

WMST 601/COMS 613: Feminist Theories and Methods
Fall 2008
Thursdays, 2:00-5:00
W-5 Arts Bldg. (west wing)

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Course Description: WMST 601 examines the meanings and practices of feminist inquiry across the humanities and social sciences. Rather than offer a survey of major theories and research methodologies field-by-field, the course instead addresses the very questions of 1) what constitutes feminist modes of inquiry and 2) the key themes and concepts that orient this inquiry in gender and women's studies. These themes include: the social construction of bodies and issues of embodiment, theories of sexual difference, questions of representation and the practices of telling history, distinctions between doing women's and gender studies, the conjunctures and disjunctures between feminist studies, queer and trans-sexuality studies, and feminist interventions into the philosophical canon, among other topics.

The seminar will focus on the *doing* of feminist research as a multiple and multi-vocal set of practices rather than the *accumulation* of a body of theories and methods. That said, WMST 601 is a reading-intensive seminar; students will read a lot of theory and pieces on methodology in the course, with the goal toward cultivating a more robust, thoughtful, and conscious set of feminist practices in their own research. Seminar time will be split between lecture and discussion, inter-disciplinary faculty roundtable discussions, guest lectures, and student presentations. The first five weeks of the seminar are devoted to the question of what makes up feminist inquiry and its related practices: theorizing, doing research, asking questions, and reflecting upon the research enterprise and feminist forms of knowledge production. The remaining weeks are organized around faculty roundtables that discuss key themes and concepts in feminist inquiry (including sex and gender, intersectionality and the feminist politics of representation). Other of these meetings will serve as more disciplinary encounters within humanistic fields where feminist inquiry is well established, notably History, Philosophy and English. The roundtables are meant to provide students with an opportunity to meet and engage with a group of renowned professors across different disciplinary homes that are all defining, in different ways, what it means to do feminist scholarship and the stakes that orient its work.

The course that follows from WMST 601 is WMST 602, a feminist research practicum being offered in Winter 2009. This latter seminar is meant to enable students to follow the line of inquiry begun here in a more research-focused course. WMST 602 will enable you to put into practice some of the themes and methodological innovations discussed here in WMST 601, in a workshop setting. WMST 601 is open to M.A. and Ph.D. students and fulfills one of the course requirements for the Graduate Option in Gender and Women's Studies as McGill University.

Course Readings: A packet of readings has been prepared for this course. To enable the proper citation of readings in your writing assignments for the seminar, the reading schedule below contains full bibliographic information on each course reading. Additionally, we will be reading two

books this term that are available for purchase at Paragraphe Bookstore, located at the corner of Sherbrooke St. and McGill College Ave. See below.

Books:

Mary Hawkesworth (2006). *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation*. Rutgers University Press.

Chris Weedon (1997). *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Blackwell Publishers.

Course Assignments: The following writing and presentation assignments constitute the whole of required work over the seminar.

Formal Presentations (20% of final grade)

During the last seminar meeting, seminar time will be given over to student presentations based upon the final seminar papers. Presentations will necessarily be short, and should last between 5 and 7 minutes maximum. You will be expected to have prepared beforehand, and you will be evaluated on your performance.

Critical Response Papers (20 % of final grade, 10% each for 2): At two times during the semester, you will hand in, and circulate online through WebCT, 2 short critical response papers that respond to a reading from the course. Response papers must respond to a reading from the week in which you are handing in the paper.

The task of the critical response is to hone in on a line of argument within the article/chapter/book you are responding to and critically examine its assumptions, purpose and significance. The responses should be *critical*. Avoid doing summaries of the author's argument and instead make an analytical intervention into them--don't tell us what they said, but tell us how we might think about what they said. Some questions to consider in writing the critical response: What exactly is the author arguing? How do you interpret its meaning? What does the author set out for the piece to accomplish? In what ways does it succeed? In what ways might it fall short? What, if anything, is especially significant in the author's argument? What does the author, potentially, overlook, and why?

Critical response papers will be used to stimulate and orient discussion in our seminar meetings, so it is important that they be written with this goal in mind.

