

Feminist Theory WGST 601

INSTRUCTOR: Professor Chaitanya Lakkimsetti

CLASS HOURS: Thursday 9:30 am- 12:30 PM

CLASS LOCATION: TEAG 326

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays 9:30am to 11:30 am (by appointment)

OFFICE LOCATION: Check with me about the location

EMAIL: clakkimsetti@tamu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND STRUCTURE

This course will offer an introduction to some of the historical and contemporary theoretical debates that have helped develop the field of Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies. It will expose students to key debates and conceptual frameworks in the field as we examine standpoint epistemologies, politics of representation, neoliberal and carceral state practices, sex trafficking, sexual violence, intersectionality, transnationalism, and feminist resistance practices. In doing so, our primary goal will be to use feminist theories both as a basis for understanding our social worlds, and as a way of developing praxis that are rooted in visions of social justice.

We will dedicate a significant amount of class time to intersectional and transnational feminist frameworks. Even though transnationalism and intersectionality both engage in antistatist work, they are often viewed as distinct frameworks having different explanatory power. Whereas intersectionality is seen as a framework that engages with U.S race and gender relationships, transnationalism is seen relevant to understanding non-US and global phenomenon. Drawing on feminist theorists such as Jennifer Nash we see how these two frameworks as “bound up” rather than separate and examine these overlaps without undermining their distinct histories and epistemologies.

Each class will consist of a student-led presentation and discussion of the assigned readings.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- 1) Fluency and familiarity with terms and conceptual frameworks that are central to the field of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.
- 2) Developing critical thinking and close readings practices that are central to feminist knowledge practices.
- 3) Appreciate the connection between feminist theory and feminist goals for social change.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

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| 1. Participation and Attendance. | 10% |
| 2. 10 Response Papers (1-2 pp. each) | 20% |
| 3. In-class Presentation on the Readings | 10% |
| 4. Discussion Facilitation | 10% |
| 5. Research/Conference Paper Abstract | 5% |

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| 6. Literature Review/Theoretical Framework/Argument | 15% |
| 7. Final paper (15-18 double-spaced pages) | 30% |
| TOTAL | 100% |

Participation and Attendance (10%)

Since the seminar will be discussion based your participation in class is crucial for the success of this course. I expect you to come to class with your insights and questions on the readings. The in-class discussion will focus on the central arguments and idea of the readings; conceptual connections with other readings; and author/s contribution to feminist theory and practice.

Your regular attendance and engagement discussion will decide your performance for this portion of the course. Asking and answering questions, leading and joining ongoing conversations, and offerings insights are some ways to engage in the class.

Response papers (20%)

You will write ten 1–2-page papers (Approximately 500 words) that reflect upon and respond critically to the readings (**due 5:00 PM on Wednesday**). These papers should include a short summary of the arguments, engage with core ideas, and critique, as well as raise questions for class discussion. They will be considered as writing and thinking exercises, and thus, marked pass/fail. Depending on the need, I will provide individual feedback on reading responses. If the response paper doesn't meet the requirements, I will ask you to rewrite it.

In-class presentation (10%)

You will be signing up for individual presentation once during the semester. For the individual presentation, you are expected to synthesize the main arguments and theoretical interventions of the readings, connect the readings with readings from previous weeks or other relevant scholarship. In addition to your critical take on the readings, you can also synthesize some of the points made by your peers about the readings in their individual response papers. I also expect you to submit a PowerPoint presentation for this assignment.

Discussion Facilitation (10%)

You are also required to sign-up to be discussion facilitator once during the semester. **This can't be the same week as your presentation.** The role of the discussion facilitator is to facilitate generative conversation on the readings and course topics. Since graduate classes are discussion oriented, it is important to generate questions that can help us situate the readings in the intellectual context; questions that help to get at the intellectual significance of the readings; questions that help make critical connections with other readings; and their role in advancing feminist theory. The questions should not be too narrow or too broad.

