

**MONOGAMY:
QUEER FEMINISM AND THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL BELONGING**

UMass Amherst
Course #: 116189
Fall 2015
Monday 4-6:30
Grad/Undergrad

Professor Angie Willey // awilley@wost.umass.edu

Office Hours: Monday 2:45-3:45pm and Wed 2-3pm Bartlett 11C, and by appointment.

Grounded in queer and feminist concerns with marriage and coupled forms of social belonging, this class will consider "monogamy" from a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. From the history of marriage to the science of mating systems to the politics of polyamory, the class will explore monogamy's meanings. Students will become familiar with these and other debates about monogamy, a variety of critical approaches to reading and engaging them, and fields of resistance to a variety of "monogamy stories" within and beyond the academy. The course will draw in particular on feminist critiques of the nuclear family, queer historicizations of sexuality, and science studies approaches to frame critical questions about what monogamy is and what discourses surrounding it can do. Through historical analysis and critical theory, the class will foreground the racial and national formations that produce monogamy as we know it. Students will develop skills in critical science literacy, interdisciplinary and collaborative research methodologies, and writing in a variety of modalities.

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- [News forum](#)
 - [Reading Tips Page](#)
 - [Assignments and Grading Information Page](#)
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Reading responses will be 1-2 double spaced pages addressing the prompt / questions for the week. They are due each week on Moodle by 5pm on Saturday, unless otherwise specified.

Additional assignments are detailed throughout the syllabus and summarized here.

All course work will be organized into a portfolio to be passed in at the end of the semester.

Portfolio Contents

- 1) A brief summary of the contents of your portfolio which reflects on its strengths and weaknesses (250-400 words)
- 2) Introductory essay (original/unrevised) (5%)
- 3) Final thoughts essay (1-2 pages) (10%)
- 4) Book review (800-1,000 words) (20%)
- 5) Op-ed (~1,000 words, publishable quality) OR analytic paper (~2,500 words) (20%)
- 6) 9 Weekly Reading Responses (25%)
- 7) A very brief summary of your participation in and contribution to discussions, group projects, and the peer review process (100-150 words). (participation = 20%)

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- [Class Policies Page](#)

Expectations and attendance

This class is a reading intensive class. The class is organized as a seminar where we will discuss the topics and readings each week. It is essential that you complete and reflect upon the reading assignments before coming to class, and be prepared to contribute to the discussion. It is critical that you participate in the emerging conversation and analysis. Every class will focus on the readings assigned for that class as stated in the syllabus. Your attendance and participation are required for the entire session of each class meeting. The format of the class will be primarily a group discussion focused on the themes of the class readings.

ATTENDANCE: Your attendance & participation is required for the entire session of each class. Since this class meets only once a week, each class constitutes nearly 10% of the course. If you have more than one absence, it will affect your final grade. For any class you miss (excused or not), a 1-page annotation for each assigned reading for the week is due the following week (this is in addition to the reading response).

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty, in any form, will not be tolerated and you are responsible for educating yourself about the University's official policy on academic honesty. Following is a summary - you can read it in full at http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/rights/acad_honest.htm

Accommodation Policy Statement

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS), please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements: <http://www.umass.edu/disability/procedures.pdf>

There is a long history of dialogue and activism around how we address one another, with respect to both names and pronouns. Students should be referred to by the name they prefer, and with the proper pronunciation, by faculty and other students. I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name and gender pronouns you prefer. Please advise me of your name's proper pronunciation, and any name or pronoun preferences not reflected in Spire early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

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Week 1: September 14, 2015

Welcome!

Introductions

Course overview / Discuss syllabus

What is monogamy? Why a class on it?

In-class group assignment

Assign research groups

- Yasmin Nair "The Secret History of Gay Marriage" [URL](#)
 - Dean Spade "For Lovers and Fighters" [URL](#)
 - The Critical Polyamorist "Couple-Centricity, Polyamory, and Colonialism" [URL](#)
 - John Witte "Why Monogamy is Natural" [URL](#)
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- [Introductory Essay Assignment](#)

This 1-2pg double spaced informal essay should describe your interest in and knowledge of the subject matter.

Due Wed 9/14 by 5pm

Week 2: September 21, 2015

Feminists Theorize Monogamy

Rosa argues that "anti-monogamy" can challenge compulsory heterosexuality. What does she mean by anti-monogamy? What does she mean by "compulsory sexuality"?

In "Thinking Sex" Rubin names monogamy as a key part of the definition of "good" sex, against which sexual others are pathologized. How might you read Rubin's assessment against contemporary poly discourse?

Overall, Robinson, and Jackson and Scott all theorize monogamy's relationship to heterosexuality. What does each argue and what evidence do they bring do they present?

