

POINT/COUNTERPOINT: CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST DEBATES
GWSS 3004W
3 Credits
Blog Address: blog.lib.umn.edu/puoto002/gwss3004

Spring 2008
AmundH 156
Tuesdays 6:20-8:50

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

I approach feminism with the presumption that no undisputed premises are to be agreed upon in the global context. And so, for practical and political reasons, there is no value to be derived in silencing disputes. The questions are: how best to have them, how most productively to stage them, and how to act in ways that acknowledge **the irreversible complexity** of who we are?

Judith Butler, "The End of Sexual Difference?"

As a democratic enterprise, feminism has had to forfeit the presumption that at base we can all agree about some things or, equivalently, to embrace the notion that each of **our most treasured values are under contestation** and that they will remain contested zones of politics.

Judith Butler, "The End of Sexual Difference?"

Fundamentally, American feminism is a movement of difference, dissensus and, as Judith Butler suggests, irreversible complexity. Debates over who counts as a feminist and what the feminist agenda should be have existed since the beginning of modern American feminism in the late nineteenth century. Far from weakening the movement, public and private debates among feminists about feminism and its goals have helped to energize it and to ensure that it is democratic.

Taking as our premise that debate is essential for the success of feminism as a democratic movement (or collection of movements), the goal of this course is to explore how feminists have energized their theoretical/political projects through an engagement with each other's differences and through productive debates on key issues and "treasured values" within the movement.

We will begin with a brief introduction to feminism and feminist debate. Then, the remainder of the course will be devoted to critical assessment of four key issues/values within feminism: (1) Reproductive Rights/Choice, (2) Work/Equality, (3) Family Values/Challenging Patriarchy and (4) the Sex Wars/Empowerment. Through the process of exploring these key issues/values, we will engage in our own ethical and political deliberation on feminism and some of its agendas for social justice and transformation.

Some questions that we will explore this semester include:

1. What is feminism?
2. How much should feminists compromise their ideals in order to get their goals realized?

3. Is pro-choice the dividing line between feminist and anti-feminist?
4. Should (queer) feminists marry? Is marriage an institution worth promoting or saving?
5. What is the meaning of “choice” in pro-choice?
6. What kind of equality should feminists be working for? Should equality be the goal?
7. Are feminist values family values?
8. How are sex workers empowered? Exploited?

GOALS FOR THE GWSS DEPARTMENT

- To study interdisciplinary scholarship on women and gender
- To focus on multicultural and cross-cultural studies both in the United States and globally
- To develop critical, analytical and interdisciplinary problem-solving skills
- To enhance research skills and creative talents
- To develop new ideas and theories about women and gender that challenges assumptions and contribute to social change.

GOALS FOR THIS COURSE

- To explore the value of debate for feminists’ ethical and political projects
- To trace the ways in which a diversity of opinions and agendas has been present since the beginning of modern feminisms
- To learn various strategies for how best to have debates effectively and responsibly
- To apply the concepts discussed in class to contemporary culture, and your own lives.
- To engage in a critical exploration of several contentious issues within feminism
- To foster a sense of community in which we all can critically explore a wide range of perspectives in respectful and productive ways
- To brainstorm strategies for addressing key issues of concern for feminists
- To develop, defend and challenge your own personal values and beliefs on feminism and its “treasured values”

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- **ATTEND CLASS REGULARLY:** You are allowed to have **one** unexcused absence during this semester. You are responsible for contacting other students to get any notes, handouts or information on assignments that you might have missed. **Please do not contact me requesting missed notes or assignments.**
- **LET ME KNOW IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:** You are always welcome to visit me during my office hours. If you can’t make my office hours, please email me so that we can set up another time.
- **BE AN ACTIVE AND RESPECTFUL PARTICIPANT IN CLASS:** Your participation is crucial to the success of the class. To that end, you are responsible for coming to class fully prepared, actively and respectfully contributing to discussions, listening attentively to others’ ideas and experiences, asking questions when you don’t understand the material and giving me feedback on what is working and not working in the class.

- **READ THE ASSIGNED MATERIAL MORE THAN ONCE:** Much of the material that we will be reading this semester is difficult and requires careful attention, particularly if you have not taken a GWSS class before. To help you to engage with this material, it is crucial that you read it more than once, take careful notes and write down your questions.
- **HAND IN ALL ASSIGNMENTS ON TIME:** Complete all work on time. “On time” means at the beginning of the class period on the particular due date. **I do not accept email submissions of assigned work.** All assignments must be typed. Late work will receive one letter grade deduction and will only be accepted up to one week after the due date.

MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

As a teacher, one of my primary goals is to empower students to claim their own education. I emphasize discussion and limit the number (and length) of my lectures. This discussion-based format means that you, along with your classmates, bear a lot of responsibility for the success of the class. You must hold each other accountable for the claims that you make and the ideas you express. And you must make sure that you come to class prepared with some thoughts/questions so that we can have respectful and productive discussions about the material/topics.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Academic Dishonesty

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own, can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY: submission of false records of academic achievement; cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement. Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to an including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask. - University of Minnesota

Disability Services

Students with disabilities who require accommodations in meeting course requirements should meet with me as early as possible in the term. Class materials, including this syllabus, can be made available in alternative formats upon request. It is your responsibility to provide documentation from Disability Services to receive accommodations.

Non-native English Speakers and Writers

If you need some extra assistance with the reading and writing assignments, please contact me early in the term.

U of M Harassment Policy

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation. For further information, call the University Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 418 Morrill Hall, 624-9547.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Paper #1: Reflection paper	100 points
Paper #2: Position paper	100 points
Paper #3: Position paper	100 points
Paper #4: Revised paper	150 points
Blog Engaging Assignments	200 points
Group Presentation	200 points
Attendance and Participation	150 points
Total	1000 points

Paper #1: Critical Reflection Paper **10%**

In this 3-4 page paper, you should develop a working definition of feminism and then discuss whether or not feminism is still important/relevant. In your discussion, make sure to defend your points with specific examples. A more detailed handout on this assignment will be distributed and discussed on 1/27.

DUE: 2/10

Paper #2 and #3: Position Papers (2 @ 10%) **20%**

In these 3-4 page papers, you should pick a position on one of the contentious issues related to (1) reproductive rights/choice, (2) work/equality, (3) family values/patriarchy or (4) sex wars/empowerment. In addition to clearly and persuasively presenting your position, you must provide an effective account of the issue (what the issue is, why it is contentious among feminists). Please note that your paper may not be on the same topic as your group presentation. So, for example, if you are giving your group presentation on some topic related to the issue of reproductive rights, you may NOT write your position paper on reproductive rights. A more detailed handout on this assignment will be distributed and discussed on 2/3.

DUE:	Reproductive Rights/Choice:	2/24
	Work/Equality:	3/10
	Family Values/Patriarchy:	4/14
	Sex Wars/Empowerment:	5/5

Note: I strongly recommend that you do NOT choose a paper topic that is due the same day as your group presentation.

Revision Paper **15%**

In this 5-6 page paper, you should do a substantial revision of your first paper on feminism and whether or not it is necessary. Taking into consideration comments (from instructors and your peer review group) your first draft and our discussion of feminism (its histories, key issues, debates), this paper should reflect a more informed vision of feminism and its importance (or lack of importance).

DUE: 4/21

Blog Engaging Assignments **20%**

For at least ten of the weeks, you must post a (roughly) 200 word response to the question or questions that I post on the blog. These questions are designed to enable you to engage with the material beyond your own reading or our discussion of it. I will post

the question/s by Wednesday morning and your blog response must be posted by the following Monday at 8 PM. You are only required to post 10 responses (worth 20 points each), but you may post on additional weeks for extra credit. Be prepared to discuss your thoughts on the question/s on the day it is due.

Note: This assignment will begin the third week of class. We will have an in-class blog workshop to familiarize you with how to use the blog during the second or third week of class.

Group Presentation

20%

You and 5-6 other class members are required to present on a controversial issue related to reproductive rights, work, family values or the sex wars. A more detailed handout will be distributed and discussed on 3/3.

Attendance and Participation

15%

You are required to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions. **More than one unexcused absence will lower your class participation grade.** For each class, you must be prepared, with fully read text in hand. Included in this grade are any in-class assignments (such as free-writing assignments, small group work, film worksheets). **If you miss more than 5 classes you will not pass this course.**

CLA GRADING CRITERIA

- A *outstanding* achievement (900-1000 points)
- B achievement *significantly above* necessary level (800-899 points)
- C achievement meeting the *basic* course requirements (700-799 points)
- D achievement *worthy of credit* (600-699 points)
- F performance *failing* to meet the basic course requirements (500-599 points)
- S equivalent to a grade of C or better

COURSE READINGS

hooks, bell. *Feminism is For Everybody* (FIFE)*
Course Packet (CP)**

*The textbook is available from the University of Minnesota bookstore at Coffman.

**The Course Packet will be available soon at Paradigm Copies in the Dinkydome.

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

January

20 Introduction to class

INTRODUCTION TO FEMINISM AND FEMINIST DEBATE

27 What is Feminism and why is it important?

READING:

a. hooks, bell. Skim the entire book read the Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 10 and 19 closely and carefully (*FIFE*)

Distribute and discuss feminist reflection paper assignment.

