

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

GSFR 700, McMaster University, Fall 2016

Wednesdays, 11:30-2:20, TSH 321

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TEXTS

Custom Courseware Packet – available via the Campus Store

Readings from this packet are designated in the schedule below as (CW)

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In 1997, the *differences* book series published an intriguing volume of essays entitled *feminism meets queer theory*. In her introduction to this collection, Elizabeth Weed notes that feminism and queer theory share commonalities and affiliations (both, for example, are interdisciplinary in nature; both define themselves in critical relation to a set of hegemonic discursive formations and practices) but argues that the meeting of feminism and queer theory has been “strange” and “surprising” insofar as queer theory, despite refusing to characterize itself as a coherent body, consistently claimed that sex and sexuality cannot be contained by the category of gender, such that gender becomes the “property” of feminist studies while sex and sexuality are to be properly studied “elsewhere.” Although not controversial in and of itself, Weed argues, this move makes feminism unrecognizable to many feminist theorists, stripped, for example, of its internal and often contentious debates not to mention its insights into intersecting positionalities along the axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability. Published a decade later, Diane Richardson, Janice McLaughlin, and Mark E. Casey’s 2006 essay collection *Intersections Between Feminist and Queer Theory* similarly represents encounters between feminist and queer theory as contentious and vexed: feminism continues to stand for a theoretical position seen as resistant to difference, they argue, while queer theory finds itself attacked for alleged political apathy and disinterest. According to Richardson, McLaughlin, and Casey, moreover, such divisions and disputes have taken on “a life of their own,” one that threatens to foreclose productive alliances and affinities.

This seminar seeks in part to map these disputes and what is at stake in them. It also begins to explore some of the more productive ways that feminism and queer theory have begun to meet, ally, and intermingle alongside trans* theorists and activists as well. (The asterick in “trans*” signals the wide range of identifications among persons who live outside of normative sex/gender relations.) How might contemporary theorists working at the intersections of feminist with queer and trans* theories offer narratives

and arguments that account for identity, and its fissures, along the axes of gender, race, class, and sexuality? How do they decide what counts as effective political strategy, identity-based or otherwise? What solutions, if any, do these theorists propose in order to best counter racism, heterosexism, transphobia, and other exclusionary norms, assumptions, and practices both outside and within feminist movements and activisms? And how might feminist, queer, and trans* theorists separately and together make effective interventions across the fields of race and postcolonial studies, gender studies, and sexuality studies?

To explore these questions collectively, we will read second wave texts by lesbian feminists and feminists influenced by structuralist theory; post-structuralist feminists; multiracial feminists; queer theorists; and trans* theorists (note that these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and indeed, often are not). Students will also follow their own interests by bringing our shared readings into conversation with related strands of contemporary feminist, queer, and/or trans* thought, for example in oral presentations and final papers.

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.

The reading schedule, seminar activities, and assignments have all been designed as vehicles for helping you to meet these learning objectives.

COURSE WORK and EVALUATION SCHEME

Seminar participation	10%
Article summaries (2 @ 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. 14**

INTRODUCTIONS, COURSE OVERVIEW

Ahmed, Sarah. "Whose Counting?" Feminist Theory 1 (2000): 97-103.**Week 2: Sept. 21**

Graduate seminar with Mel Y. Chen (readings TBA)

* 12:30-2:20 (lunch will be served)

Week 3: Sept 28

RETHINKING (GENDERED) IDENTITY

Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman"

Wittig, Monique. "One is Not Born a Woman" (CW)

Combahee River Collective Statement

Lorde, Audre. "Age, Race, Class, and Sex," "Master's Tools," "Uses of the Erotic" (CW)

Week 4: Oct. 5Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism." Signs 13.3 (1988): 405-36.Brown, Wendy. "Wounded Attachments." Political Theory 21.3 (1993): 390-410.

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

Week 5: Oct 12 -- no regular class meeting (mid-term recess)**Week 6: Oct. 19**

FEMINIST and/versus QUEER THEORY

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

Butler, Judith. "Against Proper Objects" (CW)

Week 7: Oct. 26

Sedgwick, Eve. "Introduction: Axiomatic"

Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex" (CW)

Phelan, Shane. "Bodies, Passions, and Citizenship" (CW)

Week 8: Nov. 2Puar, Jasbir. "introduction" to Terrorist Assemblages (CW)Gopinath, Gayatri. Chapter 1 from Impossible Desires (CW)**Week 9: Nov. 9**

FEMINIST and/versus QUEER and/versus TRANS* THEORY

Koyama, Emi. "A Transfeminist Manifesto" (CW)

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

Serano, Julia. Whipping Girl, Chapters 7, 9, 19, 20**Week 10: Nov. 16**Selections from "Trans-," special issue of Women's Studies Quarterly 36.3 (Dec. 2008)

Week 11: Nov. 23

Selections from “Trans-“, special issue of Women’s Studies Quarterly 36.3 (Dec. 2008)
Selections from “Race and Transgender Studies” special issue, Feminist Studies 37.2
(Summer 2011)

Week 12: Nov. 30

GSFR Diploma Research Symposium Panel

Week 13: Dec. 7

Proposal Workshop and Course Wrap-up

- * Proposals due to Avenue Discussions and Dropbox by **Monday December 5 @ 10 am**
- * Completed peer response forms due in class on Dec. 7 in hard copy (no Avenue copy required)

Dec. 9: Seminar Participation Self-Assessment Form due to Avenue Assignments
Submission Folder

Dec. 16: Final paper due to Avenue Assignments Submission Folder

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 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.

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, you must 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, and paper proposals must be submitted on Avenue to BOTH the Discussion tool and the Avenue Submissions Folder.
- (2) Oral report notes and final papers should be submitted to the Avenue Submissions Folder only.
- (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 me and 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 all 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 responsible for identifying themselves to SAS in order to receive accommodations, and should do so 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.

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.