

**Current Debates in Feminist and Gender Theory:
Feminist, Queer, and Trans* Theory**

GSFR 700, McMaster University, Fall 2017

Wed. 12:30-3:20, KTH 308

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Office hours: Wednesdays 9:30-11 & by appointment

TEXTS

All readings are available online through our Avenue course site, under “Content – Readings”

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar explores feminist, queer, and trans* theories as interconnected bodies of inquiry. (The asterick in “trans* signals the wide range of identifications among persons who live outside of normative sex/gender relations.) Examining current debates within these fields, as well as between them, we will trace histories of division and dispute, but we will also explore some of the productive ways that feminist, queer, and trans* theoretical work have managed to meet, ally, and intermingle. How might theories articulated within the fields of feminist, queer, and trans* studies decide what counts as effective political strategy, identity-based or otherwise? What solutions, if any, do these theorists propose in order to best counter exclusionary norms, assumptions, and practices both outside and within feminist, queer, and trans* movements and activisms? And how might feminist, queer, and trans* theorists separately and together make effective interventions across the fields of critical race and postcolonial studies, gender studies, sexuality studies, and disability studies?

To explore these questions collectively, we will focus primarily on theoretical texts published in the last two decades, but we will also read these texts in connection with a range of texts from earlier periods. We will develop, collectively, a set of “keywords” that help to map issues of contest and coalition amongst the theorists we are reading. In final papers for the course, students will follow their own interests by bringing our shared readings into conversation with additional strands of contemporary feminist, queer, and/or trans* thought.

COURSE GOALS

In this seminar you will:

1. increase your awareness of and fluency with a range of contemporary feminist, queer, and trans* theories;
2. develop the ability to summarize, analyze, and synthesize individual theoretical texts;
3. critically examine some of the central assumptions and arguments of feminist, queer, and trans* theoretical writings, assessing their methodologies and their

implications for social and political praxis;

4. take responsibility for contributing to the direction and quality of discussion in the seminar setting;
5. develop and exercise skills in presenting ideas orally and facilitating critical discussion;
6. explore your own position(s) in relation to various theoretical debates and approaches;
7. construct a convincing proposal for an ambitious but do-able essay, including a relevant, well-informed annotated bibliography that demonstrates your research skills and ability to grasp and summarize theoretical arguments;
8. further the field(s) of feminist, queer, and/or trans* theory by writing a persuasive, conference-paper length essay that actively engages with contemporary theoretical debates.

Our reading schedule, seminar activities, and assignments are designed as vehicles for helping you to meet these learning objectives.

COURSE WORK and EVALUATION SCHEME

Seminar participation 10%
 Article summaries (3 @ 300-400 words each) 12.5%
 Position statements (2 @ 400 words each) 12.5%
 Oral report and discussion questions 20%
 Paper proposal and annotated bibliography 10%
 Final paper (3,500 words), including proposal workshop participation 35%

SCHEDULE

Week 1: Sept. 13

INTRODUCTIONS, COURSE OVERVIEW

Week 2: Sept 20

THEORY: WHO, WHAT, and WHY/SO WHAT

Gordon, Avery. "Theory and Justice."

Ahmed, Sarah. "Whose Counting?" *Feminist Theory* 1 (2000): 97-103.

Week 3: Sept 27

RETHINKING (GENDERED) IDENTITY

Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman"

Combahee River Collective Statement

Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism"

Recommended: Butler, Judith. "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" (Chapter 1 from *Gender Trouble*)

Week 4: Oct. 4

Anzaldúa, Gloria. "La Consciencia de la Mestiza"

Koyama, Emi. "A Transfeminist Manifesto"

Stryker, Susan. "Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question"

Week 5: Oct 11 -- no regular class meeting (mid-term recess)**Week 6: Oct. 18**

FEMINIST and/versus QUEER THEORY

Sedgwick, Eve. "Introduction: Axiomatic"

Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex"

Butler, Judith. "Against Proper Objects"

Week 7: Oct. 25

Phelan, Shane. "Bodies, Passions, and Citizenship." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 2.1 (March 1999): 56-79.

Muñoz, José Estaban. "Introduction: Performing Disidentifications"

Week 8: Nov. 1

Puar, Jasbir. "Introduction" to *Terrorist Assemblages*

Gopinath, Gayatri. Chapter 1 from *Impossible Desires*

Week 9: Nov. 8

FEMINIST and/versus QUEER THEORY and/versus TRANS* THEORY

Namaste, Viviane. "Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity and Institutions"

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. "Transing and Transpassing Across Sex/Gender Walls in Iran."

Women's Studies Quarterly 36.3-4 (2008): 23-42.

Driskill, Qwo-Li. "Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies." *GLQ* 16.1-2 (2010): 69-92. DOI 10.1215/10642684-2009-013.

