

**McGill University**  
**Institute of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies**  
**WMST 303: Feminist Theory and Research**  
**Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:05-11:25; EDUC 211**  
**Winter 2014**

**Instructor:** Dr. Elizabeth Groeneveld  
**Office:** IGSF, 3487 Peel St., Room 301  
**Phone:** (514) 398-4400 x. 089632  
**Email:** elizabeth.groeneveld@mcgill.ca  
**Office Hours:** Mondays 3:00-4:00, or by appointment

**Course Description**

This course will examine a variety of feminist theoretical perspectives, including standpoint, postmodern, poststructural, U.S. third world, post-colonial, queer, indigenou, transnational, affect and radical feminist theories. We will explore these how feminist scholars approach key concepts within feminist thought (e.g. subjectivity; power; knowledge; the gaze) from different theoretical positions, and the implications of their arguments for feminist research practice. We will analyze the politics of research itself and the researcher/researched relationship, exploring how feminists have worked to produce more ethical and social justice oriented research paradigms. The course also highlights the work of innovative feminist researchers who will join the class as guest lecturers. Finally, the course examines anti-oppression methodologies and how these change research practice. In taking an interdisciplinary approach to feminist theory and research, this course will encourage students to make connections between the course materials, their research interests and other fields of study.

**Approach**

Our class time will primarily consist of lectures and small and large group discussion, with the occasional screening of a short video. Read the assigned materials in advance and be prepared for critical discussion. Bring hard copies of the readings to class. Students are encouraged to begin thinking about their final assignments early on in the semester, and to discuss with the class how their projects relate to course readings.

**Required Texts**

Groeneveld, Elizabeth, ed. *Feminist Theory and Research*. Course Package. Montreal, QC: McGill University, 2014. [CP]

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy, ed. *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2014. [FRP]

**Recommended:**

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Zed Books, 2012. [DM]

**Marks Breakdown**

Discussion Points	10% (10 x 1%)
Critical Essay	30%
Comparative Essay	30%
Take-Home Examination	30%

**Assignments**

All written assignments must:

- be typed and double-spaced using 12 pt. Times New Roman font
- have one-inch margins
- use MLA formatting (see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/> for guidelines)
- have the student's name, the instructor's name, course code, date, and word count printed in the top left-hand corner of the first page (no title page is necessary)
- have numbered pages
- be submitted as a hard copy; email submissions will not be accepted

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information)."

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

### **Discussion Points**

Value: 10% (10 x 1%)

**Due Dates:** Submit at least one hour in advance of class (9:00 am), via MyCourses. Submit a discussion point based on the required reading or readings we are completing for that class. Late submissions will not be accepted. As there are more than 10 classes, students may choose which 10 readings or sets of readings they wish to respond to.

**Description:** This assignment is designed to: motivate students to reflect on the readings in advance of class; prompt wider ranging discussion and/or to highlight shared points of interest or concern; engage quieter contributors in class discussions; and keep everyone on top of the readings. You earn credit for submitting a discussion point to MyCourses; therefore, you should see this assignment as a starting point for your thoughts on the readings that you can develop through discussion in class.

Ideas for how to do this assignment if you're feeling stuck: Select a short passage from one of our assigned readings that you would like to discuss further. Write a little bit about what made this passage jump out at you: is it representative of the author's argument? Do you particularly like this passage? Does it seem to point to a limitation of the author's argument? If we have a difficult reading, perhaps select a passage that seems particularly difficult, but important for the author's argument. Finally, can you make any connections across readings that we've already completed for the class?

### **Critical Essay**

**Value:** 30%

**Due Date:** Thursday 20 February

**Length:** 1000-1500 words

**Description:** Write a critical essay on one of the following topics. This essay must contain a clear, concise, and focused argument about your topic. You must approach your topic through a feminist analytical lens. You are expected to do additional research for this essay and to draw on at least **two** academic secondary sources not included on the course outline. The assignment will be assessed on engagement with secondary materials, the quality of the analysis, organization and structure, and clarity of the writing. Please refer to the essay rubric for further details.

1. In "Critically Queer," Judith Butler examines the ways in which the term "queer" has been refunctioned to signify a new set of meanings (27). Select one word within popular discourse (e.g. slut, virgin, the 'n' word) and conduct a critical analysis of the meanings assigned to this term. In what ways is language value laden? Are some words beyond recuperation?
2. Chandra Talpade Mohanty analyzes the "discursive colonization of Third World women's lives and struggles" (222). Select a media text and conduct an analysis of the production of the "third

world woman” within this text. Is the representation consistent with the analysis that Mohanty makes? What are the consequences of such representations?