Research/Conference Paper abstract (5%)

For the final assignment, I am providing the option of a research or conference paper. You can choose one of the options depending on your current academic goals. You are expected to submit a 500-word abstract research or conference paper proposal by **Week-5** to give me a sense of what you will be working on. You don't have to have everything worked out in advance of writing the paper, but the proposal should be coherent enough to give you (and me) a roadmap of what you plan to work on.

Literature review/theoretical framework/argument (15%)

This part of the assignment I want to encourage you to come up with main theoretical framework or argument for your paper. It doesn't have to be your final argument, but it should demonstrate to me that you can make an argument and back it up with evidence. This portion of the assignment could be 3-4 pages long.

Final paper (30%)

The final paper should be between 15-18 pages long and should read as a coherent essay / conference paper. You are free to choose a topic and genre for your paper based on the stage you are in your graduate program (it can be a dissertation proposal, master's thesis you want to develop into an article, or a chapter of your dissertation). Even though you have the liberty to pursue a topic you want for the final paper, I want to see you centering a feminist analysis to whatever issue or topic you are studying or exploring. In addition, your paper should also substantially draw on the ideas and theoretical frameworks we discussed in class.

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information, visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality:

Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws provide guidance for achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to student record policies and laws, University employees — including instructors — cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety of our community. As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared: Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus. These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether or not you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Student Counseling Service (<https://scs.tamu.edu/>). Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>.

Academic Integrity Statement

Aggie Honor Code: "An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do." Upon accepting admission to Texas A&M University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor System. Students will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the Texas A&M University community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor System. For additional information please visit: <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/>

Required Books:

Jasbir Puar. 2017. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Elizabeth Bernstein. 2019. *Brokered Subjects: Sex Trafficking & the Politics of Freedom*. University of Chicago Press.

Poulami Roychowdhury. 2020. *Capable Women, Incapable States*. Oxford University Press.

Jennifer Nash. 2021. *Birthing Black Mothers*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Chaitanya Lakkimsetti & Vanita Reddy. 2025. *#MeToo and the Politics of Transnational Feminism: An Anthology*. New York: NYU Press.

Other course materials are available through Canvas as well as easily accessible through the TAMU library services.

Course Outline

Week 1: January 16

Introduction

Lorde, Audre. 1984. "Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," Pp. 40-44. In *Sister/Outsider*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

hooks, bell. 1991. "Theory as Liberatory Practice," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4(1): 1-12.

Week 2: January 23

Why theorize?

Ellie Hernandez and Gloria Anzaldua. 1995. "Re-Thinking Margins and Borders: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldua". *Discourse* 18: 7-15.

Million, Dian. 2009. "Felt theory: An indigenous feminist approach to affect and history." *Wicazo Sa Review* 24(2): 53-76.

Butler, Judith. 2004. "Acting in Concert" Pp 1-16 in *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

Week 3: January 29 (No class, Dr. Lakkimsetti will be at a conference)

You can use this week to conduct research for your final project and start drafting your abstract.

Week 4: February 6

What is gender? How do feminists theorize gender and what dilemmas does it present to

feminist theory and praxis? Who is afraid of gender?

Scott, Joan Wallach. "Gender as a useful category of historical analysis." In *Culture, society and sexuality*, pp. 77-97. Routledge, 2007.

Karhu, Sanna. 2021. "Gender Skepticism, Trans Livability, and Feminist Critique." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 47(2): 295-317.

Judith Butler. 2024. *Who is Afraid of Gender?* (Introduction, chapter 3, chapter 6)

Week 5: February 13

How do we know what we know? Feminist epistemologies

Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14: 575-599.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1986. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33 (6): 14-32.

Harding, Sandra. 1992. "Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is 'strong objectivity?'" *The Centennial Review* 36 (3): 437-470.

Final Paper Abstract Due (In-class)

Week 6: February 20

Politics and Ethics of Representation

Mahmood, Saba. 2001. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2): 202-236.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990. "The Romance of Resistance," *American Ethnologist* 17(1): 41-55.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1988. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30: 61-88.

