

# WGS 353W

## Feminist Theory



Tuesday & Thursday 2:30PM-4:00PM  
Eaton 425

[Zoom Link](#)

WISE: WGS-353W-01-21

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### Overview

It is sometimes hard to believe that feminist theory can be found in essays and discourses dating back to 1792 but it is true! Rather than taking a strictly historical approach to feminist theory, this semester we will be concentrating on feminist theory of the body. The goal of this class will be to take a look at how feminist theory's discourses on the body have developed. While we will focus mainly on feminist theory, we will also look at some disability studies and queer theory that has materialized from the discourses in feminist theory. Think of this course as starting with the nucleus (the body) and then building to examine each orbital that creates the atom (the discourse). This feminist theory class is but a very small piece of the feminist theory pie and we all have to start somewhere, so the body it is! While I have started a path for this class, I hope that you will join me in a curious engagement of materials. I am excited to share this exploration with you and see where the next 15 weeks take us.

### Texts and Materials

All texts are available through the course site on WISE.

### Goals for this course

- You will understand the diverse range and scope of both historical and contemporary "feminisms."
- You will be able to identify and explain key concepts and theoretical strains in feminist theory.
- You will understand the role of feminist theory in promoting activism and social change.
- You will understand the complexities of academic writing and be able to develop an innovative thesis, anticipate your reading audience, reason and argue convincingly, and support your claims with concrete, textual evidence.
- You will demonstrate the ability to practice writing as a process that entails brainstorming, research, outlining, and revision through multiple drafts.
- You will make connections between the theoretical arguments advocated by feminist theorists and contemporary women's issues in our world.

### Writing Centered Goals

- Understand that diverse purposes call on diverse processes for writing and become flexible in choosing processes appropriate for the purpose
- Recognize the demands of a variety of readers and develop ways to adapt your writing to meet the needs and expectations of diverse readers
- Respect your readers' expectations for evidence, explanation, and argumentation
- Write in fluent, precise, competent, English in their formal writing, observe the conventions of standard edited English in grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics; develop a

sense of your own writing voice; appreciate the variety of English prose styles; identify styles that you admire; and match your own style to purpose and readers

## Credit Hour Compliance

Students will spend 3 hours on homework and outside assignments for every hour in class. Simply stated, expect to work 9 hours/week on homework and co-curricular activities.

## Grading Policy

**Attendance:** Due to the way in which this course is taught, class attendance is fundamental to your success and the success of your colleagues. Due to the challenges of Covid-19, if you are unable to attend class in person, I ask that you attend remotely. I also ask that you let me know before noon (12pm) each class day if you are going to switch your modality to remote. I also ask that you respect your colleagues by arriving to class, ready to begin on time.

**Participation:** Active participation in class discussion is expected and will be a factor in each student's grade. The participation grade will be based upon thoughtful contributions in discussion and other class exercises. You will be expected to participate in thoughtful discussions of close readings. Note that class participation does not simply entail speaking, but also listening in an engaged and respectful manner. All in-class presentations will have a group critique attached to the assignments. Each student is required to participate in group critiques. Active participation in group critiques will count as significant part of the assignment as well as participation credit for the day.

At their heart, the group critiques come from a place of openness and generosity. Asking hard questions is an important part of the process, however mean-spirited critiques will not be tolerated. Each student is asked to participate in each critique so that the work grows. Students will have the opportunity to adjust work based on the critiques given in class.

**Reading Assignments:** This is a seminar class not a lecture course. We are going to be talking and listening to one another, engaging in collective enterprise and exploration. We will be discussing concept concepts in theatre that are central to our personal identities and aesthetics. Accordingly, we can and should expect that we will not all agree with one another regarding the topics we will be discussing. This course should neither be seen as an opportunity to compel others to "achieve" a proper stance, nor as a space for trying to impress people. Vital to the success of this class is the commitment we make to listening and speaking with one another with respect and thoughtfulness.

