

**The University of Western  
Ontario**  
Women's Studies and Feminist Research  
Fall 2020

**WS 9550A – Feminist  
Theory**

**Syllabus**

Class Time: Thursday 1:30 - 4:30 pm

Zoom link:

<https://westernuniversity.zoom.us/j/94124558885?pwd=TUlpGE4Z1Jxa09GWnZScGRNTVZmUT09>

Meeting ID: 941 2455 8885

Passcode: saraahmed

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Office hours: By appointment on Zoom, Teams, or telephone

**Overarching rationale for the course**

The slogan, “The Personal is Political,” remains the watch word of Second Wave feminist projects and continues to inform our ideas about feminist activist practice and the relationship between feminist theory and practice. The centrality of experience and the everyday as both the impetus for political change and the sites through which it might be manifested remains an important, if not unproblematic, tenet of feminist activism, organizing and theorizing. While this framing enabled feminist theorists to articulate a different, and potentially more inclusive, epistemological approach to knowledge and knowing, it is precisely this location within the particular and subjective which has rendered feminist interventions suspect within the wider academic community. Moreover, even as feminists were asserting the importance of making the personal political and locating both feminist political and artistic practice within the lived experience of women's lives, trends within postmodernity and poststructuralist theory called into question the very ground on which this authority was established. At the same time, however, these new theoretical approaches opened up other possibilities for feminist scholars, thinkers and writers. Finally, the individualistic framing of this slogan, coupled with the liberal feminist praxis in which it first took hold and the ease with which its political message

appeared to be trivialized, raised questions about the usefulness of this approach in relation to lasting social change.

Rather than dismiss “The Personal is Political” as a historical artifact, this course will seek to use it as a lens through which to ask questions about the development of feminist theory and its future as a way of understanding the world in which we live. Central to this lens will be an exploration of assumptions about subjectivity, subjecthood and the self which are implicit in the relation between the personal and political. In unpacking the assumptions that are central to the linking of the personal and the political, we will consider how feminist theory has had to engage with questions of the self, subjectivity, agency and politics. Thus subjectivity is a productive site through which we might begin to interrogate questions that are central to both feminist theory and feminist practice: How do we understand the self and the subject and the self in relation to the other? In what ways are questions of subjectivity related to power and politics? How have debates around subjectivity and the self shaped feminist theoretical practices and vice versa? How can we start to account for the differential ways that agency has been taken up in relation to feminist theories and activist projects? How have feminist theories intersected with other theoretical approaches? What sorts of ethical issues are raised in relation to feminist theories of self, subjectivity and the other?

This course will enable students to

- explore different approaches to feminist theory, recognizing similarities and interrogating differences between and among these approaches
- evaluate feminist theories in a critical and rigorous manner
- articulate how feminist theories shape academic research
- draw on feminist theories to explore their own areas of interest
- reflect on the relationship between feminist theory and ideas of subjectivity
- appreciate the iterative and reciprocal nature of feminist theory, practice and activism
- recognize political and ethical issues in relation to feminist theory
- consider the collaborative nature of feminist theory and practice

## **Texts**

The instructor will provide access to the readings through E -Z proxy links on OWL. Students will be expected to purchase Sara Ahmed’s book, *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke, 2017).

## **Overarching rationale for assignments**

My intent in devising these assignments is threefold: firstly, I want to enable students to develop active reading skills, and to this end the presentations, weekly discussion posts, and response papers will encourage students to attend to what they are reading and reflect on it; secondly, I want students to begin to develop different kinds of academic writing skills, including, but not limited to, the formal academic essay; finally, I want to model for students the collaborative nature of feminist theory and practice and facilitate different sites of

collaborative intellectual exchange, including on-line discussion posts, class discussions, response papers and feedback on essay proposals.

The particular skills which students are encouraged to develop include:

- the ability to read and evaluate feminist theory
- the ability to engage critically and actively with feminist texts
- the ability to develop analytical arguments, orally and across a number of different types of academic writing
- the ability to provide constructive criticism to peers

## Assessment

### Weekly Lead: 10 %

**Due: see schedule below**

Each student will take the lead on annotating one article from the week’s readings (not including *Living a Feminist Life*) on Perusall. Articles with \* after them are available to annotate. In weeks where there are two students assigned, they can decide which article each of them will start the annotations for. The posted comments and questions should help their classmates to engage with the argument presented and draw out tensions and possibilities within the readings. In order to help identify connections among the readings, Leads should try to ensure that they have read all, or most, of the required readings prior to doing their annotation on Perusall. **Lead annotations need to be posted to Perusall on or before Monday morning.**

Weekly Leads will also be responsible for starting off the weekly Zoom session. They should be prepared to bring summarizing/connecting questions and/or connected learning activities which draw together the articles plus Ahmed’s book (and any additional materials) to that week’s Zoom Session. If there are two students assigned to the week, they should work together to facilitate the Zoom session.