Week 7: February 27

Intersectionality

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241-1299.

Patil, Vrushali. 2013. "From patriarchy to intersectionality: A transnational feminist assessment of how far we've really come." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38.4: 847-867.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 2019. *Intersectionality As Critical Social Theory*. Duke University Press. (Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry: pp. 21-53)

Nash, Jennifer C. 2019. *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*. (Introduction: pp. 1-32).

Week 8: March 6

Black Feminism & Black Maternal Politics

Nash, Jennifer. 2021. *Birthing Black Mothers*. Durham: Duke University Press

Week 9: March 13

Spring Break: No Class

Week 10: March 20

Biopolitics, Debility

Jasbir Puar. 2017. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Durham: Duke University Press

Literature review/Theoretical Framework (Due in class). Will allot class time for peer reviews of the lit review.

Week 11: March 27

State, Law, and Gendered Subjects

Lakkimsetti, Chaitanya. 2014. "'HIV is our friend': Prostitution, biopower, and the state in postcolonial India." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40.1: 201-226.

Roychowdhury, Poulami. *Capable Women, Incapable States*. Oxford University Press. 2020. (Select chapters)

Week 12: April 3

Carceral State and Critiques of Carceral Feminism

Bernstein, Elizabeth. "Militarized humanitarianism meets carceral feminism: The politics of sex, rights, and freedom in contemporary antitrafficking campaigns." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36, no. 1 (2010): 45-71.

Bernstein, Elizabeth. *Brokered Subjects: Sex Trafficking & the Politics of Freedom*. University of Chicago Press, 2019. (Select Chapters)

Garcia-Del Moral, Paulina and Chaitanya Lakkimsetti. (Essay manuscript under review). "From Carcerality to Impunity: Rethinking State Violence as Gendered Governance in India and Mexico".

Week 13: April 10

Transnational Feminist Itineraries

The Many Destinations of Transnational Feminism / Ashwini Tambe and Millie Thayer

Beyond Antagonism: Rethinking Intersectionality, Transnationalism, and the Women's Studies Academic Job Market / Jennifer C. Nash

Transnational Feminism and the Politics of Scale: The 2012 Antirape Protests in Delhi / Srila Ro

Transnational Shifts: The World March of Women in Mexico / Carmen L. Díaz Alba

Mozambican Feminisms: Between the Local and the Global / Isabel Maria Cortesão Casimiro and Catarina Casimiro Trindade 207.

Week 14: April 17

#MeToo and Transnational Feminist Politics

Roshanravan, Shireen. 2022. "On the Limits of Globalizing Black Feminist Commitments: "Me Too" and its White Detours." *Feminist Formations* 33.3 :239-255.

Lakkimsetti, Chaitanya and Vanita Reddy. 2025. "Routing #MeToo through Transnational Feminist Thought" in # MeToo and the Politics of Transnational Feminism: An Anthology." New York: NYU Press.

Lakkimsetti, Chaitanya and Vanita Reddy. 2025. "Patriarchal Protectionism, Toxic Masculinity, and #MeToo: A Comparative Feminist Analysis of Gender-Based Violence in India and the United States".

Cosman, Brenda and Ratna Kapur. 2025. "#MeToo, Speech, and Defamation (India, United States, and Pakistan)".

Week 15: April 24

#MeToo and Transnational Feminist Politics (Continued..)

Egypt's #MeToo: Sexual Morality, Class, and Gender Politics across Two Critical Cases.

Tambe, Ashwini. 2025. Theorizing the Temporal and Geographic Scope of #MeToo.

Choo, Hae Yeon. 2025. From Madwomen to Whistleblowers: MeToo in South Korea as an Institutional Critique

Sutton, Barbara. 2025. Hemispheric Feminist Currents: #MeToo, *Ni Una Menos*, and the Green Tide in Argentina.

Khurshid, Ayesha. 2025. "Na Tuttiya Ve": Spiritual Activism and the #MeToo Movement in Pakistan

Final Paper Due: Monday, May 5th (by 5:00 PM)