The reading and assignments for this course are rigorous and challenging. You are required to *thoughtfully* read every assignment. When I say that you are required to read, I do not mean that you should mechanically scan every page, but you should *grapple with the ideas*. You will be required to take notes on each text so that you will *read for comprehension* rather than reading for completion. I want you to *ponder every idea* rather than looking at every word. This means that you may need to read and reread sections of the articles/chapters. Reading means *engaging yourself with the ideas of the texts*.

The reading load will be quite heavy at times. To stay afloat, plan for a sufficient amount of time to complete the assignment, and read aggressively. Remember to make use of your resources: meet with

me outside of class, form reading groups with your classmates, check-out the writing center, TALK TO ONE ANOTHER!

*Forum:* For each class with a viewing and/or reading assignment, each student is to prepare one (1) compelling question that could be used in class discussion. A compelling question is one that challenges all of us to think critically about the texts – what they mean, their relation to objects/events/relations in our daily lives, etc. The questions are not simply journalistic-type questions about "facts" in the texts themselves.

In addition, you are to compose a short paragraph (at least 150 words) in which you begin to answer your compelling question. You do not have to answer the question completely, but must demonstrate that you have thought about where the answer might lie (or, at a minimum, where a discussion of the answer would begin). The goal is to demonstrate that you are reading closely and critically, and beginning to synthesize texts and your beliefs in conjunction with the texts.

Your compelling questions and short paragraphs must be posted to the Forum tab on our course WISE site by 8:30AM THE DAY OF CLASS. Late postings will not be evaluated but may be considered in class discussion. Please note that your notes will help you through this process.

*Grading:* of all written work will be based on clarity and organization of thought, use of specific supporting evidence, and pertinence of conclusions. These factors, along with quality of research, careful analysis, and general writing skills will constitute the basis for grading. I will use the grade descriptions outlined in the CLA Catalogue: (A) excellent; (B) good; (C) satisfactory; (D) below standard; and (F) failing.

#### *Paper Criteria*

An "A" paper offers a persuasive, eloquent, stylistically sophisticated argument. It presents a compelling thesis, which is then developed into a well-structured, coherent essay. An "A" paper uses evidence effectively. Such a paper thoughtfully considers and analyzes other viewpoints, including the views of the paper's intended audience. An "A" paper's style is distinctive, and this style helps further the writer's argument.

A "B" paper also offers a convincing argument. It has an interesting thesis and is, on the whole, well-structured. Like an A paper, it too considers alternative positions and does so in a thoughtful manner. A "B" paper's style is clear and relatively free of errors that could hinder its readability and/or persuasiveness. A "B" paper grasps the significance of style in making an effective argument.

A "C" paper makes an argument but does not do so effectively. It may fail to present evidence in support of its thesis or it may present evidence in a haphazard and hence unconvincing manner. In addition, a paper will receive a "C" if it is stylistically unsophisticated, replete with digressions, lacks a sense of audience, or ignores opposing opinions.

A "D" paper fails to present an argument. The paper lacks a thesis and is merely a string of ideas, some of which may be very interesting but none of which are developed into a clear, rational, coherent essay. Additionally, a plethora of typos, stylistic problems, or grammatical flaws may turn any paper into a "D" paper if such lapses significantly affect the essay's readability.

An "F" paper results when the writer neglects to hand in the assignment; refuses to address the paper topic; or violates common standards of decency. Additionally, plagiarism also will result in a paper grade of "F."

### *Critical Reading Criteria*

These will be the guiding questions that inform both our discussions and writing assignments. Class time will be most productive if you come to class having already thought about how you might respond to the questions that are most important to you.

### *Arguments:*

What are the main claims or points of the author's argument?  
What terms or assumptions are being called into question?  
What kinds of evidence does the author use to support these arguments?  
What terms and concepts are being challenged or redefined?  
What are the underlying assumptions of the text?  
What is the evidence that leads me to infer this?

### *Theories:*

What theories or theorists are used as resources?  
What is the evidence of this use?  
How are theories or theorists positioned?  
What is the evidence of this positioning?  
How do the theories reflect complexity and contradiction?  
What is being re-imagined, or imagined in new ways?  
What is the significance to the argument of using theories in this way?

