Introduction to Feminisms
SC 225; EN 125; HS 148; PS 125
Fall 2008; Fulton Hall 230; T/TH 4:30
Professor Abigail Brooks
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Office Hours: T/TH 3-4 PM and By Appointment

Course Overview: Content

This course provides a historical and contemporary overview of several primary strands of feminism (as both philosophy and social movement) in the United States. First and second wave feminisms (liberal, radical and socialist) are highlighted, as is the critique and de-centering of mainstream feminisms, and the innovation of new difference-sensitive and multicultural feminisms, by feminists of color. Current discussions and debates about the state of feminism/s in the United States today, and active manifestations of the third wave of feminism, will be illuminated. Key feminist concepts, theorizations, and themes that will be covered include: women’s lived experiences as knowledge, women’s bodily and subjugated knowledge, consciousness-raising and the personal is political, the social construction of gender and the biological essentialist critique, and the reflexive intersections of race, class and gender.

While you will be introduced to the evolution and history of American feminisms, and to a range of feminist theoretical, intellectual, and conceptual contributions, this course centers on the contemporary reality of women’s everyday lives, their struggles and triumphs, and the complex, diverse, and increasingly interconnected issues and challenges that women are facing across the globe. We will study and analyze topics such as women and work, balancing work and family, constructions of motherhood, women’s health, the feminization of poverty, women’s body image, violence against women, media images of women and women’s representation in politics and governmental policy from local, national, and transnational perspectives. How do childcare and parental leave policies in the United States compare with policies in Europe, Asia, and Latin America? How does women’s representation in government in Africa compare with Europe and the United States? What about women’s reproductive rights and access to health care in the United States when compared with other nation states? What are the prevalent threats of violence women face here in the United States and how are they reflective of, and different from, the manifestations of violence women face in war-torn nations, in peaceful nations, in multiple and diverse locations across the world? As we examine the contemporary lives and issues women are confronting in a variety of national, international, and global contexts we will also become more aware of the ways in which these issues are interlinked. A lack of mother-friendly work environments, affordable, quality childcare, and paid maternity leave policies in the United States means that American women increasingly rely on women from other nation states to care for their children (these women are often leaving children of their own back in their home countries)—women are increasingly leaving war torn and economically struggling nation
states to come care for more privileged women’s children as a means to support their own families back home. An increasingly unfriendly environment for reproductive rights in the United States affects not only American women, but the ways in which American funds are allocated and directed towards women’s health, and AIDS prevention abroad. United States’ backed World Bank and World Trade Organization structural adjustment and privatization policies have resulted in the scaling back of governmentally-provided social services in a multitude of nation states across the globe, and have disproportionately affected women. As nation states slide deeper into poverty, and as the markets of nation states are opened up to free flows of capital and foreign investment via World Bank and WTO mandates, young women and girls become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and are sold into the global sex trade at alarming rates.

Finally, as we are exposed the profound range of inequalities, struggles, and injustices that women currently face in multiple contexts, we also will learn about, and be humbled by, the rich variety and diversity of women’s strength and activism around the world—women’s involvement in social protests and women’s movements for social change. How does the level, frequency, and nature of women’s activism outside the United States compare with what women are doing here in America?

Course Overview: Format

This course consists of an innovative and unique format—one that combines lecture and intensive discussion. Tuesdays (4:30-5:45) will consist of lectures given by me (and occasionally lectures and/or activities run by an outside guest); documentary film viewings; and film screenings with the filmmaker and additional commentators present. There will be several instances throughout the semester when Tuesday’s class will be held later in the evening—in the case of, for example, an outside speaker or a film screening. Attending Tuesday’s class, whether at the usual time, or later in the evening, is absolutely essential, will be rigorously recorded, and contributes significantly to your grade.

