

Philosophy and Feminism
Phil 225-01
Monmouth College, Fall 2007

MWF 12:00-12:50
Wallace 112
Office hours:
MWF 11:00-11:50; T 11:00-1:00
& by appointment

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Course Description: This course will offer an introduction to some of the broad range of questions and issues in contemporary feminist philosophy. Reading theoretical and literary texts, along with experimental texts that challenge the distinction between theory and literature, the class will focus on how an awareness of the intersections of race, class, sexuality, gender, ability, and ethnicity is vital for disciplinary and interdisciplinary study in feminist philosophy. The question of embodiment and feminist theories of the body will be of central importance to our discussions of gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, and sexuality. We will consider historical understandings of embodiment in Western philosophical discourse for how these understandings are both informed by gender, race, class, sexuality and culture and how they also shape the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality and culture are understood. And we will explore a variety of feminist attempts to understand, resist, and reconstruct these complexities of existence in order to work against systemic oppression; to build alliances among people of different backgrounds and experiences; to make intelligible ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality, and culture shape all of our lives; and to become aware of some of the potentially liberating and joyful transformations wrought by feminist work in philosophy.

Texts (available in the bookstore and on reserve in the library):

Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*

Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman, ed, *Colonize This!*

Sarah Silberstein Swartz and Margie Wolfe, ed, *From Memory to Transformation*

And several photocopied handouts:

Linda Martín Alcoff, selections from *Visible Identities*

Simone de Beauvoir, selections from *The Second Sex*

Dionne Brand, "This Body for Itself," from *Bread Out of Stone*

Nicole Brossard, "Only a Body to Measure Reality By"

Judith Butler, selections from *Gender Trouble*

Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory"

Marilyn Frye, "Oppression"

Rosemary Garland-Thomson, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory"

Luce Irigaray, "Why Cultivate Difference?"

Wendy Komar and Frances Bartkowski, "Lexicon of the Debates," from *Feminist Theory*

Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," "The Transformation of Silence," "The Master's Tools"

María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, “Have We Got a Theory for You”
Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”
Minnie Bruce Pratt, “Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart,” from *Rebellion*
Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”
Alice Walker, “Womanist”

Course Objectives:

1. To become familiar with a variety of conceptual frameworks in feminist philosophy through readings, writing, and class conversations.
2. To study constructions and intersections of gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, ability and sexuality through a special focus on embodiment.
3. To consider institutional or structural oppression and resistance to it through critiques of Western philosophy; through reconceptions of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and culture; through explorations of political and cultural activism; through reflections on body image, dance, food, relationships, popular culture and the media, friendships, and family.
4. To practice careful reading of texts and engaged conversation with each other and the course texts.
5. To become aware of our own positions in the world in relationship to gender, sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, ability, age, and culture.

Course Requirements:

1. Regular attendance and participation (5% of the grade). If a student misses more than three classes for whatever reason, he or she may lose points from the final grade. A student may fail the class after nine absences. This is not intended as an arbitrary requirement. You help to make the class what it is, and it is impossible to have ongoing conversations without regular attendance. We will miss you if you are not here; you deprive yourself of your education if you miss class.
2. Careful and engaged reading. Please come to class with the text we are reading for the day and with the reading done carefully in advance. This will make class much more fun, honest!
3. A short (3-4 page) paper on Susan Bordo and a contemporary advertisement of your choice, worth 15% of the grade.
4. A short (3-4 minute) presentation on your first paper, worth 5% of the grade. “Just Do It” for full credit!
5. A second short paper (2-3 pages), worth 15% of the grade.
6. Two quizzes, worth 15% of the grade each.
7. Reflections for discussion, worth 5% of the grade. On several days, you will be responsible for bringing questions/reflections to class based on the reading as a starting point for discussion. Please **type up** your reflections **to hand in**, and be sure they include specific **references to the text** (with page numbers for course texts and full references for websites you may consult, even for paraphrases), an **explanation** of why you find those passages especially relevant/interesting, and some of **your own answers** or responses to your questions/reflections. Of course, you’ll also need to be in class to present your ideas, so we can have a good conversation about them. These will be graded with a check plus (10/10), check

- (8.5/10), or check minus (7/10). If you hand in the reflections but miss class, you will receive half credit for your work.
8. Attendance at two of the three “F-Word” lectures and a one-page summary of what you learned, worth 5% of the grade (dates and locations to be announced).
 9. A final paper, due during exam week, worth 20% of the grade.

