

FEMINIST CRITICAL THEORIZING

Fall 2006

Tues and Thurs, 9:45-11:00

Folwell Hall 306

Instructor: Dr. Sara L. Puotinen

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Course Description:

What is feminist theory? How is it useful? How can it change our minds and our lives? How can it inform our practices? What kind of practice is it? And why is it important to DO feminist theory? In this course we will explore these questions, taking as our basic premise that feminist theory is important, that it can transform our understandings of the world, and that it is an essential practice for feminists as they attempt to fight injustice. After spending the first few weeks developing working definitions of feminism and feminist theory, we will explore three important functions that feminist theory plays: (1) Feminist theory provides us with important *tools and concepts* for critically thinking about and challenging our world. (2) Feminist theory gives us a language with which to *express ourselves* in creative and critical ways. (3) Feminist theory enables us to rethink our relationships with others and to *forge new and potentially deeper connections* with those others.

Critical Tools and Concepts. In this first section of the course we will examine several of the critical tools and concepts developed and employed by feminist theorists. These concepts include: (a) Self/Other, (b) Intersectionality, (c) Sex/Gender and (d) Positionality. This section will culminate with a take home midterm essay exam.

Self-Expression. In this second section we will examine how women have used feminist theory to express themselves and give voice to their experiences. After exploring women's need for self-expression, we will examine three different ways in which women have expressed themselves: (a) Self-expression through storytelling, (b) Self-expression through political manifestos and (c) Self-expression through and in relation to one's bodies.

Forging Connections. In the third section we will examine how feminist theory enables feminists to rethink their relationships with others and to create new connections. To do this, we will explore how feminists are redefining feminist communities by addressing and working through differences (based on race, ethnicity, global positioning, sexuality and age) that exist between them.

Course Goals:

To introduce you to some of the key feminist theories of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

To train you in how to read theory, how to use theoretical language, and how to write analytically and critically about social and personal issues.

To enable you to recognize and appreciate theory as an important practice for feminists as they attempt to fight injustice and transform society.

Course Structure:

Scheduled Meetings: In addition to meeting as a large group on Tuesdays and Thursdays, you will meet with the teaching assistant and your smaller discussion section on Tuesdays.

Format: Each week we will address a new topic. You are expected to have all of the readings completed by Tuesday. Tuesday's class will be dedicated to introducing the new topic and readings. All lectures and activities (discussion, writing exercises, in-class assignments) will be aimed at preparing you for more in-depth discussions within your discussion sections. Thursday's class will be dedicated to processing, synthesizing and fully comprehending the new material. We will have presentations from each discussion section on what was discussed in their section and larger group discussions on the readings and the questions and issues that they raised for us.

Course Expectations:

Attend Class Regularly. You are allowed to have two unexcused absences during this semester. You are responsible for contacting other students to get any notes, handouts or information on assignments that you might have missed.

Turn in assignments on time. All assignments must be handed in on the day that they are due. Exceptions will be granted *only* with a doctor's excuse or letter from the dean. Please report these exceptions as soon as possible. Without an official excuse, your grade will be lowered due to lateness. Note that a doctor's excuse must be an *excuse*—simply a receipt from a doctor's visit will not suffice.

Let me know if you have any problems. If at any point throughout the semester you have questions or concerns about this course, please know that you are more than welcome to visit my office hours and/or make an appointment to meet with me. If you would like to meet to discuss a grade that you received, please email me with your questions or concerns and return your graded assignment to me at least one day in advance of our meeting. This will enable me to give you the best possible feedback.

Be an active participant in the class. Remember that everyone helps to shape the class. Your participation does make a difference. To that end, you are responsible for coming to class fully prepared (with fully read texts in hand), actively and respectfully contributing to discussions, asking questions when you don't understand the material and giving feedback to the instructors on what is working and not working in the class.

Do Your Own Work. You are expected to follow the Student Conduct Code. For more information on this, please see: <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/plagiarism/#definition>

Readings:

REQUIRED: *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edition, Kolmar/Bartowski. (*FTR*)
Course packet with selected essays and excerpts (CP).

SUGGESTED: *Feminisms*, Kemp/Squires (*FEM*)

Course Requirements:

1. Participation (20%)

You are required to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions (both in the larger class and your smaller discussion sections). **More than two unexcused absences will lower your class participation grade.** For each class, you must be prepared, with fully read text in hand. Included in this participation grade are any in-class assignments (such as writing exercises or quizzes), group work and your notes/presentation as discussion section recorder.

A note about your assignment as discussion section recorder: You must sign up to take notes on one session of your discussion section. In addition to typing up and submitting your notes, you will give a brief presentation to the class on the highlights of those notes. Your presentation will be given on the Thursday immediately following your discussion section. This assignment is worth one half (10%) of your total participation grade. A handout describing this assignment in greater detail will be distributed and discussed on the second day of class.