Thursdays (4:30-6:15) consist of discussion group sessions. These discussion groups draw from the feminist tenet of collaborative learning—learning that happens through the mutual and respectful sharing of ideas, thoughts, perspectives, and personal, lived experiences. Discussion groups are led by teams of student teachers. Student teachers (TAs) have taken this class previously, and have been selected for their role through a rigorous screening process. (TAs also participate in an advanced teaching seminar with me.) As discussion group participants, you will be expected to read the assigned materials for each week thoroughly, to clearly identify the authors’ principle arguments, and to analyze and critique these arguments in the context of collaborative discussion. You will be also encouraged to share your own lived experiences of gender with one another, and to reflect on the different ways that your own lived experiences reflect and/or contradict the concepts and theorizations projected through the course readings. It is a goal of the discussion groups that through the process of reflexive and respectful interchange of ideas and experiences, group participants will develop a heightened consciousness of gender-related issues, on both the individual and the collective level.
Ideally, your discussion groups will echo the feminist consciousness-raising model of respectful listening and exchange of experiences and ideas—an exchange that involves the exciting potential of empowerment and social action through the recognition of common experiences (and the linkages between these experiences and larger social, economic, and political structures of power—*the personal is political*), but also a keen awareness, respect, and appreciation for a diversity of lived experiences, worldviews, and perspectives.

*Attendance and active participation in your discussion group is absolutely essential, will be rigorously recorded, and contributes significantly to your grade. You will be expected to come to each discussion group meeting with the readings thoroughly completed, ready to engage in discussion in a respectful and thoughtful manner.*
Course Requirements and Evaluative Criteria

Participation and Attendance (35%)

You are absolutely expected and required to attend all classes—both the weekly lectures (Tuesdays 4:30-5:45) and the weekly discussion groups (Thursdays at 4:30-6:15). The discussion groups offer an innovative opportunity for interactive learning, not one that you will find in most other courses. Completing the assigned course readings thoroughly, and being prepared to discuss the readings and topics at hand in a thoughtful, engaged, and respectful manner, is absolutely essential, and will contribute to the construction, development, and evolution of a discussion-conducive environment. Indeed, while your attendance will be rigorously recorded at both the weekly lecture and discussion sessions, your participation (i.e. having completed the readings, and being engaged, attentive, respectful, and participatory throughout discussion) forms a key component of your course grade.

Weekly Papers (35%)

You will write a weekly response paper that draws from the course readings, and that can also potentially incorporate course films, guest speakers, lectures, and discussions. You are also encouraged to draw from materials outside of the course assignments—current events, newspaper and magazine articles, television and internet, movies, and any other relevant cultural, political, social phenomena past or present, local, national, or global. Your weekly response papers must be a minimum of 3 pages in length and draw from a minimum of 3 assigned readings. (Discussion of a course film and/or course speaker can be substituted for 1 reading only; in other words, you can choose to discuss 2 readings, plus a film or outside speaker. Hopefully, however, in most instances you will discuss the film and/or speaker in addition to 3—or more!—readings.) Papers must be double spaced, typed and stapled, and handed in on Thursday at your discussion session. Do not email your paper, unless, under exceptional circumstances, your TA gives you permission to do so. Late papers will be graded down one point per day.

Your papers will be read, evaluated, graded, and commented on by your TAs. Papers will be graded on a 10 point scale based upon the following criteria:

1. **Reading Completion and Comprehension.** You must demonstrate clearly, through your papers, that you have thoroughly completed and digested the readings. You must also demonstrate a solid grasp and understanding of the readings. You must discuss three (or more) readings in each of your papers. (While some readings can be discussed more thoroughly than others, it is imperative that your papers make clear you have done the readings, again, with a minimum of explicit discussion of three (or more) of the
assigned readings.) * You may substitute the discussion of one reading only with
discussion of a course film and/or outside speaker—in other words, should you chose to
discuss a course speaker or film, you must also include discussion of at least 2
(preferably more) course readings.

