

**POINT/COUNTERPOINT: CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST  
DEBATES  
GWSS 3004W**

**Blog Address: [blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/3004](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/3004)**

3 Credits

CLE Requirement: Civic Life and Ethics

Spring 2010

Tues/Thurs: 4:00-5:15

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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 an in-depth exploration of six key issues/values within feminism: (1) Reproductive Rights/Choice, (2) Work/Equality, (3) Feminist Values and Family (4) Sex Wars/ Empowerment and (5) Prison Industrial Complex/Protection. Through the process of exploring

these key issues/values, we will engage in our own ethical and political deliberation on feminism and its various agendas for social justice and transformation.

Some questions that we will explore this semester include:

- What is feminism?
- How much should feminists compromise their ideals in order to get their goals realized?
- Is pro-choice the dividing line between feminist and anti-feminist?
- Should (queer) feminists marry?
- Is marriage an institution worth promoting or saving?
- What is the meaning of “choice” in pro-choice?
- What kind of equality should feminists be working for?
- Are feminist values family values?
- How can feminists work with other social justice movements to challenge oppression in its many forms?

### **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”

### **HOW COURSE FULFILLS THE CIVIC LIFE AND ETHICS REQUIREMENT:**

This course focuses on critically examining the ethical and political choices that feminists and feminist communities have made as they develop, defend and challenge each other’s solutions to some central problems within contemporary feminism. The connection between ethics and civic life is central to the course in two key ways. This course requires that you critically reflect on the *ethics* of civic engagement (what principles are at stake in feminists’ developments of their agendas), and it allows you to collectively debate the value of these ethical principles in your own thinking about how feminists should work for social justice.

## WRITING INTENSIVE COMPONENT OF COURSE:

Writing is a central part of this course. In addition to informal writing assignments (such as blog posts and in-class free writing), you are required to write two brief position papers and a reflection paper on feminism. We will work all semester on your feminist reflection papers and you will have many opportunities to get feedback from the instructors and other students.

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- **ATTEND CLASS REGULARLY:** You are allowed to have **two** 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.** Instead, I would encourage you to exchange email addresses or phone numbers with several other students. Or, you could become facebook friends (or set up a facebook group for students-only in the class?). And you should always remember to check the blog.
- **LET ME KNOW IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:** You are always welcome to visit me during my office hours. Please try to email me ([puot0002@umn.edu](mailto:puot0002@umn.edu)) indicating when you are coming in and what you want to talk about. 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. You can also post questions/comments on our course blog.
- **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. All assignments must be typed. Late work will receive 1/2 letter grade deduction and will only be accepted up to one week after the due date. **All assigned work must be completed in order to pass the class.**
- **CHECK THE BLOG SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK:** We will be using our course blog a lot in this class. You should check it regularly to read what other students in the course have to say about the readings, topics, and feminism. You should also check it to read any announcements from class (like revised assignments) or to download handouts. I will also occasionally post my notes or reflections on the topic/readings.

- **DON'T PROCRASTINATE:** At the end of every semester, I ask students to give advice to future students. One of the most popular suggestions is: don't procrastinate. The readings, papers, and blog assignments always take more time than you think so don't wait until the last minute to do them.

## **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 and 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	<b>100 points</b>
Paper #2: Position paper	<b>100 points</b>
Paper #3: Position paper	<b>100 points</b>
Paper #4: Revised paper	<b>150 points</b>
General Blog Assignments	<b>230 points</b>
Group Project: Tracking an Issue	<b>120 points</b>
Presentation on Issue	<b>50 points</b>
Attendance and Participation	<b>150 points</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1000 points</b>

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

In the preface to *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks' explains that she wrote the book in order to provide her friends and family with a brief and accessible explanation of what feminism is and why it is important. The goal of this assignment is to write a **3-4 page/double-spaced/11 or 12 point font** paper in which you offer your own clear and compelling definition of feminism and why it is/is not important.

In completing this paper, imagine you are writing it to a family member (your mom or dad, for example) or a close friend in order to answer their question: So what is feminism and why are you studying it? Your emphasis should not be on "converting" your audience to feminism or defending feminism against the many charges leveled against it (although you can defend feminism in your paper), but on communicating your own understanding of feminism and why it is/isn't still important. While you should draw upon other sources (class discussion, readings, etc) to support your points, the goal of this paper is for you to develop your personal definition of feminism and to be able to express that clearly and effectively to others.

Here are some questions to get you started. You should answer at least some of these in your paper, but you do not have to answer all of them.