Short Paper on New Feminist Scholarship (20% of final grade): On **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16**, seminar participants will turn in a 5-6 page review paper on a current, and possibly exemplary, text in feminist scholarship. The point of this assignment is to acquaint you with some new directions in feminist inquiry. You will turn in both a paper copy of the essay (for me), and will post an online version to WebCT (for your seminar colleagues). The choice of text is up to you, as long as it is either self-identified as feminist, or seeks to make a constructive intervention into feminist research and thought. You might choose a text that sets out a new path of feminist inquiry. You might choose a text that is especially synthetic or trans-disciplinary in its methodological approach. You could choose a text in a relatively recent field, to examine the ways in which feminist work is constituted there. The "text" itself should either be a book or a substantial article – e.g. extended in length, exceptional in theoretical rigor and/or research breadth and reach. If you wish to choose a text other than a book or substantial article (e.g. a special issue of a journal), please check with me first.

The essay itself should critically review the text, what it sets out to accomplish, the methods around which its inquiry is organized, and the impact it has had on the field (you may need to familiarize yourself with some of the review literature on the text to do so; if you choose an article that is part of

a special issue that includes review essays of the piece, even better). If applicable, include a bibliography of work that you have consulted in order to write the essay, as well as a full bibliographic citation of the text on which you are commenting. Once completed, we will have a small archive of review essays on current texts in feminist scholarship.

Seminar Paper (40% of final grade): The course will culminate with a 15-to-20 page seminar paper. Seminar papers should not exceed this page limit. If you are thinking about writing a longer paper (at 5 pages or more over the maximum), consult with me first. The seminar paper will be due on **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12**, in hard copy. I will also need a self-addressed envelope so that I can mail my comments to you.

There are three different options for the seminar paper.

Option #1: A Conference Paper or Journal Manuscript

In this option, your task is to write a paper written in the style of a conference talk or invited lecture on a topic of feminist scholarship. The conference paper can be one you are currently preparing for presentation at a conference or in manuscript form for publication, or it could be an opportunity to simply try out the genre of conference paper presentation. Its theme must be in gender and feminist studies, and it should make reference to at least two works from our seminar readings.

Option #2: Literature Review

In this option, your task is to conduct a literature review of an area of feminist inquiry in your field, or in another field in which you wish to develop some expertise for your own research. To do this, you need to familiarize yourself with the published scholarship in the area you have chosen, and then write it up. The genre you are writing for is the graduate research proposal, such as a dissertation proposal, or a proposal for an M.A. thesis.

Literature reviews require significant library research and reading, so plan ahead and give yourself enough time to adequately review the literature on which you will be writing. If you are thinking about choosing this option, choose a book for the short essay assignment that is part of your review. A significant part of the task of doing a literature review is defining the area of scholarly study you are reviewing, determining which texts “count” and why, and which are extraneous, unrelated or less significant to the area of study. This takes time---give it to yourself.

The review should include a description of the research area you have chosen, a discussion of several exemplary texts and how they construct and analyze their object of study (with citations for additional texts in the area which you have chosen not to discuss in much detail), blind spots or limitations of the existing literature, and ways that scholars have expanded on and/or opened up inquiry in this area. Be critical but also recognize what researchers’ theoretical and methodological innovations have accomplished in the area of study. The literature review should not consist only of negative critique – consider also how this area of scholarship could be useful to current scholarship. What kind of thinking and inquiry does it enable? What new/significant approaches does/did it offer? How does it enable you to do the kind of work you seek to do in the area? In what ways does it fall short? Are there ways it could use more theoretical rigor or adeptness or some methodological development?

Examples could include, but are not limited to: feminist humanistic disability studies, feminist cultural geographies, feminist popular music studies, feminist film studies, feminist

cultural anthropology, current feminist theories of history, feminist philosophies of female sexuality, among others.

Option #3: Methods Statement and Research Plan

This option picks up where Option #2 leaves off. Here your task is to construct a methods discussion and research plan for a research project you wish to conduct; if you are thinking about your M.A. thesis or Ph.D. dissertation, you might choose this option with that goal in mind. Rather than review the existing scholarship in the area of research you will conduct, here you must write up a description of: 1) the research questions which drive your project; 2) how you define and construct your research object of study (this includes what I would call a “theory discussion”; 3) the steps or plan of research action you will take in order to study it; and 4) the methods of analysis you will use to analyze your research object(s) and where they come from, and a discussion of the ways in which they will enable you to answer your research questions (e.g. why *these* methods?).