-  [Jackson and Scott \(2004\) "The Personal is Still Political: Heterosexuality, Feminism, and Monogamy" File](#)
 -  [Gayle Rubin \(1984\) "Thinking Sex" File](#)
 -  [Becky Rosa \(1994\) "Anti-Monogamy: A Radical Challenge to Compulsory Heterosexuality?" File](#)
 -  [Christine Overall \(1998\) "Monogamy, Non-Monogamy, and Identity" File](#)
 -  [Victoria Robinson \(1997\) "My Baby Just Cares for Me" File](#)
 - [Reading Response #1 Forum](#)
 - [Feminist Conversations Group assignment Forum](#)
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Week 3: September 28, 2015

Monogamy Studies?

Legal theorist Elizabeth Emen's (2004) borrows the title of Adrienne Rich's seminal essay on compulsory heterosexuality (1980) to make a similar argument about monogamy's compulsory status. What evidence does she present to support this argument?

She offers "polyamorous existence" as a field of resistance, a challenge, to monogamy's law. What is "polyamorous existence"?

Haritaworn, Lin, and Klesse (2006) seek to offer a critical introduction to polyamory. How do they articulate the scope and concerns of poly studies for this collection?

Barker and Langdrige's review essay (2010) offers an overview of a growing field. How do they map the terrain of the study of "non-monogamies"?

-  Elizabeth Emens "Monogamy's Law: Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence" [URL](#)
 -  Haritaworn, Lin, and Klesse "Poly/Logue: A Critical Introduction to Polyamory" [File](#)
 -  Barker and Langdrige (2010) "Whatever happened to non-monogamies? Critical reflections on recent research and theory" [URL](#)
 -  "Politics and Possibility: A Queer Feminist Introduction to Monogamy" [File](#)
 - [Reading Response #2 Forum](#)
 - [CFP Group Projects Forum](#)
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Week 4: October 5, 2015

- Non/Monogamy and Marriage
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The "opposite sex" requirement of the "one man, one woman" dictum has harnessed the energies of the Christian right, mainstream gay rights organizations and scholars and activists troubled by the allocation of rights and resources on the basis of coupling—gay or straight. Concerns with the “twoness requirement” – monogamy – have been mobilized alternately to highlight the ‘slippery slope’ that gay marriage represents, to differentiate respectable from unsavory bids for inclusion, and to extend the vision of inclusivity to multi-partner relationships.

What arguments do each of these authors make about non/monogamy and marriage? Drawing on these arguments, what do you think needs to be said about the prospect of polyamorous marriage?

-  Ashbee. Polyamory, Social Conservatism and the Same-Sex Marriage Debate [File](#)
 -  Sheff. Poly Families, Same Sex Marriage, and the Slippery Slope [File](#)
 -  Aviram. Make Love, Not Law [File](#)
 -  Brake. Minimal Marriage [File](#)
 -  Wilkinson. What's Queer about Polyamory Now? [File](#)
 -  Emens. Regulatory Fiction [File](#)
 - [Reading Response #3 Forum](#)
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Week 5: October 13, 2015 (Tuesday)

- Historicizing Compulsory Monogamy
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The history of monogamy illuminates ways in which investments in monogamy are not only investments in the gendered order of things, but also in race and nation.

In your response paper, draw on these histories to explain how monogamy and non-monogamy are racialized. Reflect on the significance of this history to contemporary arguments and debates about monogamy and non-monogamy with specific reference to an issue or angle on which you plan to write.

- "Monogamy's Nature"
 - [Cott Public Vows Folder](#)
 - [Carter. Heart of Whiteness Folder](#)
 -  [Burgett "On the Mormon Question" File](#)
 - [Reading Response #4 Forum](#)
 - [History of the Present Blogging Assignment Forum](#)
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Week 6: October 19, 2015

The Genomics of Non/monogamy

These readings interrogate the naturalization of coupled forms of social belonging in contemporary neuroscientific research. Drawing on these readings, and connecting them to earlier course readings, please explain how the naturalization of monogamy is articulated and operates in racially gendered ways.

"Why do Voles Fall in Love?" Larry Young

-  ["Why do Voles Fall in Love?": Sexual Dimorphism and Monogamy Gene Research" File](#)
 -  [Making the Monogamous Human File](#)
 - [Reading Response #5 Forum](#)
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Week 7: October 26, 2015

Critical Poly Studies?

In 1-2 sentences each, explain the take home arguments of the articles for today. Following these concise summaries, consider them collectively. What might something like a "critical poly studies" offer us as an intellectual project? How would you describe its relationship to other fields or critical projects?

- "Making our Poly Nature"
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-  Klesse. "Notions of Love in Polyamory" [File](#)
-  Finn and Malson "Speaking of Home Truth" [File](#)
-  Petrella "Only with you, maybe, if you make me happy" [File](#)
- [Reading Response #6 Forum](#)

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Week 8 and 9: November 2 & 9, 2015

Beyond Non-Monogamies: 2 weeks

2-3 students will be assigned excerpts from each book and will work collaboratively to summarize its key points and to teach it to the rest of the class in a 15 minute teaching module (on the 9th). For your reading journal, please pass in your lesson plan by the end of class on Nov. 2. It might include a formal lecture, bullet points, a handout with quotes, presentation slides, etc.

