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WGS100 – Introduction to Gender & Sexuality Studies

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College: CUNY Hunter College, Spring 2024
Office Hours: Wed 2:30–3:30 / Sat 5:00-6:00 in West Building 1739

Course Description

Feminism interrogates the ways that gender and sexuality shape our society as a whole. Unsurprisingly, educational institutions and the student-teacher relationship in specific have been thoughtfully examined by feminist thinkers. These reflections have given rise to insightful critiques of the gendered assumptions and hierarchies often built into the classroom environment and creative proposals for alternative ways of learning together. The methods of feminist pedagogy embody these techniques, showing that freer, more equal, and more joyous forms of education will better empower students and teachers to produce knowledge, develop personally, and contribute to social change.

But realizing these goals together will not be easy. Feminist pedagogy requires that both teacher and student challenge themselves to build a space of trust, respect, and critical reflection. Bringing our lives into the classroom, listening to others who we may disagree with, and carefully considering the truth of our feelings and beliefs are all skills that require practice and courage. Together, we will focus on developing these skills together through the construction of a feminist classroom.

Our course will be divided into three sections.

- In the first, we explore the methods of feminism in relation to our collective activity of learning together. We will study consciousness raising, collaborative knowledge production, social construction, deconstructive techniques, critical theories of oppression and injustice, intersectional approaches, and structural analysis, examining how each can be applied to ourselves, the world around us, and the classroom we constitute.

I would like to thank the Hunter WGS Faculty, for making their syllabi available for consultation. In particular, this syllabus is inspired by those of Professors Abdullah-Matta, Allison, Azari, Cartei, De Lorenzo, Iscan, Mendelsohn, Mitchell, Ngeo, Polyak.

- In the second section, we investigate a selection of topics that we collaboratively choose together. This will be your opportunity to direct the classroom, in dialogue with each other and me, to explore ideas that you find exciting. See next page for more information.
- In the final class, we wind down with extra credit presentations and some time to reflect on our journey over the semester.

Finally, I want to thank you all ahead of time for going on this journey with me. I will be learning about and exploring feminist methods with you, and your trust, patience, and commitment will empower me to grow as a teacher. In return, I hope that you will find our class exciting, important, and personally meaningful. I am honored to lay the foundation for us to build on and look forward to the journey.

Teaching Philosophy

Our course will include three main components: Readings to be done before class, in class discussions, and assignments based on classroom material. Each of these serves many functions within the context of the university as a whole, but as critical learners we ought to reflect on their relation to the collaborative process of education we will be engaged in.

What is the Purpose of Assigned Readings? First, to expose ourselves to a selection of feminist perspectives on the world. As students, we will study and reflect on both the main ideas and the way of approaching feminist thought that each reading exemplifies, benefiting from while being critical of the experience/training, differential access to resources, and unique worldviews of the authors we encounter. But our readings will serve a number of additional purposes. Through reading, we practice the skill of listening and exploring other people's ideas—ideas which we may find difficult or uncomfortable. At the same time, the readings will provide a touchstone which is common to each of us while not being personal to any of us, so that through discussing them we can practice developing shared rather than individual forms of knowledge. Finally, by studying the readings as creative interpretations of the world, we will experience and enact our unique ability as free beings to respond to the world as meaningful through the prism of our ability to think and act for our own reasons—reasons that we can reflect on together—an activity which expresses a fundamental aspect of our humanity.

What is the Purpose of the Classroom? Classroom discussions will provide a space for us to get to know each other, laying the foundation for honest and critical reflection and providing an opportunity for building relationships that have value beyond the immediate context of the classroom (e.g friendships, collaborations, comradeship, partnership, networking, shared community, etc.). Our shared respect and trust will, in turn, enable us to explore the material in a variety of different modalities with different methods and results (objective knowledge, catharsis, recognition, personal desire, self-understanding, moral orientation, mutual accountability, truth-building, etc.). More deeply, the challenging practice of community constitutes the earth on which the garden of justice struggles to bloom, as we experience the joy of our mutual presence and see the possibility of social transformation that is indicated by our collaboration as an

example of non-oppressive but non-utopian social relations. If we engage with each other in a genuine fashion, our practice of learning together will demonstrate the possibility of a world which is not bloodied by the fist of injustice by actualizing a free relation to each other.