Expectations and Policies: There are several expectations that I have of students as participants in a graduate seminar. I expect that students will: attend every seminar meeting and come prepared to discuss each of our readings, do all of the readings on time and have something to say about them, turn in seminar work on time and in completed fashion, and openly communicate about anything of concern in the course (e.g. if you know you will have trouble meeting a deadline or if there is anything that will prevent you from fully participating in the seminar).

Discussion Etiquette: Discussion makes up a great percentage of time in seminar. Following a few basic discussion guidelines helps insure that this time is productive, enlightening, enjoyable and respectful.

1. It takes work to create a shared climate of friendly and lively discussion. Try to avoid personal attacks and insults, jabs, and grand-standing behaviors. Instead, approach differences of opinion or approach as *interesting*, as worth exploring more fully with an open mind.
2. Disagreements are natural and welcome in scholarly discussion. So are arguments. But arguments are not contests; no one “wins” or “loses,” nor is this the point of talking with each other. Grant your fellow seminar participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not.
3. Avoid purely negative critique in your comments. Our goal in discussion is to understand the texts we read and how they might be useful to us -- in addition to sharpening and honing our skills in critique. That said do not fear being critical of a text.
4. Wait your turn – do not interrupt others, unless they call on you to intervene.
5. You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject; if you do, expect that others may want to disagree with you. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time. Changing your mind and respectful contestation are both encouraged.
6. Experience and anecdote are not the same thing as evidence in a scholarly argument. Use them wisely, and sparingly. While we each bring interesting experiences to the classroom, only bring them up when they are actually relevant to seminar discussion, otherwise they can lead to a deluge of stories---what I call “the tyranny of the anecdote.” If you bring up your own experience in class, relate it directly to a point you’re making about the topic under discussion. Also recognize that it then becomes a public topic for discussion and is no longer something you possess or own. Others may interpret your experience differently than you do, and they are free to respectfully disagree with your interpretation.

Grading: Graduate students at McGill (or any other university in Quebec) have the right to turn in work that is written in French. If you plan on writing in French over the semester, please notify me in advance so that if I should need to, I can locate a translator. Most of our readings, lectures, seminar discussions, presentations and demonstrations will be conducted in English.

Final grades for the semester will be based on the quality and clarity of your performance in presentations, demonstrations, and your written work. If you turn in work late, you may not receive written comments from me and your grade could be reduced. If I deem your work unsatisfactory, I may ask you to do it again. Taking an incomplete or “K” grade for this course is greatly discouraged, unless you have a truly exceptional reason that can be supported by formal documentation.

How to Interpret Graduate-Level Grades:

A:	Good work
A-:	Satisfactory
B+:	There is a problem with what you submitted
B:	There is a substantial problem with what you submitted
B-:	Lowest possible passing grade in a graduate course; indicates a major problem but not a failure
C+ or lower:	Officially considered a “fail” by the Graduate Studies Office.

Auditors: If you would like to audit this class, and I invite you to participate with us, I will hold you to the same policies and issues of etiquette described here as I do students who are enrolled for credit.

Statement on Academic Integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Semester Calendar of Readings and Meetings

Please note: The following calendar of readings for term is not complete. Over the term, a few additional readings may be added based upon recommendations from guest faculty who will be speaking to our seminar.

What is Feminist Inquiry?

Thurs, September 4: Whither Women’s Studies?

Introduction to the seminar and to the new graduate option in Gender and Women’s Studies at McGill University; links between women’s studies and gender studies; how to think about the issue of inter-disciplinarity or trans-disciplinarity in gender and women’s studies from a disciplinary location.

Wendy Brown (1997). “The Impossibility of Women’s Studies” *differences* 9(3): 79-101.

Robyn Wiegman (2002). “The Progress of Gender: Whither ‘Women?’” In Robyn Wiegman (ed.) *Women’s Studies on its Own*. Durham, NC: Duke University, 106-140.