Week 10: Nov. 15

Muñoz et al. "Transpedagogies: A Roundtable Dialogue." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36.3-4 (2008)

Selections TBD from "Race and Transgender Studies" special issue, *Feminist Studies* 37.2 (Summer 2011) – I recommend Bailey, Baderoon, and the poems (Richardson, Huang)

Week 11: Nov. 22

Spade, Dean. "Intersectional Resistance and Law Reform." *Signs* 38.4 (Summer 2013): 1031-55.

Pyne, Jake. *Somatechnics* 7.1 (2017): 95-123.

1 selection TBD:

1 article from "The Issue of Blackness" special issue *TSQ* 4.2 (May 2017)

1 chapter from Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride* (2015)

1 chapter from Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (2017)

Week 12: Nov. 29

Proposal Workshop

Week 13: Dec. 6

Course Wrap-up

- * Proposals due to Avenue Discussions and Assignment Submission Folder **Mon. November 27 @ 10 am**
- * Completed peer response forms due **in class on Wed. Nov. 29 in hard copy** (no Avenue copy required)
- * Seminar Participation Self-Assessment Form due to Avenue Assignments Submission Folder **Dec. 8**
- * Final paper due to Avenue Assignments Submission Folder **Dec. 15**

IMPORTANT NOTES

Email and Office Hours: I encourage students to drop by during my office hours (or at another pre-arranged time) to discuss course content and/or assignments. Please also feel free to use email for brief, logistical questions. If your email message requires more than 3 sentences in response, it is most likely better suited for discussion in person during office hours or by appointment.

In accordance with the Faculty of Humanities email policy, all email communication sent from students to instructors, and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University email account or Avenue to Learn email account. This policy allows the instructor to keep an accurate record of course-related email. It also protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of students. If for any reason you prefer to use another email account, please contact me directly, as soon as possible, to work out alternative arrangements.

I will check my Avenue and McMaster email accounts every 24 hours, Monday through Friday, meaning that during the work week students can expect to receive brief responses to emailed questions within 24-36 hours; emails sent over the weekend will receive responses on Mondays.

In-class etiquette: Please be respectful of your fellow students' needs to concentrate during seminar discussions, oral reports, and workshops. Please arrive promptly. No cell phones in class, please. If you use a computer to take notes, please shut down all other applications (including social media sites); otherwise, you will be requested to leave your computer outside the classroom. You may think that you are absolutely capable of multitasking during class, but this can be very distracting for those around you. If undue problems arise, I reserve the right to make this a computer-free class.

Assignments:

- (1) All article summaries, position statements, oral report handouts, oral report notes, paper proposals, and final papers must be submitted on Avenue.
- (2) All paper workshop response forms must be submitted in hard copy during the in-class workshop on Nov. 29.
- (3) Late article summaries and position statements, as well as late paper proposals and paper workshop peer responses, will not be accepted and will be given a grade of zero. Late final papers will be penalized 5% per day, 7 days per week. All late assignments forfeit written comments from both me and, where relevant, from your fellow students.

(4) Please keep copies of and preparation notes for all assignments, including research notes for your oral report, paper proposal, and final essay. You may be required to hand in these notes; failure to do may result in loss of credit for the assignment.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous, and Spiritual Observances: Students requiring academic accommodation based on religion and spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the Course Calendar or by their respective Faculty. In most cases, the student should contact his or her professor or academic advisor as soon as possible to arrange accommodations for classes, assignments, tests and examinations that might be affected by a religious holiday or spiritual observance.

Extensions and other Accommodations: Please make all requests for assignment extensions in person or via email no later than the end of the third week of classes. Note that the office of Student Accessibility Services (SAS) approves accommodations for students with disabilities. These accommodations are designed to ensure that each student has a fair opportunity to perform in McMaster courses. Students with disabilities are encouraged to identify themselves to SAS in order to receive accommodations, ideally no later than the end of the second week of classes. If you have an SAS accommodation letter, please have me sign it (or inform me that it is coming) as soon as possible; I look forward to working with you to ensure appropriate accommodations. For further information, or to register with SAS, please see <http://sas.mcmaster.ca/>, call 905.525.9140 x28652 (TTY: 905-528-4307) or go to the SAS office at MUSC B-107. If you have questions or concerns about these steps, and/or wish to discuss accommodations with me informally, I am happy to speak in person; please drop by my office hours or make an appointment.

Academic integrity: Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. Plagiarism and submission of work that is not one’s own or for which previous credit has been obtained are examples of academic dishonesty. For more information on academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy (<http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>).

Course changes: Instructors and the university as a whole reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. If such modifications become necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of students to check their McMaster and Avenue email accounts and their Avenue course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Evaluations: Students will be asked to complete evaluations at the end of the course.