2. **Critical Analysis and Reflection.** You must engage in intelligent reflection, discussion,
critique, and analysis of the readings—you should thoughtfully analyze, critique, and
reflect on, the authors’ primary arguments, the theories and concepts presented, and the
experiences of women that are illuminated in the readings. Such analysis, critique, and
reflection can include and be strengthened by, the incorporation of your personal views,
perspectives, and lived experiences. The discussion of course films, course speakers,
current events, additional readings, film, television, and/or any other aspects of culture
(both past and present, local, national, and global), can also be a useful contributing
aspect to critique and analysis. Finally, the demonstration of a cumulative understanding
of previous course readings, and drawing from previous readings and units of the course,
is strongly encouraged, and can be applied as a useful tool for comparison and critical
analysis.

3. **Quality of Writing and Clear Communication of Ideas: Flow, Cohesion, and
Organization.** Are you communicating ideas, critiques, analyses, opinions and
reflections clearly? Are your points presented in a cohesive and organized fashion? Does
your writing read easily and flow well?

**Take Home Mid-Term Essay Exam (30%)**

There will be a take home exam consisting of essay questions related to course readings, topics,
lectures, discussions, speakers, and films. It will be read, evaluated, and graded by me. This
essay exam will be due on **Thursday, October 23rd**. Please note that you will not have to write
a weekly response paper this week.
Required Texts

*Be sure to purchase the fourth edition.

*Be sure to purchase the Revised and Updated 2006 edition.

On-Line Course Reserves Through O’Neill Library (abbreviated on the syllabus as CR.) To access the on-line course reserves, go to the library home page and click on resources to bring up the Course Reserves Catalogue. All of the articles are filed under my name, but it will be easier to find each reading if you search by author, or by title. *Please also note that if an article is not in the electronic course reserves list, it will be available at the Course Reserves Desk at O’Neill Library in hard copy form.

Highly Recommended Texts

*Be sure to purchase the 2005 edition.

* I highly recommend purchasing this text—it is a fabulous and fundamental reference book on women’s health and on a range of women’s issues that you will likely continue to find useful, helpful, and informative throughout your lives.

Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism. 2002. Edited by Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman.


* We will be drawing on a number of chapters from each of these two excellent texts throughout the semester—if you can afford to, purchasing them is highly recommended. However, some chapters will be available through on line course reserves, and the full texts will also be on hard copy reserve through the Reserves Desk at O’Neill Library.

• All texts are available for purchase at the Boston College Bookstore and on reserve at the O’Neill Library.
Course Schedule

September 2

I. Introduction to Feminisms and to Women’s Studies: Historical and Contemporary Manifestations

Why study women? What is feminism in its many different shapes and forms—as epistemology, as scholarship, as social movement, and as practice? How is feminism defined and lived across, between, and among diverse classes, races, and cultures?

- Basic Overview of Course Content and Themes; Course Expectations and Format Reviewed; Introduction of Teaching Assistant Teams and Discussion Sections

Required Reading:
bh, Bell. 2000. “Introduction, Come Closer to Feminism,” in Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics. CR.
Quindlen, Anna. 2007 [2003]. “Still Needing the F Word.” CR.
Aronson, Pamela. 2003. “Feminists or ‘Postfeminists?’: Young Women’s Attitudes towards Feminism and Gender Relations.” CR.
Lorde, Audre. 2007 [1984]. “Poetry is not a Luxury.” CR.

Recommended Reading:
Baumgardner, Jennifer and Amy Richards. 2000. “The Dinner Party” (chapter 1, pp. 11-49); “What is Feminism” (chapter 2, pp. 50-86) in Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future. CR.
2. Introduction to Feminisms and to Women's Studies
Liberal, Radical and Socialist Feminisms in Historical and Contemporary Societal and Cultural Contexts

The Personal is Political: Consciousness-Raising
Gender as Socially Constructed; Gender Socialization
Women’s Ways of Knowing; Women’s Lived Experience as Knowledge

Focusing in on Liberal Feminism: The Personal is Political (Consciousness-Raising) and Gender as Socially Constructed

Required Reading:
Woolf, Virginia. 1929. “A Room of One’s Own.” CR.
Inman, Mary. Unpublished Material. “How Different are Men and Women?” CR.
Ljeoma, A. 2002. “Because You’re A Girl,” in Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism. CR.
Richardson, Laurel. 1987. “Gender Stereotyping in the English Language.” CR.
Gilman, Susan Jane. 2008 [2000]. “Klaus Barbie, and Other Dolls I’d Like to See.” CR.