- Kathleen Blee (2002). "Contending with Disciplinarity" In Robyn Wiegman (ed.) *Women's Studies on its Own*. Durham, NC: Duke University, 177-182.
- Marilyn Boxer (2000). "Unruly Knowledge: Women's Studies and the Problem of Disciplinarity" *NWSA Journal* 12(2): 119-129.
- Marjorie Pryse (2000). "Trans/Feminist Methodology: Bridges to Interdisciplinary Thinking" *NWSA Journal* 12(2): 105-118.
- Mary Romero (2000). "Disciplining the Feminist Bodies of Knowledge: Are We Creating or Reproducing Academic Structure?" *NWSA Journal* 12(2): 148-162.

Thurs, September 11: What is Feminist Inquiry?

Mary Hawkesworth (2006). *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation*. Rutgers University Press, first half of book.

Thurs, September 18: What are Feminist Methodologies?

- Sandra Harding (1987) "Is there a Feminist Method?" In *Feminism and Methodology*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1-14.
- Sue Wise and Liz Stanley (2006). "Having it All: Feminist Fractured Foundationalism" in Kathy Davis, Mary Evans and Judith Lorber (eds.). *Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies*. London: Sage Publications, 435-456.
- Sandra Harding and Kathryn Nordberg (2005). "New Feminist Approaches to Social Science Methodologies: An Introduction" *Signs* 30(4): 2009-2015.
- Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook (2005). "Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy" *Signs* 30(4): 2211-2236.
- Christine Halse and Anne Honey (2005). "Unraveling Ethics: Illuminating the Moral Dilemmas of Research Ethics" *Signs* 30(4): 2141-2162.

Thursday, September 25: Feminist Theorizing and Questions of Epistemology

- Mary Hawkesworth (2006). "Standpoint" chapter.
- Charlotte Bunch (1987). "Not by Degrees: Feminist Theory and Education" in *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 240-253.
- Elizabeth Gross (1986). "Conclusion: What is Feminist Theory" in Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross (eds.). *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*. Sydney: Allen Unwin, 190-204.
- Donna Haraway (1991). "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 183-202.
- Kirstie McClure (1992) "The Issue of Foundations: Scientized Politics, Politicized Science, and Feminist Critical Practice" in Joan Scott and Judith Butler, eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge, 341-368.

Thursday, October 2: Post-structuralism meets Feminist Theory

- Chris Weedon (1997). *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Nicola Gavey (1997) "Feminist Post-Structuralism and Discourse Analysis" in Mary M. Gergen and Sara N. Davis (eds.). *Toward a New Psychology of Gender: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 49-64.

For further reading:

- Judith Butler and Joan Scott (1992). "Introduction" In Butler and Scott (eds.). *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge, xiii-xvii.
- Judith Butler (1992). "Contingent Foundations and the Question of 'Postmodernism'" In Butler and Scott (eds.). *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge, 3-20.
- Joan Scott (1988). "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism" *Feminist Studies* 14(1): 32-50.
- Linda Martin Alcoff (1988). "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory" *Signs* 13(3): 405-436.
- Biddy Martin (1982). "Feminism, Criticism, Foucault" *New German Critique* 27: 3-30.

Key Themes/Concepts in Feminist Inquiry

Thurs, October 9: Sex and Gender (Lived Bodies and Performance)

****Note: Seminar will end by 4:30pm today.**

- Mary Hawkesworth (2006). "Gender" chapter.
- Wendy Cealey Harrison (2006). "The Shadow and the Substance: The Sex/Gender Debate" in Kathy Davis, Mary Evans and Judith Lorber (eds.). *The Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies*. London: Sage Publications, 35-52.
- Judith Butler (1993). "Imitation and Gender Subordination" in Ablove et. al. (eds.). *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 307-320.
- Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000). "Dueling Dualisms" in *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books, 1-29.
- Elizabeth Grosz (2005). "The Force of Sexual Difference" in *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 171-183.

Thurs, October 16: Intersectionality

Guest lecture: Anna Carastathis, Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia University?

- Mary Hawkesworth (2006). "Intersectionality" chapter.
- Nira Yuval-Davis (2006). "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13(3): 193-209.
- Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241-1299.