Note: As many of you know, I generally am more concerned with excellent work than with rigid deadlines. Until now, I have been very flexible in accepting late papers. It is becoming more and more apparent that this is not a favor to students, because, instead of using the extra time to do better work, students have used the extra time to finish work for other classes. Once the energy of the class conversations and study of the material passes, the quality of papers tends to decline. Therefore, you will have 7 days’ (not class days, but calendar days, including weekends) grace to use at your discretion over the course of the whole semester, no questions asked. Once you’ve used these days, your grade on assignments will start to fall. I encourage you not to use any of these days. It’s better for your work if you get your assignments in on time!!

For written assignments, I will base my evaluation on the following:

1. A clear demonstration that you understand the text(s) about which you are writing. If you highlight one example, I want to be sure you understand it in its context.
2. A focus for your paper, whether it’s a thesis, a guiding theme, or a set of key questions.
3. Supporting evidence from the texts, with references for all quotations and paraphrases.
4. Careful organization. Have you gone beyond a “book report” to offer your own analysis and insights?
5. Creative and insightful engagement with and reflections on the issues and ideas you raise in your writing.
6. Clear writing on the sentence level. Have you proofread for clarity, complete sentences, spelling, grammar, punctuation, word choice, and so forth?

As you already know, plagiarism is unacceptable. Please give references for all paraphrases, use quotation marks and give references for all direct quotes from books, articles, websites and other sources. If you have writer’s block or are out of time, see me rather than giving in to the temptation to plagiarize. The College takes plagiarism very seriously, and plagiarism could result in failure of the assignment and/or course and even expulsion from the College. Please don’t plagiarize!

Schedule of Assignments:

August

29 introductions and *The F Word*

31 reflections, everyone: What is feminism?

Audre Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury” and “The Transformation of Silence”

September

3 Marilyn Frye, "Oppression"

5 "Lexicon of the Debates"

7 "Lexicon" and Alice Walker, "Womanist"

10 Simone de Beauvoir, from *The Second Sex*

T September 11th: Sam Thompson lecture Alexander Nehamas 7:00 Morgan Room

12 María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You"

14 first quiz

17 Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, iv-xi and "Feminism, Western Culture and the Body" (1-42)

19 "In the Empire of Images" (xiii-xxxviii)

21 chapter 1 "Whose Body is This?" (45-69)

24 chapter 2 "Are Mothers Persons?" (71-97)

26 chapter 3, "Hunger as Ideology" (99-134) and reflections, group 1

28 chapter 6, "Reading the Slender Body" (185-212)

October

1 chapter 7, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender Skepticism" (215-233) and chapter 9 "Postmodern Subjects, Postmodern Bodies, Postmodern Resistance" (277-300)

3 chapter 8, "Material Girl" (245-275)

5 Nicole Brossard, "Only a Body to Measure Reality By" reflections, group 2

8 paper #1 due and presentations (4 minutes each—that's about 2 double-spaced pages)

10 presentations on paper #1

12

15 fall break

17 Dionne Brand, "This Body for Itself"

19 *From Memory to Transformation*

22

24 reflections, group 3

26

29

31 Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality"

November

2 Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart"

5 Pratt, reflections, group 4
7 Judith Butler, from *Gender Trouble*
9 Butler

12 Luce Irigaray, “Why Cultivate Difference?”
14 paper #2 due
16 Linda Martín Alcoff, from *Visible Identities*

19 Rosemary Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability”
21-23 Thanksgiving break

26 Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory” and *Colonize This!*
28 *Colonize This!* reflections, group 5
30 Audre Lorde and *Colonize This!*

December
3 second quiz
5
7 reflections, group 6

10
12 reflections, everyone

Final paper due December 15th at 1:00.