What is the Purpose of Assignments? To challenge students to objectify the process of learning in which they have participated in a product or performance that expresses their creative appropriation of the ways of making sense of the world (concepts) that they have discovered in the class. An assignment should hold the student accountable in a way that supports their making the knowledge their own by internalizing and applying it. In this process, the ideas of the class are developed insofar as they are thought through by a unique person with a unique perspective. At the same time, the process of engaging with ideas in a way that enables a student to apply and develop them involves a transformation of the learner themself. And finally, insofar as the teacher is also a student, the student's learning is also an object for the teacher as a part of their own learning about both the subject matter of the class and the practice of teaching itself.

Course Materials

We will be using a google drive with files accessible directly or via the masterdoc. All course materials are provided electronically.

Course Topics

We will collaboratively choose topics for four of the course weeks. You may find a list of possible topics and readings here. I will provide more information about the selection process in class. Here is just the list of possible topics:

Electronics Policy. To facilitate an engaged classroom environment, students are prohibited from using electronic devices (laptops, phones, etc.) in class. On the first violation of this policy, students will be given a warning. For each violation after the warning, the student's participation grade will drop one letter. If you have a specific need to use electronic devices for education purposes, please contact me directly (over email or in person after class) or reach out to the Hunter College Office of Accessibility and have them send me a letter.

Course Grading

- Participation (30%)
- Build the Curriculum (30%)
- Make a Movement (30%)
- Museum Trip (10%)

Course Assignments

Participation / Journal Responses. Most every week will include an in-class writing portion, where you will respond to a question about the readings and material in a provided blue book journal. You must complete at least nine responses to obtain full credit and will receive 2% extra credit on your final grade for every additional response.

> I strongly encourage you to write notes and annotate while you read, and you may consult these notes while you journal. You can find tips for taking notes in the Reading Annotations Guide.

In Class Projects. The majority of your grade will be determined by three in class hand-written projects which capstone the three main sections of the course. You will work with each other to complete these projects as a group but individually complete your own submission on paper which I will provide you. In all cases, you will receive 10% of extra credit on your final grade if you enact your project, even in a partial form. You can find additional guidelines, a rubric, and links to examples on the In Class Projects Guide.

> **Missed Projects** must be made up within 2 weeks during my office hours or a time we schedule independently. Please reach out to me to confirm a make up time.

Extra Credit: You may complete the following extra credit assignment to receive one-half letter grade extra credit on your final grade (e.g. B to B+). To receive credit, your response must engage with at least one author or idea from the course. You may submit the extra credit assignment at any time before the last day of class (but not during the readings or exam period).

- **Outrageous Act**. Perform an act that defies sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ageist, ableist, or racist norms. This may include a (safe and legal) change in your individual behavior, a collective action, a public performance, etc. Afterwards, you must write a 250w reflection on what motivated your act, how it disrupted oppressive norms, how it felt to do so, and any ways that your action has transformed how you think / plan to engage with yourself or the world going forward.

Further Information

Gender Pronouns and Names: The Department of Women and Gender Studies affirms all forms of gender expression and identity. If you prefer to be called a different name than what is on the class roster, please let me know. Feel free to correct me and one another on your names, pronunciation, and gender pronouns, and let me know if there are changes. If you would like to talk more about gender pronouns please email me or come to my office hours.

Learning Objectives. By the end of the course students will be able to:

1. Identify the major social forces that shape disenfranchised people's lives (including but not limited to that of women) in specific historical and social locations

2. Describe how gender, race, class, sexuality, and other dimension of identity intersect in historical, social and economic contexts.
3. Define core concepts (and basic terms) in gender and sexuality studies and feminist theory such as consciousness raising, collaborative knowledge production, social construction, deconstructive techniques, critical theories of oppression and injustice, intersectional approaches, and structural analysis.
4. Engage with current debates in the field of Gender and Sexuality Studies
5. Apply core concepts and theories of Gender and Sexuality Studies to life experiences and historical events, and processes.
6. Communicate arguments/positions about gender, race, class & sexuality in writing & speech.

Academic Integrity Statement. Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College's students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 /or VRS (646) 755-3129.

Hunter College Policy on Sexual Misconduct. In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College. Sexual Violence: Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444). All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct: Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123.