Thurs, October 23: The Politics of Feminist Representation

Guest Faculty: Prof. Alia Al-Saji (Philosophy)

- Saba Mahmood (2001), "Feminist Theory, Embodiment and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." *Cultural Anthropology* 16:2, 202-236.
- Marnia Lazreg (2000), "The Triumphant Discourse of Global Feminism: Should Other Women be Known?" In *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, eds. Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 29-38.
- Linda Martín Alcoff (1991-1992), "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique* 20, 5-32.

Recommended:

Uma Narayan (1997), "Through the Looking-Glass Darkly: Emissaries, Mirrors, and Authentic Insiders as Preoccupations" in *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*. London & New York: Routledge, 121-157.

Thurs, October 30: Sexuality Studies and Feminist Theory

Guest faculty: Prof. Allan Hepburn (English)?

Cressida Heyes (2003) "Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender" *Signs* 28(4): 1093-1120.

Emi Koyama (2003) "The Transfeminist Manifesto" In Rory Dickerson and Alison Piepmeier, eds. *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Viviane Namaste (2005). "Introduction," "Making the Lives of Transsexual People Visible: Addressing the Politics of Social Erasure," "Sex Change, Social Changes: Reflections on Identity and Institutions" and "Beyond Image Content: Examining Transsexuals Access to the Media" in *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions and Imperialism*. Toronto: Women's Press, ix-xii, 1-33, 41-59.

Viviane Namaste (2005). "C'était du Spectacle! Les Cabarets à Montréal" in *C'était du Spectacle! L'histoire des Artistes Transsexuelles à Montréal, 1955-1985*. McGill-University Queen's Press, 11-58.

Recommended Readings:

Sharon Marcus (2005) "Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay" *Signs* 31(1): 191-218.

Cressida Heyes (2000) "Reading Transgender, Rethinking Women's Studies" *NWSA Journal* 12(2): 170-180.

Heather Love (2004). "'The Right to Change my Mind': New Work in Trans Studies" *Feminist Theory* 5(1): 91-100.

Feminist Inquiry in the Disciplines of Humanities

Thurs, November 6: Feminist Philosophical Inquiry

Guest faculty: Professors Marguerite Deslauriers (Philosophy) and Sabrina Hom (Women's Studies).

Linda Singer (1993) "Defusing the Canon: Feminist Rereading and Textual Politics" in *Erotic Welfare: Sexual Theory and Politics in the Age of Epidemic*. New York: Routledge, 163-176.

Luce Irigaray (1993), "Wonder: A Reading of Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*" in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and C. Gill. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 72-82.

Genevieve Lloyd (1984) "Reason as Attainment" in *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 38-48.

Rene Descartes (2006). "Mediation One: Concerning those Things that can be Called into Doubt" in Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (ed. and trans.) *Meditations, Objections and Replies*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 9-13.

Thurs, November 13: Women's History or Gender History

Guest Faculty: Professors Nancy Partner (History) and Elizabeth Elbourne (History and Women's Studies)

Judith Bennett (1996) *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600*.
Oxford University Press (chapters 1, 7, 8 and the Appendix).
Nancy Partner (1993) "No Sex, No Gender" *Studying Medieval Women* 68(2): 419-443.
Joan Scott (1986, December) "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" *The American Historical Review* 91(5): 1053-1075.
Joan Scott (1992). "Experience" in Butler and Scott *Feminists Theorize the Political*.
Clare Hemmings (2005) "Telling Feminist Stories" *Feminist Theory*.

Thurs, November 20: No Seminar; Professor out of Town

Thurs, November 27: Feminism and Cultural Studies

Guest Faculty: Professors Ned Schantz, Derek Nystrom and Berkeley Kaite (English)

Tania Modleski (1988 and 2005) "Afterword" to the original and second edition of *The Women Who Knew Too Much*.

Angela McRobbie...

What to do with?

Charlotte Brunsdon (1997). "Pedagogies of the Feminine" in *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes*.
New York: Routledge, 172-188.

Carol Stable (1995). "Resistance, Recuperation, and Reflexivity: The Limits of a Paradigm" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12: 403-422.

Thursday, December 4: Final Student Presentations

Monday, December 15: Seminar Papers Due