

## **WOMENSST 392F**

### **FEMINIST ENGAGEMENTS WITH BIOMEDICINE: HEALTH, ETHICS, AND THE NATURE OF DIFFERENCE**

Fall 2014  
Thursday 2:30-5pm  
Bartlett Hall Room 35

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Office Hours: Bartlett Hall 11C; Wednesdays 1-3pm and by appointment

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Through the lenses of disability, critical race, and queer feminisms, this course will provide a forum for the exploration of conceptions of health, ethics and embodiment in overlapping fields such as feminist body theory, science studies, bioethics and health movements, as well as in more creative treatments of these themes. We will embark on a semester-long exploration of what it means to engage bodies ethically as feminists, always in dialogue with biomedical constructions of “the body itself.” The course will revolve around a series of questions that arise when we think, talk, and write across disciplines, genres, and settings about bodies. These questions include (but are not limited to): What is biology? What is “the body”? What is ethics and what does it mean to treat bodies ethically? What is health? What is science? What is feminism? What relationships have been articulated among these concepts? How do we assess and bring into dialogue disparate types of knowledges about bodies?

Over the course of the semester, we will explore a range of types and expressions of ethical concern with bodies and with bio-medical research and practices. Through interdisciplinary inquiry we will begin to map ethical questions and frameworks being proposed, debated and institutionalized across and beyond the academy with regard to the status and practices of biomedicine.

In the first two sections of the course, “Feminists Theorize the Body, Embodiment, and Bio-Ethics” and “Difference as/and Illness,” we will build a shared set of theoretical tools and language for thinking, talking, and writing about bodies, biology, ethics, and difference. In the final section of the class we will look in depth at “gynecology” as a rich site of feminist engagement with the biomedicalization of bodies. Drawing on a wide variety of feminist

engagements, we will touch on topics including trans health issues, menopause, intersex treatment, and sexual dysfunction.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

- To provide a critical introduction to thinking about feminist engagements with health and biomedicine as they are institutionalized in various movements and fields of scholarship.
- To contextualize the production and regulation of difference as a concern for feminist “bio-ethics” broadly construed.
- To emphasize the role of the production of normal and abnormal bodies in the formation of the modern self and its social, legal, political, and cultural frames of reference.
- To insist on the necessary relationship between theory and the lived experience of the body.
- To introduce students to a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary materials and methods.

### **COURSE OUTCOMES:**

- An understanding of historical contingency with respect to biology, biomedicine, and ethical concerns surrounding them.
- Ability to apply a range of theoretical perspectives within these fields to particular case studies.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Readings will be available electronically.

### **STRUCTURE:**

The course will be largely discussion based, with a flexible lecture/discussion format. Lectures will contextualize readings, not summarize them: it is imperative that students come prepared (with questions and comments) to discuss the key readings for each class period. You are expected to bring all readings to class with you (see details under “participation”).

### **ASSESSMENT:**

**Participation (20%):** Attendance (both physical “showing up” and presence) is crucial as the learning goals for this class are cumulative. Excused or unexcused, missed classes must be made up by writing a summary of each text assigned for the class period you are absent. Summaries are due one week from the date of the missed class.

About “good” class participation: “Good” class participation does not necessarily mean talking the most. There are many ways to promote dialogue in class, including asking

questions, noticing if others are silent and trying to make space for more timid voices, allowing silences just to “be” for a few moments (often silence is not emptiness but rather intense thinking), talking to each other and not just to the instructor, reminding yourself that the goal is not to be “right,” but to collaboratively work through issues and problems.

Additionally, you are expected to read closely and come prepared to discuss each author’s argument on its own terms and in relation to the larger themes of the course. You should keep a notebook (digital or old school) of key concepts and quotes with page numbers from each of the readings and bring this to every class. All readings must be brought with you to class.

**Reading journals (40%):** careful reading is engaged reading, and writing is thinking, so in order to facilitate thoughtful engagement with the texts and the concepts they raise, every week you will submit a 1-2 page (single spaced) informal response. Responses may take a variety of forms, so long as they address the texts and are intelligible as responses to our shared readings. Responses will be posted AT LEAST 48hrs before class (By Tuesday at 2:30pm). Students will be grouped into online cohorts. Each week you will write your response paper to your two partners and respond to each of theirs (in a few sentences – asking a clarifying question, posing a challenge, following up on an insight you found useful, etc.). You will take turns summarizing questions and key points from your group’s discussion to bring to class. You will have one “pass.” A response not submitted by the deadline will count as your pass. Any response not posted by the deadline after you have used your pass will result in an automatic loss of two percentage points (this could be the difference between, for example, an A- and a B+), and an for any week in which you do not respond to your group members before class, you will lose an additional point.