2. Critical Response Notebooks (25%)

You are required to keep a critical response notebook. This notebook should contain one entry per week. Each entry should focus on at least two of the readings for the week (**excluding “Lexicon of the Debate” selections**) and include the following: (a) a concise summary (1-3 paragraphs) of the text, (b) an examination of some critical questions that this text raised for you and/or for the class, based on our discussion or the lecture, and (c) an explanation of how this text connects or does not connect to the class, to other things you have read and/or to your own life and experiences. These notebooks will be collected every other week throughout the semester. A handout describing this assignment in greater detail will be distributed and discussed on the second day of class.

3. Take-Home Midterm Exam (25%)

A take-home midterm examination will be distributed on October 12 and will be due on October 19. This exam, which will consist of several short essay questions, will require you to think critically about what you have learned, drawing upon our texts, films we have watched, lectures and in-class discussions.

4. Final Paper (30%)

You are required to write a 10-page paper. As part of this grade, you must submit a rough draft (worth 10% of your paper grade) and a revised final draft (worth the other 20% of your paper grade). A more detailed description of this assignment will be handed out on October 26. The rough draft of your paper will be due on November 16 and the final draft will be due December 12.

Grade Scale:

A	94-100	C	75-80
A.	92-93	C-	73-74
B+	90-91	D+	71-72
B	85-89	D	65-70
B.	83-84	F	less than 65
C+	81-82		

If you are a student with a disability, you may receive extra assistance from Disability Services (www.ds.umn.edu). After contacting them, please let me know as soon as possible so that I can accommodate your needs.

Note: This syllabus is subject to change at any point throughout the semester. Any amendments or alterations will be announced in class and through email.

Course Schedule:

INTRODUCTION

**Week 1:
9/5, 9/7**

What is Feminism?

Reading: “Feminism” from the Feminist Dictionary (FTR)

Walker. "Womanism" (FTR)

**Week 2:
9/12, 9/14**

What is Feminist Theory?

Reading: Spelman/Lugones. "Have We Got a Theory for You!" (FTR)
hooks. "Theory as Liberatory Practice" (FTR)
Bunch. "Not by Degrees" (FTR)
Lorde. "Poetry is not a Luxury" (FTR)

SECTION I: THEORETICAL TOOLS

**Week 3:
Reading**

Other/Outsider

Handout on Cultural Imperialism
Lorde. "Age, Race, Class and Sex" (FTR)
Williams. "The Emperor's New Clothes" (CP)

**Week 4:
9/26, 9/28**

Intersections

Reading: Lexicon of the Debate: Intersections of Race/Class/Gender
Truth. "Ain't I A Woman?" (FTR)
Crenshaw. "Intersectionality" (FTR)
Allison. "A Question of Class" (CP)
Smith. "Homophobia" (CP)

Week 5:

Identity/Identity Politics

**Week 6:
10/10**

Positionality

Reading: Lexicon of the Debate: Epistemology
Collins. From *Black Feminist Thought* (FTR)
Anzaldúa. "La Conciencia" (FTR)

10/12

HAND OUT MIDTERM EXAMS

SECTION II: SELF-EXPRESSION

**Week 7:
10/17**

The Need for Self-Expression

Reading: Lexicon of the Debate: Language
hooks. "Talking Back" (CP)
Friedan. From *The Feminine Mystique* (FTR)
Walker. "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" (CP)
Woolf. From *A Room of One's Own* (FTR)

10/19

MIDTERM EXAMS DUE

**Week 8:
10/24**

Self-Expression and Storytelling

Reading: Trinh T. Minh-ha. "Grandma's Stories" (CP)
Kingston. "White Tigers" (CP)

10/26

DISCUSS FINAL PAPERS

**Week 9:
10/31, 11/2**

Manifestos

Reading: Lexicon of the Debate: Power
Stanton. "Declaration of Sentiments"

NOW. "Statement of Purpose"
Radicalesbians. "Woman Identified Woman"
Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement"
Baumgardner/Richards. "Manifesta"
[All five of these political statements are found in *FTR*]
Rhodes. From *Manifesto to Modern* (RES)

Week 10:
11/7, 11/9

Self-Expression and the Body

Reading: Lexicon of the Debate: Bodies
Mairs. From *Waist High in the World* (CP)
Thompson-Garland. "Integrating Disability" (*FTR*)
Lorde. From *The Cancer Journals* (RES)

SECTION III: FORGING CONNECTIONS

Week 11:
11/14

Redefining Community, Part I

Reading: Lexicon of the Debate: Third World/Global Feminism
Lugones. "Playfulness and 'World'-Traveling" (CP)
Narayan. "Cultural Contestations" (*FTR*)

11/16

FIRST DRAFT OF FINAL PAPERS DUE

Week 12:
11/21, 11/23

CLASS CANCELLED FOR THANKSGIVING

Week 13:
11/28, 11/30

Redefining Community, Part II

Reading: Reagan. "Coalition Politics" (CP)
Sandoval. "U.S. Third World Feminism" (CP)

Week 13:
12/5, 12/7

Redefining Community, Part III

Reading: Baumgardner/Richards "Thou Shalt Not" (CP)
Walker. Introduction to *To Be Real* (CP)

Week 14:
12/12

FINAL DAY OF CLASS/FINAL DRAFTS DUE