3. Audre Lorde famously argued, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (123). What does this phrase mean? What are its assumptions about power? Select an activist group and conduct an analysis of its mandate and/or tactics.
4. Another topic. Instructor approval must be granted by Tuesday 11 February.

### **Comparative Essay**

**Value:** 30%

**Due Date:** Tuesday 25 March

**Length:** 1500-2000 words

**Description:** Write a comparative essay on one of the following topics. This essay must contain a clear, concise, and focused argument about your topic. You must approach your topic through a feminist analytical lens. You are not expected to do additional research for this essay. The assignment will be assessed on engagement with secondary materials, the quality of the analysis, organization and structure, and clarity of the writing. The assignment is designed to promote synthesis of some of the key themes and concepts discussed over the course of the semester. Please refer to the essay rubric for further details.

1. In “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” bell hooks states that “language is also a place of struggle” (*passim*). What does hooks mean by this statement? What are its implications for feminist research? Drawing on **three or four** readings from this class, discuss the ways in which feminist research might productively engage with hooks’ argument about the power of language.
2. According to Judith/Jack Halberstam, minority subcultures “tend to be documented by former or current members of the subculture rather than by ... experts” (162). Consider the implications of Halberstam’s argument within a broader research context: must researchers be members of the communities in/with which they conduct research? How does one determine and negotiate such a relationship? Draw on **three or four** readings from this class to support your argument.
3. In “Have We Got a Theory for You!” María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman ask the following question: “if we think doing theory is an important activity, and we think that some conditions lead to better theorizing than others, what are we going to do about creating those conditions?” (504). Contextualize the question that Lugones and Spelman are posing within the broader context of their argument. Drawing on **three or four** readings from this class, respond to Lugones and Spelman’s question. What conditions make better theorizing possible?
4. Another comparative essay topic. Instructor approval must be granted by Thursday 13 March.

### **Take-Home Examination**

**Value:** 30%

**Length:** 1500-2000 words

**Due Date:** TBA

**Description:** Write a detailed proposal for your dream feminist research project. The project that you propose should be capable of being executed within an 8-month time frame. Use course materials and additional research to inform your writing of the proposal. Draw on at least **two** academic secondary sources on the course outline and at least **two** academic secondary sources not on the course outline. You will be assessed on the strength of the proposed project, its do-ability, engagement with secondary sources, organization and structure, and clarity of the writing. Please refer to the take-home rubric for further details.

You will break up your proposal into the following subsections:

**Abstract:**

- a one- to two-paragraph summary of the project

**Theoretical Approach:**

- the theoretical perspective(s) informing your research and why these will be useful

**Methodology:**

- the methods you will use to collect data and a rationale for why you've chosen these methods over others
- how the feminist theory informing your research informs the kinds of methods you've chosen to use

**Research Significance:**

- why you want to do this project
- an argument about why this project would constitute feminist research
- the significance of the project (answering the "so what?" question)

**Research Dissemination:**

- how you would want to present your findings and how you would want this research to be used (who benefits?)

## Policies and Guidelines

**How to Interpret Grades in this Course**

Your professor is eager to help you do well on assignments before they are due. Please visit the professor during office hours to ask questions about material for the course and assignments on which you are working.

Grades are assigned based on the scale set out in the Arts and Sciences calendar. Grades in the "A" range are awarded only for superior work (and not merely sufficient performance). Grades in the "B" range are awarded for work that is above satisfactory. In the "C" range they are awarded for satisfactory/sufficient work. And in the "D" range, they are awarded for unsatisfactory work.

Final grades will be based on the McGill University scale, reproduced here:

85-100% = A	60-64% = C+
80-84% = A-	55-59% = C
75-79% = B+	50-54% = D (Conditional Pass)
70-74% = B	0-49% = F (Fail)
65-69% = B-	

Grades are never given out over email or the telephone. Students can check their grades via the course website.

**Disability Services**

If you have a disability, please register with the Office for Students with Disabilities at 398-6009 ([www.mcgill.ca/osd](http://www.mcgill.ca/osd)).

Unfortunately, the instructor's office is not accessible for visitors with mobility impairment, but meetings at alternate locations will be happily arranged.

**Email Policy**

If you have a question for the professor, please check the course syllabus first to see if the information you require is on it. If the question involves more than a yes/no answer, please ask during office hours instead. If you are unable to meet with the professor during office hours, please feel free to make an appointment.

Please do not email the professor on the weekends or after business hours.