You may pick either the following West and Zimmerman piece (Doing Gender) or the Judith Lorber piece (Believing is Seeing) to read; further, you can skim whichever piece you choose. Reading one thoroughly, or both thoroughly, is fantastic but not required.


Pick one (or more) of the following case studies on gender construction to read:
Martin, Emily. 1991. “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles.” CR.
Recommended Reading:

Nelson, Mariah Burton. 2007 [1994]. “Boys will be Boys and Girls will not.” CR.
Sadker, David. 2008 [2006]. “An Educator’s Primer on the Gender War.” CR.

September 16

3. Introduction to Feminisms and to Women’s Studies
Liberal, Radical and Socialist Feminisms in Historical and Contemporary Societal and Cultural Contexts
   The Personal is Political: Consciousness-Raising
   Gender as Socially Constructed
   Women’s Ways of Knowing; Women’s Bodily Knowledge; Women’s Lived Experience as Knowledge

Focusing in on: Radical and Socialist Feminisms: The Personal is Political (Consciousness-Raising) and Women’s Ways of Knowing (Women’s Lived Experience as Knowledge)

Required Reading:

Gilligan, Carol. 1982. “In a Different Voice.” CR.
Daly, Mary. 1971. “After the Death of God the Father: Women’s Liberation and the Transformation of Christian Consciousness.” CR.

Starhawk. 2007 [1979]. “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture.” CR.
Recommended Reading:

Millet, Kate. 1970. “Sexual Politics.” CR.

September 23

4. Introduction to Feminisms and to Women’s Studies
Feminisms Problematized, Critiqued, and Revised
Feminist Scholars and Activists of Color Illuminate the Limits, Shortcomings, and Blind Spots—the Racism and Classism—Inherent in Mainstream Feminisms.

- New Feminisms and Feminist Concepts Constructed and Identified
- Unearthing Women’s Subjugated Knowledges
- Acknowledging Differences Among and Between Women: Challenging the Unified Category Woman
- Highlighting the Potential for Dialogue, Alliances, Community, and Social Change Forged Among and Between Women with Diverse Experiences and Standpoints

Required Reading:
Collins, Patricia Hill. 2007 [1993]. “Towards a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Oppression.” CR.
Yamato, Gloria. 2007 [1991]. “Something About the Subject makes it Hard to Name.” CR.
McIntosh, Peggy. 2007. [1988]. “White Privilege and Male Privilege.” CR.
Hooks, bell. 2000. “Race and Gender,” in Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics. CR.
Truth, Sojourner. 1851. “Ain’t I a Woman?” CR.
Tzintzun, Christina. 2002. “Colonize This!,” in Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism. CR.
Hurdis, Rebecca. 2002. “Heartbroken: Women of Color Feminism and the Third Wave,” in Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism. CR.
Darraj, Susan Muaddi. 2002. “It’s not an Oxymoron: The Search for an Arab Feminism,” in Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism. CR.

Recommended Reading (You are, however, required to read one or more readings from this list that are of particular interest to you):


September 30

Women, Politics, and Economics: Balancing Work and Family
United States and Europe
Required Reading:
National Committee for Pay Equity. 2008 [2006]. “Questions and Answers on Pay Equity.” CR.
Albelda, Randy. 2008 [2006]. “New Welfare Regime, Same Single Mother Poverty Problems.” CR.
Mitchell, Tonya. 2008 [2003]. “If I Survive, it will be Despite Welfare Reform.” CR.
Bravo, Ellen. 2008 [2006]. “Sexual Harassment.” CR.