**Final project (40%):** For the culminating project you will integrate readings and concepts from sections I & II and apply them to the specific topic of interest, agreed to buy your group and approved by the professor (for example: depression, obesity, breast feeding, cancer, etc.). Your collective aim is peer-education that: 1) explains the historical and cultural context of the topic as a biomedical issue (i.e. its biomedicalization), 2) reflects on the role of conceptions of difference in shaping the issue, 3) articulates a set of concerns and debates that reflect a variety of feminist approaches to and angles on the topic.

Final projects will have both group and individual components. Group components (20%) will include: an annotated bibliography building on the initial reading list for the topic, a bulleted list of 3-5 take home points, and a poster and webpage that draw on that research and make those points accessible. Individual components (20%) include: an analysis of RSS feed results on the topic and/or an existing educational resource and a brief (1-2pg) reflection paper on your contributions to the group project and what you learned about the topic in the process. Detailed guidelines will be distributed and discussed in class.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Part I: Feminists Theorize the Body, Embodiment, and Bio-Ethics

#### Week 1: Welcome!

Thinking about bodies individual and group exercises.

Course overview, mutual expectations.

#### Week 2 (Sept 11). Introducing “the body”

Birke, L. “Ironing out the Differences?: Feminism and Biology” in *Feminism and the Biological Body*. Edinburgh University Press. 1999.

Dolmage, J., Lewicki-Wilson, C. “Refiguring Rhetorica: Linking Feminist Rhetoric and Disability Studies”. *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods and Methodologies*. Ed. Schell, E., Rawson, K. University of Pittsburgh Press. 2010.

Kafer, A. “Introduction: Imagined Futures” in *Feminist, queer, crip*. Indiana University Press, 2013.

Roberts, D. “Introduction” in. *Killing the black body: Race, reproduction, and the meaning of liberty*. Random House LLC, 2014.

Wilchins, R. "A Certain Kind of Freedom: Power and the Truth of Bodies--Four Essays on Gender" in Nestle, Joan, and Riki Anne Wilchins. *Genderqueer: Voices from beyond the sexual binary*. Alyson Publications, 2002.

#### Week 3 (Sept 18). Embodiment: Somatophobia, Silence, and Power

Spelman, E. “Gender & Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought” In: Morgan, S. ed. *The Feminist History Reader*. Oxon, Routledge. 2006.

Hammonds, E. “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality”. [The Black Studies Reader](#). Ed. Bobo, J., Hudley, C., Michel, C. Taylor & Francis Books. 2004.

Lorde, A. “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”.  
<<http://www.womenstemple.com/EroticAsPower-article.htm>

Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. “The Femme Shark Manifesto”.  
<<http://queerfatfemme.com/femme-sharks/femme-shark-manifesto/>>

Screening: Riggs, M. *Tongues Untied*. 1989.

#### **Week 4 (Sept 25). Historicizing the biomedical body**

Clarke, Adele E., Janet K. Shim, Laura Mamo, Jennifer Ruth Fosket, and Jennifer R. Fishman. "Biomedicalization: Technoscientific transformations of health, illness, and US biomedicine." *Biomedicalization: Technoscience, health, and illness in the US* (2010): 47-87.

Stepan, N. "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science". *Isis*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (June, 1986), pp. 261-277.

Gilman, S. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature". *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 204-242. The University of Chicago Press. 1985.

Carter, J. "Introduction: the search for Norma" in *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*. Duke University Press. 2007.

\*Discuss Group Projects\* \*1 hour Library Session\*

#### **Week 5 (Oct 2). Embodiment part II: Other body stories (online, participatory)**

Yvonne Fly Onakeme Etaghene  
"Nigerian Dyke Holy Text"

<http://www.boothism.org/2013/07/04/yvonne-fly-onakeme-etaghenes-nigerian-dyke-holy-text/>

"My Butch Swagger"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qM4lcF2Nuw0#t=90>

Beast Ly

"I Notice You" & "Summer Stew"

<http://vimeo.com/skinbeast>

"Queer Vibrations." *In Media Res*.

<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2010/05/06/queer-vibrations.>

Additional shared links on Moodle

#### **Week 6 (Oct 9). What is feminist bioethics?**

Tong, R. "Feminist Approaches to Bioethics"; Roberts, D. "Reconstructing the Patient: Starting with Women of Color"; Dresser, R. "What Bioethics can Learn from the Women's Health Movement"; and Lindeman Nelson, H. and Lindeman Nelson, J. "Justice in the Allocation of Healthcare Resources: A Feminist Account" in Susan M. Wolf (ed.) *Feminism and Bioethics: Beyond Reproduction*. Oxford University Press. 1996.