Course Schedule

Materials Folder *Note: The texts for each week are listed in order of importance.*

Week 1 – Introductions

- Assigned:
  - Read the syllabus.
- Recommended:
  - Davis 1981, "Education and Liberation: Black Women's Perspective" in *Women Race and Class*, pg 99-109.
  - Rich 1977, "Claiming an Education" in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose* 1966-1978, pg 231-5.

Week 2 – Liberation, Domination, and Education

We will begin by critically reflecting on the practice of learning. We will investigate the ways in which traditional educational models can perpetuate gendered forms of hierarchy and injustice and explore feminist proposals for reshaping the classroom. At the same time, we will begin building collective trust by getting to know each other and sharing about ourselves. Key concepts: pedagogy, banking education, student-teacher / teacher-student, freedom/domination.

- Assigned:
  - hooks 1994, "Engaged Pedagogy" in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, pg 13-22.
- Recommended:
  - Freire 1970, "The Banking Concept of Education," and "Education as a Practice of Freedom" in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pg 71-92.
  - Shrewsbury 1997, "What is Feminist Pedagogy?" in *Women's Studies Quarterly* Vol. 25, No. 1/2.

Week 3 – Learning about Ourselves Together

To move beyond the traditional model of education, we need to understand how we can build knowledge together. Each of us brings a unique perspective to the classroom, informed by our individual lives and experiences, which are themselves shaped by our different social positions. Together, we will explore how this positionality shapes what we can know. Key concepts: positionality, epistemology, dialogue, collective understanding.

- Assigned:
  - Takacs 2002, "Positionality, Epistemology, and Social Justice in the Classroom" in *Social Justice* Vol. 29, No. 4, pg 168-194.
- Recommended:
  - Longino 2002, "Socializing Knowledge" in *The Fate of Knowledge*, pg 124-144.

Week 4 – Community in the Classroom

To build a critical learning community we must speak honestly about our thoughts and experiences. We can only truly share ourselves and our perspectives when we trust that others will respond with care and respect. At the same time, we cannot demand that others agree with or affirm our perspectives. This week we study why we must and how we can confront these challenges through building the trust and structure necessary for critical dialogue.

- Assigned:
    - Lorde 1978, "The Transformation of Silence into Language Speech and Action" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, pg 40-44.
- Recommended:
    - Lugones 2003, "On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism" in *Pilgrimages / Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, pg 65-75.

Week 5 – Building the Curriculum

Having completed the first unit on feminist pedagogy you will develop a program for educating a specific group (e.g. a group of students, adults, old people, workers, neighbors, people with a shared interest or hobby, etc.) on a specific topic from our course. Your curriculum should demonstrate knowledge of the topic as well as a considerate employment of feminist pedagogical techniques. Make sure to directly explain what feminist pedagogy looks like and how your syllabus embodies it.

- None

Week 6 – The Construction of Gender

As we understand who we are, we must ask how we can make ourselves and our world better. A foundational claim of feminist thought maintains that gender is socially constructed and can therefore be transformed to be more just. We will explore these ideas, encapsulated in Simone de Beauvior's famous claim that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Keywords: social construction, sex/gender, practice, social change.

- Assigned:
    - Beauvoir 1949, "Introduction" and "Childhood" in *The Second Sex*, pg 3-6, 12-17, 279-83.
    - Lorber 1994, "Night to His Day: The Social Construction of Gender" in *Paradoxes of Gender*, pg 13-19, 22-27, 30-36.
- Recommended:
    - Davis 1981, "Woman Suffrage at the Turn of the Century: The Rising Influence of Racism" in *Women Race and Class*, pg 110-126.
    - Haslanger 2012, Future Races, Future Genders" in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, pg 248-272.

Week 7 – The Many Faces of Injustice

If we collectively construct social identities and even the body itself, then we can transform them together. Feminists have done extraordinary work in theorizing the different ways that society can go wrong and what we can do about them, carefully investigating what it means to benefit from or be subordinated within gendered social systems. Key concepts: power, symbolic/material injustice, oppression, domination, alienation, inequality.

- Assigned:
    - Frye 1983, "Oppression" in *Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* pg 1-16.
- Recommended:
    - Young 1990, "The Five Faces of Oppression" in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* pg 39-65.
    - Davis 1981, "The Anti-Slavery Movement and the Birth of Women's Rights" and "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working Class Perspective" in *Women Race and Class*, pg 30-45, 222-244.
    - McIntosh 1989, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, pg 188-192.