### Weekly Respondent: 5%

**Due: see schedule below**

Each student is assigned to be a designated respondent to one of the articles being annotated in Perusall. The respondent will be expected to engage deeply (responding in depth to at least several of the lead’s annotations and the article), though they may also include more numerous brief comments as well. If there are two respondents for a given week, they will need to decide amongst themselves which article each of them will be responding to.

	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	19-Nov	26-Nov	03-Dec
<b>Lead</b>	Natasha	Charlotte	Sabrina	Grace	Kasey	Peyton	Andrea	Kat
	Sohini		Jessica		Jioanna			
<b>Response</b>	Grace	Natasha	Kasey	Kat	Sohini	Charlotte	Jessica	Jioanna
	Andrea		Peyton		Sabrina			

### **Perusall and Zoom Seminar Participation: 10%**

Participation in graduate seminars consists of an ongoing engagement with the course readings (both through online annotations using Perusall or during weekly Zoom discussions) as well as other course materials and activities.

### **Conference Abstract: 5 %**

Students will prepare an abstract in response to the class conference call for papers. The theme of the conference will be determined in consultation with the members of the class.

**Due: October 8, 2020**

### **Presentation of conference paper and participation in conference: 25 %**

**Due: November 12, 2020**

Students will deliver a conference paper as part of an online class-conference. The format of this conference will be discussed in more detail as the semester proceeds. **Students will submit the paper (as delivered on the conference day) via Assignments on OWL for grading. They will also share that paper with a colleague, who will provide feedback on the conference paper.** Participation at the conference is mandatory and students are expected to participate by chairing, acting as assigned respondents to panels, and asking questions during the sessions.

### **Written Response to Conference Paper: (2 pages) 5 %**

**Due: November 19, 2020**

Students will provide written feedback (of approximately 2 pages) on one of their classmate's conference papers. This feedback will be based on both the orally delivered paper (and discussion) as well as the written version of the paper. This feedback is intended to be framed as a peer review and is expected to be constructive, recognizing both strengths and weaknesses, and making suggestions for how the paper might be further developed.

### **Journal Article: (15 -20 pages) 40 %**

**Due: December 10, 2020**

The final paper of the course is designed to provide students with the opportunity to develop their conference paper into a journal article for a relevant publication. This development includes responding to the publication requirements as set out for the journal in question (citation style, format etc.). Please identify the journal and include a copy of the publication requirements as part of your essay submission. Once you have read this, please email me a photo of your favourite feminist or queer theorist.

### **Some policies:**

- Attendance Requirement: Students are expected to attend all classes. Failure to attend classes regularly, present material in class or participate in group activities such as the conference or abstract workshop, in the absence of a documented medical reason, will be reflected in the student's final grade.
- Laptop Policy: We will address the use of laptops during the first class. Regardless of the policy we arrive at, I reserve the right to ask any student to refrain from using their laptop computer. Mobile phones and other mobile devices **are not permitted** during class time.

The university regulations require that the following plagiarism information be included:

**Scholastic Offences:**

“Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf> .” (see <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/crsout.pdf>)

**Specifically on Plagiarism:**

“Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing, such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see the ‘Scholastic Offense Policy’ in the Western Academic Calendar). Plagiarism checking: The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.” --- U.W.O. Senate statement on plagiarism

**Turnitin:**

"All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under licence to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licencing agreement currently between the University and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>) (<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/crsout.pdf>)

**Weekly Reading Schedule**

Sept 17     **Introduction**

Dionne Brand, “Seeing” *Bread Out of Stone*  
 Sara Ahmed, "Homework" in "Introduction" *Living a Feminist Life*

24     **Theory**  
 Required:

Audre Lorde: “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” *Feminism and ‘Race’*. 89 -92  
 Barbara Christian: “The Race for Theory” *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987). 51-63.  
 Sara Ahmed, “Whose Counting.” *Feminist Theory*. 1.1 (2000) 97-103.  
 Sara Ahmed, "Introduction" *Living a Feminist Life* 1-18