### *Purpose:*

What are the purposes of this text?  
What is the evidence for my claim about purposes?  
What is at stake theoretically and practically?  
What is the evidence for my claim about the stakes?  
What are the arguments and assumptions that the author is trying to challenge?  
What evidence leads me to infer this?

### *Intellectual Relationships:*

How are experts, scholars, allies, or opponents mentioned?  
Who is being put into what camp?  
What evidence is there for my claims?  
What are the implications of such use?

### *Rhetorical Strategies:*

What significant or comment-worthy rhetorical strategies are used by the author?  
What specific examples and quotations demonstrate these strategies?  
What is the significance of these strategies for making the author's argument?

The following is the grading breakdown for this term:

Class Participation: 25%

Essays: 25%

Forum: 25%

Final Paper: 25%

### *Land Acknowledgement*

We are gathered on the land of the Kalapuya, who today are represented by the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians, whose relationship with this land continues to this day. We offer gratitude for the land itself, for those who have stewarded it for generations, and for the opportunity to study, learn, work, and be in community on this land. We acknowledge that our University's history, like many others, is fundamentally tied to the first colonial developments in the Willamette Valley. Finally, we respectfully acknowledge and honor past, present, and future Indigenous students of Willamette.

### *Diversity and Disability*

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, perspective, and other background characteristics. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, please notify me as soon as possible. Students with disabilities are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Services office in Matthews 103 at 503-370-6737 or [Accessible-info@willamette.edu](mailto:Accessible-info@willamette.edu) to discuss a range of options to removing barriers in the course, including accommodations.

### *Course Content Considerations*

We will be analyzing multiple standpoints and, at times, we may encounter individual resistance to the text(s). At times, such resistance may provoke unexpected responses. In such cases, please take personal care. Support services are available through Bishop Wellness and the Chaplain's office. I will always be available to assist as desired/needed.

### *Commitment to Positive Sexual Ethics*

Willamette is a community committed to fostering safe, productive learning environments, and we value ethical sexual behaviors and standards. Title IX and our school policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which regards sexual misconduct — including discrimination, harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We understand that sexual violence can undermine students' academic success, and we encourage affected students to talk to someone about their experiences and get the support they need. Please be aware that as a mandatory reporter I am required to report any instances you disclose to Willamette's Title IX Coordinator. If you would rather share information with a confidential employee who does not have this responsibility, please contact our confidential advocate at [confidential-advocate@willamette.edu](mailto:confidential-advocate@willamette.edu). Confidential support also can be found with SARAs and at the

GRAC (503-851-4245); and at WUTalk - a 24-hour telephone crisis counseling support line (503-375-5353). If you are in immediate danger, please call campus safety at 503-370-6911.

### *Academic Integrity*

Students of Willamette University are members of a community that values excellence and integrity in every aspect of life. As such, we expect all community members to live up to the highest standards of personal, ethical, and moral conduct. Students are expected not to engage in any type of academic or intellectually dishonest practice and encouraged to display honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in all they do. Plagiarism and cheating are especially offensive to the integrity of courses in which they occur and against the College community as a whole. These acts involve intellectual dishonesty, deception, and fraud, which inhibit the honest exchange of ideas. Plagiarism and cheating may be grounds for failure in the course and/or dismissal from the College.

<http://willamette.edu/cla/catalog/policies/plagiarism-cheating.php>

### *Intellectual Property & Privacy*

Class materials and discussions including recorded lectures are for the sole purpose of educating the students enrolled in the course. The release of such information (including but not limited to directly sharing, screen capturing, or recording content) is strictly prohibited, unless the instructor states otherwise. Doing so without the permission of the instructor will be considered an Honor Code violation and may also be a violation of other state and federal laws, such as the Copyright Act.

## Paper Assignments

*Feminist Theory Paper 1* (Due February 26<sup>th</sup> with In-Class Peer Review on February 19<sup>th</sup>)

A Critical Rebuttal (4-5 pages)

Each student will come to class with a working outline and a solid introduction. We will break into groups and work with one another to solidify claims, flow of introduction, and help fill in any blanks in the outline. This is a working session and each person should bring a laptop to class. If you do not have access to a laptop, please let me know one week earlier so I can make sure we have a laptop in class for you. Each student will upload their introductions & outlines (same document) to the Feminist Theory 2021 Shared Google Drive.