### **Late Policy**

All assignments will be penalized at 5% per day late. If you have a late assignment, please submit it to the IGSF (3487 Peel St.) during regular business hours (9am-5pm). You may wish to call the IGSF in advance at 514-398-3911 to confirm that the Institute is open, as we occasionally close during special events. Do not email your assignment to your professor. *This late policy applies to the Critical Essay and Comparative Essay assignments; the policy does not apply to the Discussion Points or Take-Home Examination.*

If you have extenuating circumstances that can be documented (medical emergencies, etc.), simply attach a copy of your documentation to the assignment. If you do not have documentable and exceptional circumstances that prevent you from submitting your paper, you need to accept the fact that late marks will be applied.

### **Grade Appeals**

Assignments are graded on performance, not effort. Grades are final, except where a mistake has been made in calculation. Here are the circumstances under which the professor would change a grade: (a) if an error has been made at the level of calculation, or (b) if you have not been held to the same standard as everyone else. If you seek clarification on a grade you have received, you should visit your professor during office hours, keeping in mind the criteria of evaluation on which your assignment was graded. The professor will neither defend nor contest the evaluation; she will instead discuss ways in which you can understand the evaluation and improve upon your performance.

In the event that you feel you received an undeserved grade and wish to dispute it, you must make your case **in writing** within one week (7 days) of receiving the grade. The case in writing must detail the grounds on which you are making an appeal, accompanied by the original assignment (make a photocopy for yourself). The letter must be typed, single-spaced and printed on paper; email submissions will not be accepted. Grade complaints will not be considered after the week deadline, or if they are not made in writing. If the professor agrees to review your assignment and re-evaluate its grade, keep in mind that your grade could remain the same, be elevated, or be reduced.

### **Guidelines for Productive Discussion**

Our class times are dedicated to in-depth discussion. Following a few basic discussion guidelines will help insure that this time is productive, enlightening and fun for all of us.

1. Experience and anecdote do not constitute evidence in a scholarly argument. While you each bring interesting experiences to the classroom, **ONLY** bring up your personal experience when it is relevant to class discussion; think carefully about this before you speak about your experience. If you bring up your own experience in class, recognize that it becomes a public topic for discussion. Others may interpret your experience differently than you do, and they are free to respectfully disagree with your interpretation. Furthermore, ask yourself what point you seek to make by talking about yourself. Is it really relevant? Do you want others to know this about you?

2. Work to create a shared climate of friendly and lively discussion. Avoid personal attacks, jabs, and grandstanding behaviors. Also avoid overly personalizing the topic under discussion. The point is to build knowledge together, not to look good or act smarter than everyone else or endlessly talk about yourself.

3. Disagreements are natural and welcome in scholarly discussion. So are arguments. But arguments are not contests. Grant your fellow course participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not.

4. As much as possible, avoid purely negative critique in your comments. Our goal in discussion is to understand the texts we read and how they might be useful to us – in addition to cultivating our skills in critique. Understand first; criticize second.

5. Wait your turn – do not interrupt others.

6. You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time.

## Weekly Schedule

### WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST THEORY & RESEARCH (7 & 9 January)

#### Tuesday:

Introduction to the Course and to Each Other  
Go Over Course Syllabus

#### Thursday:

bell hooks. "Theory as Liberatory Practice." *CP*  
Sharlene Hesse-Biber. "A Re-Invitation to Feminist Research." *FRP*

### Theme I: Key Concepts For Feminist Theory And Research

### WEEK TWO: THE SUBJECT (14 & 16 January)

#### Tuesday:

Nancy A. Naples and Barbara Gurr. "Feminist Empiricism and Standpoint Theory: Approaches to Understanding the Social World." *FRP*  
Nollaig Frost and Frauke Elichaooff. "Feminist Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and Critical Theory." *FRP*

Recommended:

Judith Butler. "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism." *CP*

#### Thursday:

Norma Alarcón. "The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back*." *CP*  
Audre Lorde. "Age, Race, Class, and Sex," *CP*

### WEEK THREE: POWER (21 & 23 January)

#### Tuesday:

Judith Butler. "Critically Queer," *CP*  
Michel Foucault. "Method." *CP*

#### Thursday:

bell hooks. "Choosing the Margins as Space of Radical Openness." *CP*

### WEEK FOUR: FEMINIST/QUEER MEDIA RESEARCH (28 & 30 January)

#### Tuesday:

Judith Halberstam, "What's That Smell?" *CP*  
Heather McIntosh and Lisa M. Cuklanz. "Feminist Media Research." *FRP*

#### Thursday:

Wendy Peters. "Pink Dollars, White Collars: *Queer as Folk*, Valuable Viewers, and the Price of Gay TV." *CP*

Guest Speaker:

Wendy Peters, Assistant Professor of Gender Equality and Social Justice, Nipissing University.