- What kind of impact has the feminist movement/feminist ideas had on your own life or the lives of others? On local, national, transnational, global culture and/or politics?
- Has the feminist movement been a success?
- Is feminism still necessary? Why? Why is it important to study feminism?
- What is a feminist issue?
- What kinds of issues should feminists be focusing on?
- Who embodies your definition of feminism?
- Would you call yourself a feminist?

This paper is due at the beginning of class on **February 2**.

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

In these 2-3 page papers, you should pick a position on one of the contentious issues related to (1) reproductive rights/choice, (2) work/equality, (3) feminist values/family, (4) Sex Wars: Empowerment, and (5) Prison Industrial Complex/Protection. 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). A more detailed handout on this assignment will be distributed and discussed on 1/28.

<b>DUE:</b>	
<b>Reproductive Rights/Choice</b>	<b>2/11</b>
<b>Work/Equality:</b>	<b>3/2</b>
<b>Feminist Values/Family</b>	<b>4/1</b>
<b>Sex Wars/Empowerment</b>	<b>4/15</b>
<b>PIC/Protection</b>	<b>4/29</b>

**Revision Paper** **15%**

In this 5-7 page paper, you should do a substantial revision of your first paper on feminism and whether or not it is necessary. Taking into consideration my comments on 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: 5/6**

**General Blog Assignments** **23%**

You are required to be an active participant on our course blog. I will distribute and discuss a handout detailing this assignment on Thursday, January 21.

**Group Project: Tracking an Issue** **12%**

In groups of 3 or 4, you are required to track a specific topic related to the larger issues of the class. You and your group members will be responsible for tracking (researching, reading about, following) an issue and then presenting a series of entries in which you document that tracking. I will distribute and discuss a handout detailing this assignment on Thursday, January 21.

**Presentation on Issue** **5%**

You and your group members are required to give a very brief presentation based on your tracking of an issue. This presentation should be 5-10 minutes long and should provide an overview of your issue and some highlights from your tracking experience.

**Attendance and Participation** **15%**

You are required to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions. **More than two unexcused absences 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).

**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 on Washington Avenue.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)**

### **January**

#### **19 Introduction to class**

*Distribute and discuss syllabus. Discuss Feminist Reflection paper assignment.*

### **SOME INTRODUCTIONS**

#### **21 Feminism and Blogging**

We will meet in the Rachel Raimist Feminist Media Center for training on using the course blog. You will be assigned to one of three groups/meeting times. We will not meet as a large group today. See other sheet for meeting time.

*Distribute Blog Assignments handout.*

#### **26 What is feminism? Why is it important?**

##### **READING:**

- hooks, bell. *Feminism is for Everybody*.

**Note:** skim the entire book, but read the introduction and chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 10 and 19 closely and carefully.

#### **28 What is feminist debate?**

##### **READING:**

- Enloe, Cynthia. Excerpt from "Introduction: Being Curious about our Lack of Feminist Curiosity" (CP)
- Jaggar, Alison. Excerpt from *Living with Contradictions*

*Discuss handouts on position papers and blog assignments.*

### **February**

## **ISSUE #1: REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND CHOICE**

#### **2 Reproductive Rights: Some Background**

##### **READING:**

- Sanger, Margaret. "Birth Control—A Parents' Problem or Woman's? from Women and the New Race" (CP)
- PBS website for *The pill*: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/index.html>

FILM: *The Pill*

*Feminist reflection papers are due today.*

#### **4 Fighting for rights, but at what cost?**

READING:

- Roberts, Dorothy. Excerpt from “The Dark Side of Birth Control” (CP)
- Briggs, Laura. Excerpt from “Discourses of ‘Forced Sterilizations’ in Puerto Rico” (CP)
- Sanger, Alex. “Eugenics, Race, and Margaret Sanger Revisited: Reproductive Freedom for All” (CP)?

#### **9 Reproductive Rights: What is choice? Who gets to choose? What choices?**

READING:

- Roberts, Dorothy. Excerpt from “The Meaning of Liberty” (CP)
- Ross, Loretta J. “The Color of Choice” (CP)
- Crews, Allison. “And So I Chose” (CP)
- Sayce, Liz and Rachel Perkins. “They should not breed: Feminism, disability and reproductive rights” (CP)
- “Language: On choice” (WebCT)

#### **11 Continue discussing choice and reproductive rights**

*Reproductive Rights position paper due today.*

## **ISSUE #2: WORK AND EQUALITY**

#### **16 Two proposals for (house) work equality**

READING:

- Friedan, Betty. “The Problem That Has No Name” (CP)
- Syfers, Judy. “Why I Want a Wfe” (CF)
- Cox, Nicole and Silvia Federici. “Wages for Housework: A Perspective on Capital and the Left” (WebCT)
- Flyers on Wages for Housework (WebCT)

#### **18 The Nanny Problem**

READING:

- Ehrenreich, Barbara. Excerpt from “Maid to Order” (CP)
- Flanagan, Caitlin. Excerpt from “How Serfdom Saved the Women’s Movement” (CP)
- Tronto, Joan. “The Nanny Problem” (CP)

#### **23 Whose work? At whose expense is freedom achieved?**

READING:

- PBS website for *Maid in America*: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/maidinamerica/>

FILM: *Maid in America*

**25 Workers as agents not victims**

READING:

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

**March**

**2 Developing a Reproductive Rights Agenda**

*Work position paper due today.*

**4 Developing a Workers' Agenda**

**9 TBA**

**11 Peer Reviews of Feminist Reflection Papers**

**16 Spring Break**

**18 Spring Break**

**ISSUE #3: FEMINIST VALUES AND THE FAMILY**

**23 What are feminist and queer family values, part 1?**

READING:

- Lehr, Valerie. "Social Problems and Family Ideology" (CP)
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation" (CP)

**25 What are feminist and queer family values, part 2?**

READING:

- Selections from *Feminist Family Values* (CP)
- Pardo, Mary. "Mexican American Women Grassroots Community Activists: 'Mothers of East Los Angeles'"

**30 Who (and what) is left out of family values? The devaluing of birth mothers**

READING:

- Cornell, Drucilla. "Adoption and its Progeny: Rethinking Family Law, Gender, and Sexual Difference" (CP)
- Patton, Sandra Lee. "Producing IL/legitimate Subjects: Transracial Adoption and Welfare Reform" (CP)

## April

### I Family Values: Marriage and Beyond

#### READING:

- *The Nation*. Special issue on Marriage: The State of the Union
- Warner, Michael. "Normal and Normaller"
- Olson, Theodore B. "The Conservative Case for Gay Marriage"

*Feminist Values position paper due today*

## ISSUE #4: SEX WARS: EXPLOITATIVE OR EMPOWERING?

### 6 Some Historical Background

#### READING:

- Dworkin, Andrea. "Against the Male Flood: Censorship, Pornography, and Equality" (CP)
- Hollibaugh, Amber and Cherríe Moraga. "What We're Rolling Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism" (CP)
- Rubin, Gayle. Excerpt "Thinking Sex" (CP)
- Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of the Erotic" (CP)
- Henry, Astrid. Excerpt from *Not my Mother's Sister* (CP)

### 8 Sex Workers Unite?

FILM clips: *Live Nude Girls Unite!*

### 13 Sex Wars: Erotic or Pornographic? Exploitative or Empowering?

#### READING:

- Chapkis, Wendy. Excerpt from *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (CP)
- Barton, Bernadette. "Dancing on the Mobius Strip: Challenging the Sex War Paradigm" (CP)

### 15 Sex Wars: Sex Education

#### READING:

- Moran, Jeffrey T. Excerpts from *Teaching Sex: the shaping of adolescence in the 20th century*

*Sex Wars position paper due today*

## ISSUE #5: THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX AND PROTECTION

### 20 The Prison Industrial Complex Defined

#### READING:

- Davis, Angela. Section from *Are Prisons Obsolete?*
- Watch online video from Angela Davis on the Prison Industrial Complex

- Handout on Prison Industrial Complex (from [www.corrections.project.com](http://www.corrections.project.com))

## **22 Women and the Prison Industrial Complex**

### READING:

- Ritchie, Andrea. "Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color" (CP)
- Allard, Patricia. "Crime, Punishment, and Economic Violence" (CP)
- Ogden, Stormy. "Pomo Woman, Ex-Prisoner, Speaks Out" (CP)
- Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. "Gender Violence and the Prison-Industrial Complex" (CP)

## **27 Protection, but at what cost?**

### READING:

- Gottschalk, Marie. Excerpt from *The Prison and the Gallows* (CP)
- Meiners, Erica. "Never Innocent" (CP)
- Hoffman, Jessica. "On Prisons, Borders, Safety and Privilege" (CP)

## **29 Developing a Feminist Values Agenda**

*Prison Industrial Complex position paper due today*

### **May**

## **4 Developing Responses to Sex Wars and Prison Industrial Complex**

## **6 Wrap up of class**

*Final drafts of feminist reflections papers due today*