Each pair/group will read one additional set of readings for the 9th, and come prepared with written questions for that group. Bring a copy to the professor. Don't forget to include your names.

Excerpts from:

David Eng's Feeling of Kinship (Intro and chapter one)

Kevin Floyd's *The Reification of Desire (chapter 1)*

Lisa Henderson's Love and Money (Intro and conclusion)

Lynne Huffer's Mad for Foucault (chapter 5)

Nicole Seymour's *Strange Natures (chapter 5)*

Shannon Winnubst's *Queering Freedom (intro & epilogue)*

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- [Reading Response #7: lesson plan Forum](#)

by 6:30pm 11/2

- [Reading Response #8: questions Forum](#)

Questions for peers by 11/7 and in hard copy in class 11/9

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Week 10: November 16, 2015

- **Book Review Workshop**
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Choose an academic or popular book on a relevant theme (love, coupling, belonging, kinship, queer family and/or community, non-nuclear living, privatization of care, etc.), to review either as a resource for critical monogamy studies and/or to critique from the perspective of critical monogamy studies, as you prefer.

The final review should be well-structured, revised for both style and content, and polished. It should be concise (between 800 and 1,000 words) and should reflect meaningful engagement with class readings and key concepts.

Today we will workshop book reviews. Please come prepared to say the name of your book and give a 1-2 min summary of your review (this should be very brief: less than 150 words). You should post and **bring 3 printed copies of a full draft of your book review** with you to class and come prepared to participate in a rigorous peer review process.

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- [Book Review Guidelines URL](#)
 - [Book Review Draft Forum](#)

Post here by 11/14

- [Revised Book Review Forum](#)

Post here by 11/21

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Week 11: November 23, 2015

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- No reading for today. Finish your book review and final project proposal.

We will pool collective resources to analyze a film this week, so feel free to bring popcorn or other snacks to share for the screening!

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- **Proposals for final projects are due today.**

Proposals should include: a coherent description of the proposed project, a rationale for the project as a culminating assignment for this class, a detailed timeline of steps toward completion, and a preliminary bibliography. The proposal should NOT exceed 1pg single-spaced and should be handed in both on Moodle **and in hard copy**.

For your final project, you can choose either to write a polished op-ed (see link to detailed guidelines and examples) OR to write a short analytic paper. Whichever assignment you choose, you should regard it as an opportunity to engage deeply with major concerns of the course. Please draw on, develop, and otherwise borrow freely from your reading responses.

You may for example choose a theme in the media - mainstream or otherwise - (e.g. anti-polygamy discourse, couple-centric polyamory, compulsory sexuality) OR a specific text (e.g. a TV show, magazine, political campaign or speech, policy or historical document) and formulate an

analysis. Don't forget to draw on previous weeks' readings to support your arguments. For graduate students, this is an opportunity to spend time with a particular text your research might address and to further explore additional secondary source materials not read by the whole class.

- [Final Project Proposal Forum](#)
- [Op-Ed Project Resources URL](#)
- [The Feminist Wire URL](#)

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Week 12: November 30, 2015

- [Queer Feminisms and the Politics of Social Belonging Resource Sharing](#)

Your readings for today are the final chapters of my forthcoming book, *Undoing Monogamy: The Politics of Science and the Possibilities of Biology*. They draw on Alison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For* and Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic" respectively. We will discuss those chapters as well as other narrative resources, on which you will report.

From "lesbian kinship" to "queer kinship" to communal living and beyond, literature, film, and art have been at least as influential as academic writing (and certainly an inspiration for it!) for imagining belonging beyond the privatized family. Recent challenges to the human/non-human binary, work on asexuality, and a variety of approaches to queer/feminist futurity also offer resources for rethinking belonging as we know it.

For this class session, you will locate, summarize, and share a resource with the class. This can be a work of art or fiction or a piece of academic prose. The only requirement is that it is a resource to think with about how a world beyond non/monogamy might look or work.

In your reading response, please explain what is meant by "a dyke ethics of anti-monogamy" and, very briefly, what it might mean to understand non/monogamy as a "biopossibility." Please also include a short summary of your resource and a link or attachment.

- [Reading Response #9 Forum](#)

Please post here by 11/28 at 5pm

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Week 13: December 7, 2015

- [Queer Feminism and the Politics of Social Belonging: Recap & Synthesize](#)

You have no outside reading for today. You are expected to pass in a solid, clean draft of your final project, for sharing and workshopping.

Today we will spend the first half of class synthesizing course themes, culminating in a redrafting of the CFPs you wrote early in the term.

The second half of class will be spent on peer review of your final projects.

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- [Final Project Polished Draft Forum](#)

Please post here by 11/5 at 5pm

- [Final Portfolio Assignment](#)

Please submit as a PDF with components in order by December 14 at 4pm.