Scully, J., Baldwin-Ragaven, L., Fitzpatrick, P. "Introduction" in *Feminist Bioethics: At the*

*Center, On the Margins*. Johns Hopkins University Press.  
2010.

Rogers, WA. "Feminism and Public Health Ethics". *Journal of Medical Ethics*. 2006.

Willard, B. "Feminist Interventions in Biomedical Discourse: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Integrative Medicine". *Women's Studies in Communication*. Vol. 28, Issue 5. 2005.

\*Presentations\*

\*Group project preliminary bibliography due.\*

## **Part II: Difference and/as Illness**

### **Week 7 (Oct 16)**

Braun, L., Fausto-Sterling, A., Fullwiley, D., Hammonds, E., Nelson, A., Quivers, W., Reverby, S., Shields, A. "Racial Categories in Medical Practice: How Useful Are They?" 2007.

Epstein, Steven. *Inclusion: The politics of difference in medical research*. University of Chicago Press, 2008. (Selections)

Screening: *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making us Sick?* California Newsreel. 2008. & Intersexion

### **Week 8 (Oct 23)**

Jordan-Young, R. *Brainstorm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences*. President and Fellows of Harvard College. 2010. (Selections)

Screening: Ophelian, A. *Diagnosing Difference*. Floating Ophelia Productions. 2009.

Rosario, V. "Quantum Sex: Intersex and the Molecular Deconstruction of Sex". *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. Volume 15, No. 2. 2009.

Magubane, Z. "Spectacles and Scholarship: Caster Semenya, Intersex Studies, and the Problem of Race in Feminist Theory" *Signs*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Spring 2014), pp. 761-785  
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/674301>

Yvonne Fly Onakeme Etaghene

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Nyfsw8-1cc>

## **Week 9 (Oct 30).**

Readings TBA

\*Group project updated annotated bibliographies due, group meetings with professor.

## **Part III: Feminist Health, Ethics, and Difference Case Study: Gynecology**

### **Week 10 (Nov 6). Introduction and history**

Kapsalis, T. *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum*. Duke University Press. 1997. (selections)

TBA

Screening: Davis, K. *Southern Comfort*. 2001.

Our Bodies Ourselves

<http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/about/history.asp>

### **Week 11 (Nov 13). Rethinking Sexual Dys/function**

Lloyd, E. "Pre-Theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality". *Philosophical Studies*. Volume 69, Numbers 2-3. 1993.

Gupta, K. TBA

Koedt, A. "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm. 1970.

Screening: Canner, E. *Orgasm Inc*. 2009.

Tiefer, L. "Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery: Freakish or Inevitable? Analysis from Medical Marketing, Bioethics, and Feminist Theory". *Feminism & Psychology November 2008 18: 466-479*.

Green, F. "From Clitoridectomies to 'Designer Vaginas': The medical construction of heteronormative female bodies and sexuality through female genital cutting". *Sexualities, Evolution & Gender*. Volume 7, Issue 2, pages 153-187. 2005.

### **Week 12 (Nov 20). Rethinking Menopause**

Roberts, C. "Sex, Race and 'Unnatural' Difference: Tracking the Chiastic Logic of Menopause- Related Discourses". *European Journal of Women's Studies*. Volume 11, no. 1. 2004.

Murtagh, M., Hepworth, J. “Feminist Ethics and Menopause: Autonomy and Decision Making in Primary Medical Care”. *Social Science and Medicine*. Volume 56, Issue 8. 2003.

Niland, P. and Lyons, A. “Uncertainty in Medicine: Meanings of menopause and hormone replacement therapy in medical textbooks” *Social Science & Medicine*. Volume 73, Issue 8, October 2011, Pages 1238–1245.

Erol, M. “Tales of the Second Spring: Menopause in Turkey Through the Narratives of Menopausal Women and Gynecologists” *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness* Volume 28, Issue 4, 2009.

Kelly, J. “A lesbian feminist analysis of the demise of hormonereplacement therapy” *Women's Studies International Forum*. Volume 31, Issue 4, July–August 2008, Pages 300–307.

Hyde, A., Nee, J., Drennan, J., and Butler, M. “Menopause Narratives: The Interplay of Women’s Embodied Experiences With Biomedical Discourses” *Qual Health Res* June 2010 20: 805-815.

Screening: A Menopausal Gentleman (1998)

<http://hidvl.nyu.edu/video/000515761.html>

### **Week 13 (Dec 4). Synthesis: Reflecting on Gynecology, bodies, and the ethics of difference**

In-class exercise, group presentations, and farewells