### **WEEK FIVE: THE GAZE (4 & 6 February)**

**Tuesday:**

Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Under Western Eyes Revisited." *CP*

Recommended:

Linda Tuhiwai Smith. "Research Through Imperial Eyes." *DM*

**Thursday:**

Rosemary Garland-Thomson. "Ways of Staring." *CP*

### **WEEK SIX: KNOWLEDGE (11 & 13 February)**

**Tuesday:**

Leela Fernandes. "Regimes of Visibility and Transnational Feminist Knowledge." *CP*

Chandra Mohanty and M. Jacqui Alexander. "Cartographies of Knowledge and Power: Transnational Feminism as Radical Praxis." *CP*

**Thursday:**

Donna Haraway. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *CP*

## **Theme II: The Relationship Between Researcher And Researched**

### **WEEK SEVEN: THE POLITICS OF RESEARCH (18 & 20 February)**

**Tuesday:**

Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Attachments," *CP*

**Thursday:**

Karla Slocum. "Negotiating Identity and Black Feminist Politics in Caribbean Research." *CP*

**\* Critical Essay Due Today \***

### **WEEK EIGHT: POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER (25 & 27 February)**

**Tuesday:**

Linda Bell. "Ethics and Feminist Research." *FRP*

Linda Tuhiwai Smith. "Imperialism, History, Writing, and Theory." *DM or CP*

**Thursday:**

Guest Speaker:

Lynda McNeil from McGill University's Research Ethics Board

## **Reading Break No Classes (4 & 6 March)**

### **WEEK NINE: SPEAKING WITH OR SPEAKING FOR? (11 & 13 March)**

**Tuesday:**

Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman. "Have We Got a Theory for You!" *CP*

**Thursday:**

Linda Alcoff. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." Online:  
<http://www.alcoff.com/content/speaothers.html>

Recommended:

Linda Tuhiwai Smith. "The Indigenous People's Project" and "Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects." *DM*

**Theme III: Research Methodologies****WEEK TEN: FEMINIST RESEARCH METHODS (18 & 20 March)****Tuesday:**

Elana D. Buch and Karen M. Staller. "What is Feminist Ethnography?" *FRP*

M. Brinton Lykes and Alison Crosby. "Feminist Practice of Action and Community Research." *FRP*

**Thursday:**

Sharlene Hesse-Biber. "The Practice of Feminist In-Depth Interviewing." *FRP*

Jennie Munday. "The Practice of Feminist Focus Groups." *FRP*

Recommended: Sharlene Hesse-Biber. "Feminist Approaches to Mixed Methods Research." *FRP*

**WEEK ELEVEN: INTERSECTIONAL METHODOLOGIES (25 & 27 March)****Tuesday:**

Guest Speaker: Vrinda Narain, Assistant Professor of Women's Studies and Law, McGill University.

**\* Comparative Essay Due Today \***

**Thursday:**

Anna Carathathis. "Identity Categories as Potential Coalitions." *CP*

Dean Spade. "Intersectional Resistance and Law Reform." *CP*

**WEEK TWELVE: ANTI-OPPRESSION METHODOLOGIES (1 & 3 April)****Tuesday:**

Palacios, Lena, ed. *Guest Speaker Reading Package*.

<<http://www.icasa.org/docs/nsac%202012%20workshop%20handouts/d-1%20handouts.pdf>> *CP*

Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Families of Sisters in Spirit. "Police (In)Justice: Responding Together to Change the Story." Online:

<<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/policeinjusticerespondingtogethertochangethestory.pdf>> *CP*

Recommended:

Human Rights Watch. "Summary and Recommendations." Online:

<[http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/canada0213\\_insert\\_low.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/canada0213_insert_low.pdf)> *CP*

INCITE! Women of Colour Against Violence. "Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Colour and Trans People of Colour: A Critical Intersection of Gender Violence and State Violence. An Organizer's Resource and Tool Kit." Access Online: <[http://www.incite-national.org/sites/default/files/incite\\_files/resource\\_docs/3696\\_toolkit-final.pdf](http://www.incite-national.org/sites/default/files/incite_files/resource_docs/3696_toolkit-final.pdf)> *CP*

Guest Speaker:

Lena Palacios, Graduate Student in Communication Studies, McGill University.

**Thursday:**

Chela Sandoval. "US Third World Feminism." *CP*

**WEEK THIRTEEN: CONDUCTING SELF-REFLEXIVE ANTI-OPPRESSION RESEARCH (8 & 10 April)**

**Tuesday:**

Karen Potts & Leslie Brown. "Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Researcher" *CP*

Patti Lather. "Feminist Perspectives on Empowering Research Methodologies." *CP*

Conclusions & Final Thoughts on the course

Discussion of Take-Home Exam

**Thursday:** No Class