In academic terms, critical analysis of a work means considering:

- 1) the claims of theorists, scholars, authorities, and so on;
- 2) the ideologies and conceptions upon which those claims are based;
- 3) how far the ideas seem to apply or be relevant to a given situation.

Critical analysis, therefore, is about evaluating and understanding other peoples' work, e.g. their arguments. Your academic argument/rebuttal paper, in response to those claims, must be based on factual information and theoretical ideas (even if these are to be rejected), not on personal experience or beliefs, things which are quite valuable but far less easily generalizable. You may bring personal experience to bear (as supplementary evidence) only after you have established solid theoretical grounding for your argument.

For paper #1, you should take up some piece of an argument or "theory" we have read thus far in the course. Briefly explain the author's logic and then introduce your qualms about the author's position.

Spend the remainder of the essay developing a critical argument that explains your resistance to the author's supposition.

Some options: you might identify a place in the author's argument that seems paradoxical to other claims in the essay; you might expose some underlying faulty logic in the author's claims; you might question the "practicality" of the theoretical premise; you might draw attention to a moment in the argument that overlooks another key idea or concept in feminist thinking.

*Feminist Theory Paper 2* (Due on April 6th with In-Class Presentations Due on March 30<sup>th</sup> & April 1st)  
Each student will present Paper #2 in class. Presentations should last no more than 6 minutes with a 3 minute critique. At the time of presentation, the paper should be 90% complete. Presentations will be executed cleanly and concisely with organization similar to your paper. DO NOT READ YOUR PAPER but DO have a formal, prepared presentation. You will not be allowed to exceed your time. The critique should provide the presenter positive contributions to finish the paper that will be due on 4/6, 2:30pm in assignments. Again, at the time of your presentation, you should be able to hand in your paper for a grade.

Option 1: A Feminist Ritual Analysis (4-5 pages)

Offer a critical argument about a recent event, ritual, experience, or incident that provokes a "feminist" analysis. You might consider your own (or others') daily practices, conversations, habits, experiences, etc. Frame the paper with a brief explanation of the ritual/event and then, using direct textual evidence from the theoretical materials we have read thus far, analyze the ritual through this feminist lens. Ideally, this assignment will expose a re-reading or deeper analysis of a ritual you have taken for granted or perhaps understood/lived from too singular a perspective.

Here are two concrete examples of how this assignment might work (note: these are NOT thesis statements but rather hypothetical topic ideas): 1) I plan to write an essay based on a recent conversation I had with the out-of-home childcare providers who care for my younger daughter. My analysis of our interaction will take shape using Ruddick's essay on "Maternal Thinking." 2) My essay will pair Halberstam and Butler's work on female masculinity and gender performativity to reconsider a recent encounter in which I was read as male, and I deliberately used that gender misreading to my advantage.

Please understand that this academic essay should not turn into a diary-ish entry that simply recounts and muses upon an event/ritual but rather cites that event/ritual as the starting place for a nuanced, developed, and well-informed feminist reading or interpretation. Please engage a theoretical vantage point you have not written on thus far.

Feminist Theory Paper 2, option 2: Another Critical Rebuttal (4-5 pages)

In academic terms, critical analysis means considering 1) the claims of theorists, scholars, authorities, and so on; 2) the ideologies and conceptions upon which those claims are based; and 3) how far they seem to apply or be relevant to a given situation. Critical analysis, therefore, is about evaluating and understanding other peoples' work, e.g. their arguments. Your academic argument/rebuttal paper, in response to those claims, must be based on factual information and theoretical ideas (even if these are to be rejected), not on personal experience or beliefs, things which are quite valuable but far less easily generalizable. You may bring personal experience to bear (as supplementary evidence) only after you have established solid theoretical grounding for your argument.

For paper #2, you should take up some piece of an argument or "theory" we have read thus far in the course. Briefly explain the author's logic and then introduce your qualms about the author's position. Spend the remainder of the essay developing a critical argument that explains your resistance to the author's supposition.