Watch: Gender, Colonialism and Anti-Black Police Racist Violence  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8BM\\_gtyK98](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8BM_gtyK98)

Oct 1

### **Knowledge**

Required:

Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 183-201

Mariana Ortega, "Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant" *Hypatia* 21.3 (2006) 56-74 \*

Jin Haritaworn, "Perverse Reproductions: Notes from the Wrong Side of the Classroom." *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*. 8.1 (2011) 25-28. \*

Sara Ahmed. "Feminism is Sensational" *Living a Feminist Life*. 21- 42.

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### **Subjectivity**

Required:

Michel Foucault, "Power over Life" *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* \*

Judith Butler, "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All" *Psychic Life of Power* 106 –139 \*

Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics." *Public Culture*, 15.1 (2003) 11- 40.

Sara Ahmed, "On Being Directed" and "Willfulness and Feminist Subjectivity" *Living a Feminist Life*, 43-88.

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### **Intersectionality**

Required:

Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Leslie McCall. "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies." *Signs* 38.4 (2013) 785-810. \*

Jin Haritaworn, Christian Klesse, Umut Erel and Encarnación Gutiérrez.

"On the Depoliticisation of Intersectionality Talk: Conceptualising Multiple Oppressions in Critical Sexuality Studies." *Theorizing Intersectionality and Sexuality*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 56-77. \*

Alison Kafer and Eunjung Kim, "Disability and the Edges of Intersectionality" *Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability* p.124 – 138. \*

Sara Ahmed, "Trying to Transform" *Living a Feminist Life* 94-114 and "Being in Question" *Living a Feminist Life* 115-134

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### **Ethics**

Required:

Nancy Tuana, "Climate Apartheid: The Forgetting of Race in the Anthropocene" *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7.1 (2019) 1-31.\*

Axelle Karera, "Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics" *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7.1 (2019) 32-56. \*

Sara Ahmed, "Fragile Connections." *Living a Feminist Life* 163 -186

- 29     **Affect**  
 Required:  
 Jose Esteban Munoz, “Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance”. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. 65- 81 \*  
 Ann Cvetkovich, “The Utopia of Ordinary Habit: Crafting, Creativity and Spiritual Practice” *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham: Duke UP. 154-202. \*  
 Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism” *The Affect Theory Reader* 93- 117 \*  
 Watch: Co-Conspiring Against Carceral Systems.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoZm6agdctA>
- Nov    5     **Reading Break**
- 12     **Class Conference via Zoom**
- 19     **Labour**  
 Required:  
 Emma Dowling. “The Waitress: On Affect, Method and (Re)presentation. *Cultural Studies <-> Critical Methodologies*. 12.2 (2012) 109-117. \*  
 Rosemary Hennessy. “Open Secrets: The Affective Cultures of Organizing on Mexico’s Northern Border.” *Feminist Theory* 10.3 (2009) 309-322. \*  
 Sara Ahmed, “Brick Walls” “Feminist Snap” *Living a Feminist Life*, 134-160; 187-212.  
 Watch: “Black Tax and the Invisible Labour of Black Women in the Academy”  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC\\_0GfdXNSJhhAsvwV0psWaw/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_0GfdXNSJhhAsvwV0psWaw/featured)
- 26     **Materiality**  
 Required:  
 Rosemary Garland-Thompson. “Misfit: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept” *Hypatia* 26.3 (2011). \*  
 Alison Kafer. “Bodies of Nature” *Feminist, Queer, Crip* p. 129-148. \*  
 Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker. “Weathering: Climate Change and the “Thick Time” of Transcorporeality. *Hypatia* 29.3 (2014) 558-575. \*

Sara Ahmed, "Lesbian Feminism" *Living a Feminist Life* 213-234

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**Connections**

Required:

Lorraine Mayer, "A Return to Reciprocity" *Hypatia* 22.3 (2007) 22-42 \*

Maria Lugones, "On Complex Communication" *Hypatia*, 21.3 (2006) 75-85 \*

Barbara Tomlinson, "Category Anxiety and the Invisible White Woman: Managing Intersectionality at the Scene of Argument." *Feminist Theory*. \*

Sara Ahmed, "A Killjoy Survival Guide", "A Killjoy Manifesto", *Living a Feminist Life*. 235-268.