February

3 What is feminist debate?

READING:

a. Looser, Devaney. "This Feminism Which Is Not One" (ONLINE: Go to our blog to click on the link, or copy link below)

<http://www.theminnesotareview.org/journal/ns41/looser.htm>

Distribute and discuss handout on group presentations and position papers.

VIDEO: Clips from *Resolved: The Feminist Movement Was Disastrous*

CONTENTIOUS ISSUES WITHIN FEMINISMS

10 Reproductive Rights: Some Historical Background

READING:

a. Sanger, Margaret. "Birth Control—A Parents' Problem or Woman's? from *Women and the New Race*" (CP)

b. Roberts, Dorothy. "The Dark Side of Birth Control" (CP)

c. Davis, Angela. "Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights" (CP)

FILM: *The Pill*

Your feminist reflection paper is due today.

17 Reproductive Rights: What is choice? Who gets to choose? What choices?

READING:

a. Roberts, Dorothy. "The Meaning of Liberty" (CP)

b. Ross, Loretta J. "The Color of Choice" (CP)

c. Crews, Allison. "And So I Chose" (CP)

d. Sayce, Liz and Rachel Perkins. "They should not breed: Feminism, disability and reproductive rights" (CP)

e. Saxton, Marsha. "Disability Rights and Selective Abortion" (CP)

24 Work: Whose work? At whose expense is "equality" achieved?

READING:

a. Friedan, Betty. "The Problem That Has No Name" (CP).

b. Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Maid to Order" (CP)

c. Handagneu-Sotelo. "Cleaning Up a Dirty Business" (CP)

FILM: *Maid in America*

If you chose to write one of your position papers on reproductive rights, it is due today.

March

3 Work: What is equality? How should it be achieved?

READING:

a. Cobble, Dorothy Sue. "Introduction" (CP)

- b. Williams, Joan. “Deconstructing the Ideal Worker Norm in Market Work” (CP)
- c. National Partnership for Women and Families. Excerpt from “Amicus Brief: Ledbetter v. Goodyear” (ONLINE: Go to our blog to click on the link)

10 Presentations

Bring and distribute copies of your feminist reflection paper for your peer review group.

If you chose to write one of your position papers on work, it is due today.

17 Spring Break

24 Family Values: Does “family values” mean patriarchal values? What are feminist and queer family values?

READING:

- a. Selections from *Feminist Family Values* (CP).
- b. Lehr, Valerie. “Social Problems and Family Ideology” (CP)
- c. Pardo, Mary. “Mexican American Women Grassroots Community Activists: ‘Mothers of East Los Angeles’” (E RESERVES)

Peer Review of Feminist Reflection Papers

31 Family Values: Who (and what) gets valued? The devaluing of birth mothers

READING:

- a. Cornell, Drucilla. “Adoption and its Progeny: Rethinking Family Law, Gender, and Sexual Difference” (CP)
- b. Fessler, Ann. “The Family’s Fears” and “Birth and Surrender” (CP)
- c. Eng, David. Excerpts from “Two Mothers” (E RESERVES)

April

7 Family Values: Marriage and Beyond

READING:

- a. *The Nation*. Special issue on Marriage: The State of the Union (E RESERVES)
- b. Duggan, Lisa. “Beyond Gay Marriage” (CP)
- c. Butler, Judith. “Is Kinship Always Heterosexual?” (CP)

14 Sex Wars: Some Historical Background

READING:

- a. Ferguson, Ann, et. al. “Forum: The Feminist Sexualities Debate” (E RESERVES)
- b. Hunter, Nan D. “Contextualizing the Sexuality Debates: A Chronology 1966-225 (CP).
- c. Dworkin, Andrea. “Against the Male Flood: Censorship, Pornography, and Equality” (CP)
- d. Hollibaugh, Amber and Cherríe Moraga. “What We’re Rolling Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism” (CP)

If you chose to write one of your position papers on Family Values, it is due today.

21 Sex Wars: Erotic or Pornographic? Exploitative or Empowering?

READING:

- a. Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of the Erotic" (CP)
- b. Levy, Ariel. Excerpt from *Female Chauvinist Pigs* (CP)
- c. Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex" (CP)

Your revised feminism reflection paper is due today.

28 Sex Wars: Sex Workers Unite?

READING:

- a. Chapkis, Wendy. Excerpt from *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (CP).
- b. Barton, Bernadette. "Dancing on the Mobius Strip: Challenging the Sex War Paradigm" (E RESERVES)
- c. Jenness, Valerie. "COYOTE'S Participation in Legal Discourse: Defining the Law as the Source of Prostitutes' Victimization." In *Making it Work: The Prostitutes Rights Movement in Perspective* (CP)

FILM: *Live Nude Girls Unite!*

May

5 Presentations

If you chose to write one of your position papers on Sex Work, it is due today.