Week 8 – Intersectionality and Experience

Though early forms of feminism tended to homogenize women's experience, critiques from working class and women of color pierced through the veil of sameness and uncovered the intersectionality of social categories like gender, race, age, and class (and many more), showing that each unique mixture creates a distinct terrain for experience and social struggle. Key words: intersectionality, identity, experience, coalitionism.

- Assigned:
    - Crenshaw 2003, "Traffic at the Crossroads: Multiple Oppressions" in *Sisterhood is Forever: The Women's Anthology for a New Millennium* pg 43-57.
- Recommended:
    - Hill Collins 2019, "Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry" in *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* pg 24-29, 43-50.
    - Davis 1981, "Class and Race in the Early Women's Rights Campaign" in *Women Race and Class*, pg 46-69.

Week 9 – Interlocking Social Structures

Intersectional identities like race, gender, and class are not just dimensions of individual experience, but social categories that precede and shape our identities. Feminist thinkers argue that these categories arise from the structure of our society, going beyond individual action to shape the terrain of social life itself. Feminists have thereby pioneered the investigation of structural injustices, or forms of harm that are not the fault of individuals or groups, but of the way that we organize our relations to each other. Key concepts: social structure, structural injustice, social relation, social role.

- Assigned:
    - Young 2011, "Structure as the Subject of Justice" (Selections) in *Responsibility for Justice*, pg 43-48, 52-64.
- Recommended:
    - Combahee River Collective 1977, "A Black Feminist Statement" in *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, pg 15-27.
    - Snorton 2017, "Trans Capable: Fungibility, Fugitivity, and the Matter of Being" in *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, pg 55-100.
    - Davis 1981, "The Meaning of Emancipation According to Black Women" and "Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist" in *Women Race and Class*, pg 87-98, 172-201.

Week 10 – Taking Responsibility

Who bears responsibility for rectifying the intersectional and structural injustices that threaten our society? Feminists have gone beyond traditional backward-looking theories of injustice to articulate forward-looking theories of responsibility that focus on what agents can do to improve society rather than who broke things. Key concepts: responsibility, blame, accountability, repair.

- Assigned:
    - Young 2011, "A Social Connections Model" (Selections) in *Responsibility for Justice*, pg w43-48, 52-64.
- Recommended:
    - Zheng 2018, "What is My Role in Changing the System: A New Model of Responsibility for Structural Injustice."

Week 11 – Make a Movement

Having completed the second unit on feminist theory you will develop an action strategy for achieving a specific ethically justified political or social goal within a specific community (e.g. school, neighborhood, district, borough, city, state, country, world). Your action strategy should explain why your proposed change would be just and include a plan for effect that identifies relevant obstacles to change as well as possible sources of power. Make sure to directly explain what makes the issue your movement addresses wrong or unjust.

- Assigned:
    - None

Week 12 – Student Selected Topic #1 – Reproductive Justice

We will explore the right to abortion in relation to a broader understanding of reproductive and sexual justice.

- Assigned:
    - Ross 2017, Introduction to Radical Reproductive Justice
- Recommended:
    - ACRJ 2005, A New Vision for Advancing Our Movement for Reproductive Health: Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Justice
    - Garita 2015, Moving Toward Sexual and Reproductive Justice: A Transnational and Multigenerational Feminist Remix

Week 13: Student Selected Topic #2 – Sexuality (Erotics)

We will explore human erotic desire, focusing on its positive dimensions and how we can ethically engage in sexual relations.

- Assigned:
    - Lorde 1978, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power
- Recommended
    - Millar 2008, Toward a Performance Model of Sex
    - Serano 2008, Why Nice Guys Finish Last
    - Corinna 2008, An Immodest Proposal

Week 14 – Museum Field Trip

We will take a field trip to a local Museum, where we will put theory into practice by drawing on feminist concepts to analyze artwork and cultural artifacts.

- Assigned:
    - TBD

Week 15 – Penny for Your Thoughts

To conclude the course you will write an essay that engages with a core idea from the course, drawing on 1-2 readings we have studied (no outside research is required, though you may reference outside sources with proper citation). Your paper should interpret the thinker's ideas, critically reflect on them, pose objections while also going beyond the thinker to creatively develop your own ideas in dialogue with them. Make sure to include a clear thesis statement in the first paragraph of your essay ("In this paper I argue that X… because Y…").

- Assigned:
    - None