Recommended Reading:

Coltrane, Scott. 2007. “Fathering: Paradoxes, Contradictions, and Dilemmas.” CR.
Bravo, Ellen, Gloria Santa Anna and Linda Meric. 2008 [2006]. “9to5: Organizing Low-Wage Women.” CR.
Marchevsky, Alejandra and Jeanne Theoharis. 2009. [2006]. “The End of Welfare as we Know it: An Overview of the PRWORA.” CR.
Steil, Janice M. 1995. “Supermoms and Second Shifts: Marital Inequality in the 1990s.” CR.

October 7

Women, Politics, and Economics: Work and Family
Global Perspectives

October 14

Women, Health, and Reproduction: Healthcare, Reproductive Rights, Childbirth, and Sexual Education

Required Documentary Film Screening and Discussion with the Director
The Business of Being Born, directed by Abby Epstein
*Time and located to be announced

Required Reading:
Boston Women’s Health Collective. The Politics of Women’s Health in the US. CR.
Rivera, Lourdes. 2008. “Uninsured, Exposed, and at Risk—But not Powerless.” CR.
Luna, Stella. 2002. “HIV and me: The Chicana Version,” in Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism. CR.
Block, Jennifer. 2007. “Arranged Birth,” in Pushed: The Painful Truth about Childbirth and Modern Maternity Care. CR.
Willis, Ellen. 2008 [1981]. “Abortion: Is a Woman a Person?” CR.
Males, Mike. 2008 [2005]. “Parental Consent Laws: Are they a ‘Reasonable Compromise’?” CR.
Flavin, Jeanne. 2009. “Contemporary Challenges to Black Women’s Reproductive Rights.” CR.
Recommended Readings:
Roberts, Dorothy E. “The Future of Reproductive Choice for Poor Women and Women of Color.” CR.

October 21

*Women and Sexualities*
*In class Guest Speaker: Robyn Ochs: “Identity and the Sexuality Spectrum.”*

Required Reading:


Recommended Readings:


October 28

Women and Aesthetics of the Body: Beauty and Body Image

Documentary Film Viewing (in class) of Never Perfect directed by Regina Park

Required Reading:


**Recommended Readings:**


Additional Recommended Readings of Interest on Cosmetic Surgery:
(Please note that these readings are all on reserve at O’Neill Library; however they are mostly on hard copy reserve verses electronic.)

November 4

Cultures of Sexual Violence Against Women: Contemporary and Historical Manifestations: United States

Required Reading:
Scully, Diana and Joseph Marolla. 2007 [1985]. “Riding the Bull at Gilley’s:’ Convicted Rapists Describe the Rewards of Rape.” CR.

Recommended:

November 11

*Cultures of Sexual Violence Against Women: International and Global Perspectives: Globalization, Militarism, and War.*

Documentary Film Viewing (In class) of My Home, Your War directed by Kylie Grey

Required Reading:
November 18

Women in the Public Eye: Growing Empowerment and Progress on the One Hand, Growing Exploitation and Stubborn Barriers on the Other

Images of Women and Female Representation at Home and Abroad—Media Technology, Power, and Politics.

Required Readings:
Levy, Ariel. 2005. “Introduction” and “Chapter 1, Raunch Culture” (pp. 1-45), “Chapter 3: Female Chauvinist Pigs,” (89-117), and “Conclusion” and “Afterward,” (pp. 197-212) in Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture. CR.

NO LECTURE OR DISCUSSION SESSION, NOVEMBER 25 AND 27, DUE TO THANKSGIVING BREAK
December 2 (Last Lecture Day; Last Discussion Group Meeting is Thursday, December 4)

Feminisms Present and Future:
Progress and Set Backs, Challenges and Victories, in Women’s On-Going Fight for Equality, Justice, Power, Representation and Rights

Documentary Film to be shown (in class):
The Shape of Water by Kum Kum Bhavnani

Required Reading: