Dreams of a Common Language:
Foundational Concepts,
Texts, and Approaches in the
Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality

Studies in Women, Gender, and Sexuality (WGS) 97
Harvard University, Spring 2013
Tuesdays 1-3 pm, Robinson 107

Prof. Robin Bernstein
rbernst@fas.harvard.edu
Office: Boylston Hall 031
Phone: 617.495.9634
Office Hours: Tuesdays 3-5

TF: Mara Block
mara.block@gmail.com
Office Hours: TBA

This course introduces students to key concepts, texts, and approaches in the study of women, gender, and sexuality. Together, we will develop a shared vocabulary that will prepare you for advanced study in the concentration. We will become adept in using foundational concepts such as essentialism, constructivism, historical “waves” of feminism, intersectionality, borderlands, mestiza consciousness, standpoint theory, situated knowledge, discourse, and queerness. We will learn to distinguish among liberal, material, and cultural feminisms. We will encounter feminist approaches to science. Throughout the semester, we will practice applying these concepts to the analysis of primary texts and to events we see all around us. Finally, this course encourages students to think collaboratively, to co-create productive conversations, to dream, and to integrate these theoretical explorations with a critical analysis of the politics of our own multiple locations.

Texts and Policies

Required Texts (available at the Harvard Coop and on reserve at Lamont Library):
Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza
Alison Bechdel, Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic
Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume I
Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives (third edition)

Course Requirements and Grading:
Attendance and informed, productive participation  30%
10 response papers (1-2 pages; please bring 4 hard copies to class)  30%
Summary of an argument (2 pages, due March 5)  10%
Paper #1 (5-7 pages, due Friday, March 29)  15%
Paper #2 (5-7 pages, due Thursday, May 9)  15%
Course Policies:

Every week (with a few exceptions, as noted in the schedule), you will write a 1-2 page response to the week’s reading. You will bring to class four hard copies: one for yourself, one for the professor, one for the TF, and one for another member of the class. At the beginning of each class, you will swap papers with another student. Please try each week to swap with someone you’ve never swapped with before. The first 15 minutes of every class will be devoted to discussion, in pairs, of your response papers. Each paper is worth 3% of your semester’s grade. The professor and TF will read your responses but will not critique them. Response papers are graded credit/no credit. Late response papers will be accepted only with a dean’s note.

Your most important responsibility in this course is to collaborate with your colleagues to craft productive discussions. You should think not only about your own comments, but about the overall classroom dynamic: who is speaking more, who less? How might you contribute to an atmosphere that enables everyone to participate meaningfully? How do you negotiate disagreements? What silences emerge, and how might we think about those silences? Is silence necessarily a problem? Most importantly, what might a conversation informed by feminist theories look like? How might we collectively create such a conversation?

On a more mundane note: lateness and unexcused absence detract from our conversation and therefore figure negatively toward your participation grade. Laptops are not permitted in our seminar. Needless to say, practices that disrespect your colleagues (for example, interrupting, hogging the floor, launching personal attacks, texting, or answering cell phones) obstruct rather than advance conversation; such practices are therefore unacceptable.

Late papers (other than the response papers) will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each day or partial day overdue. Please note that failure to complete any assignment can lower your final grade in excess of the stated percentage. Collaboration on written assignments is permitted only with prior written consent of the professor.

Professor Bernstein holds office hours from 3-5pm every Tuesday (except when Harvard holds a faculty meeting, in which case Prof. Bernstein holds office hours from 3-4pm). You are welcome to drop in, but students with appointments receive priority. You may reserve time online at <http://wgs.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k53419&pageid=icb.page449095>. If you have class during office hours, please email Professor Bernstein at <rbernst@fas> to make alternative arrangements.

With a student’s consent, meetings during office hours will be “walking meetings.” The professor and student will talk while strolling around campus. Any student may opt for a traditional, “sitting meeting” instead. If you opt for a sitting meeting, you need not offer any explanation, and no questions will be asked. We will, of course, stay inside during inclement weather. For more information about the intellectual and health benefits of walking meetings, see Nilofer Merchant, “Sitting is the Smoking of our Generation,” Harvard Business Review 14 January 2013 <http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2013/01/sitting_is_the_smoking_of_our_generation.html>.

Any student needing academic adjustments or accommodations should present a letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by February 8. All discussions will remain confidential, although AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.
Course Schedule

January 29. Dreams of a Common Language

February 5. Gender Essentialism, Gender Constructivism
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction” to The Second Sex (in McCann and Kim)
Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born a Woman” (in McCann and Kim)
Martin, Emily, “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles,” Signs 16.3 (Spring 1991), 485-501. Access online through JSTOR.
In class: mini-lecture on the racial politics of gender essentialism

February 12. Borderlands and Mestiza Consciousness
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza

February 19. A Key Historical Model: “Waves” of Feminism
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
Charlotte Krolokke, “Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrrls”
Linda Nicholson, “Feminism in ‘Waves’: Useful Metaphor or Not?” (in McCann and Kim)
Becky Thompson, “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism” (in McCann and Kim)
Beverly Guy-Sheftall, “Response from a ‘Second Waver’ To Kimberly Springer’s ‘Third Wave Black Feminism?”” Signs Vol. 27 No. 4 (Summer 2002), pp. 1091-1094 (Access online through JSTOR)

THURSDAY, February 21: RECOMMENDED WGS EVENT: “Pre-Packaged Rebellion: Langston Hughes, Federico Garcia Lorca, and the Economies of Queer Martyrdom,” a talk by Robert Reid-Pharr, City University of New York. 5:00 - 7:00 pm Barker Center, room TBA.

February 26. A Foundational Text of Second-Wave Feminism: This Bridge Called My Back
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981) (excerpts)
Norma Alarcón, “The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism”

Assignment for article summary distributed.

March 5. Intersectionality
NO RESPONSE PAPERS: two-page summary of Crenshaw’s argument (1 hard copy) due in class
This day only: please bring a laptop to class (loaners are available; please contact the TF if you would like to use one)
McCann and Kim, “Introduction” to Section II: “Theorizing Intersecting Identities,” pp. 147-158 (in McCann and Kim)
June Jordan, “Report from the Bahamas” (in McCann and Kim)
Lila Abu-Lughod, “Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies” (in McCann and Kim)
Assignment for Paper #1 distributed

March 12. Standpoint Theory and Situated Knowledges
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
McCann and Kim, “Introduction” to Section II, “Theorizing Intersecting Identities” (in McCann and Kim)
Nancy C. M. Hartsock, “The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism” (in McCann and Kim)
Uma Narayan, “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist” (in McCann and Kim)
Patricia Hill Collins, “Defining Black Feminist Thought” (in McCann and Kim)
Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” (in McCann and Kim)
In class: mini-lecture on liberal, material, and cultural feminism

March 19. NO CLASS! SPRING BREAK!

March 26. Applying Foundational Feminist Concepts to a Text
NO RESPONSE PAPER DUE TODAY
Alison Bechdel, Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic
In-class exercise: How to Read Foucault
FRIDAY, March 29, 3pm: Paper #1 (5-7 pages) due to Professor Bernstein’s mailbox in WGS, Boylston Hall ground floor.

April 2. Discourse, Sexuality, and Power
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
Michel Foucault. The History of Sexuality Volume I
RECOMMENDED: Sandra Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” (in McCann and Kim)

April 9. Thinking Sex, Using the Erotic
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”

Please note: Gayle Rubin is scheduled to become the second Matthiessen Visiting Professor of Gender and Sexuality at Harvard University and to teach WGS courses in the 2013-2014 academic year.


April 16. Queer Nation, Queer Theory
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
Queer Nation Manifestos (http://www.jessanderson.org/doc/qnation.html)
Suzanna Danuta Walters, “From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism and the Lesbian Menace (Or, Why Can’t a Woman be More Like a Fag?)” (in McCann and Kim)

April 23. Feminist Science
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
Sarah R. Richardson, “Sexing the X: How the X Became the ’Female Chromosome’”
Assignment for Paper #2 distributed

April 30. Globalization and Feminism
1-2 page response paper due (bring four hard copies to class)
Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles” (in McCann and Kim)
*In class: worksheets from first day of class will be returned.*

**THURSDAY, May 9, 3pm: Paper #2 (5-7 pages) due to Professor Bernstein’s mailbox in WGS, Boylston Hall ground floor.**

**Enjoy your summer!**