Some options: you might identify a place in the author's argument that seems paradoxical to other claims in the essay; you might expose some underlying faulty logic in the author's claims; you might question the "practicality" of the theoretical premise; you might draw attention to a moment in the argument that overlooks another key idea or concept in feminist thinking.

Please engage a theoretical vantage point you have not written on thus far.

*Feminist Theory, Final Paper* (Due on Thursday, May 6th at 5pm)

For your final paper, write a 4-5 page critical analysis that argues for the relationship between two theoretical approaches we have read this semester. Put another way, pick two essays/lenses/approaches you understand as in conversation with one another and analyze that conversation. Consider the following kinds of questions: What do the two approaches have to say to one another? How does reading one approach inform your reading and understanding of the other? Are they offering coincident perspectives, themes, ideas, or logics? Or are they instead somehow in opposition to each other? Your job is NOT to write a comparison/contrast essay but to identify a particular relationship between two feminist approaches and argue for why and how that relationship matters. In other words, don't limit your analysis to merely showing the conversation that exists between the works but also explain why that conversation is significant.

## Class Schedule

Thursday 1/21	Introduction and Setting the Tone	
Tuesday 1/26	Susan Archer Man, "Doing Feminist Theory" (CH1)	
Thursday 1/28	Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" & bell hooks, "Ain't I a Woman?"	
Tuesday 2/2	Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction to the Second Sex" & Monique Wittig, "One is Not Born A Woman"	
Thursday 2/4	Betty Friedan, "The Problem that Has No Name" & Kate Millet, "Sexual Politics"	
Tuesday 2/9	Shulamith Firestone, "A Dialectic of Sex" (CH 1) & Jo Freeman's "The BITCH Manifesto"	
Thursday 2/11	Combahee River Collective, "Black Feminist Statement" & Gloria Anzaldúa "Borderlands" (CH 5 & CH 7)	Discuss Paper #1
Tuesday 2/16	Adrienne Rich, "Notes Towards a Politics of Location"	



Thursday 2/18	Group Critiques of Paper #1 Introduction & Outline. Please bring computers to class. We will be working in small groups on introductions and outlines. ALL introductions and outlines should be placed in the Feminist Theory 2021 Google Drive in advance of class.	
Tuesday 2/23	Catharine MacKinnon, "Marxism, Method, and the State"	
Thursday 2/25	Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex"	
Tuesday 3/2	Amber Hollibaugh and and Cherríe Moraga, "We're Rolling Around in Bed With" & Ester Newton, "The Misunderstanding"	Paper #1 Due
Thursday 3/4	Donna Haraway, "Simians, Cyborgs, and Women" (CH 5)	
Tuesday 3/9	Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology"	
Thursday 3/11	Patricia Hill Collin, "Black Feminist Thought" (CH 1 & CH 2)	Discuss Paper #2
Tuesday 3/16	Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex"	
Thursday 3/18	Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble" (Section #3)	
Tuesday 3/23	Eve Sedgwick, "Epistemology of the Closet" (CH 1)	
Thursday 3/25	SPRING BREAK (NO CLASSES)	
Tuesday 3/30	Paper #2 Paper Presentations Day #1	
Thursday 4/1	Paper #2 Paper Presentations Day #2	
Tuesday 4/6	Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities" (Intro)	Paper #2 Due
Thursday 4/8	J Halberstam, "Female Masculinity" (Intro)	
Tuesday 4/13	Andrea Long Chu, "My New Vagina Won't Make Me Happy" & Andrea Long Chu "On Liking Women" & Sara Ahmed, "An Affinity of Hammers"	
Thursday 4/15	Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory"	Discuss Final Paper
Tuesday 4/20	SSRD (NO CLASSES)	
Thursday 4/22	Nancy Hirschmann, "Disability, Sexuality, and the Other" & Carolin Ahlvik-Harju "Disturbing Bodies"	
Tuesday 4/27	Nirmala Erevelles, "Crippin' Jim Crow"	
Thursday 4/29	Judith Halberstam, "Queer Art of Failure" (Introduction)	
Thursday 5/6	Final Paper due on WISE no later than 5PM	