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**Summer 2008**

**Introduction to Women's Studies (WS100S)**

**Description of changes in the syllabus to incorporate issues of sustainability**

This course is intended to provide students with an overview of the perspectives, debates and scholarship within the interdisciplinary field of Women's Studies. The course is taught as a freshman seminar, with a maximum of 15 students. In the Piedmont Project seminar, I was struck with the importance of "attachment to place" in creating my own interest and engagement with issues of sustainability. I explored ways to incorporate "attachment to place" within the Women's Studies course, but could not find a satisfying approach to organize a semester of course materials. Fortunately, I was also inspired by the readings that we did in preparation for the Piedmont Project. One of the readings discussed the environmental problems arising from the cultural expectations in the U.S. surrounding fashion. The author argues that clothes that are out of style tend to be discarded even if they are in good condition. This practice not only adds to the problem of waste, but dovetails nicely with feminist debates about sartorial displays and constructions of gender. For my revised syllabus, I expanded the section of the course that students find most interesting – culture, beauty, bodies – and I added the topic of fashion. The course now focuses on the gender and sustainability implications of the systems of production and consumption that involve body modification and adornment: body image and body ideals, food, cosmetics, hairstyles and hair products, and fashion. Within each section, I have incorporated issues of sustainability (readings directly related to sustainability and the environment are marked with an asterisk on the syllabus).

The other major change in my syllabus is to use ecofeminism as a point of theoretical leverage for students to delve into key feminist debates. Comparing claims by ecofeminists with other feminist perspectives, students explore questions concerning gender inequality; intersections of gender with other sources of social inequality, particularly race, class and sexuality; and tensions surrounding transnational feminist organizing. Although the engagement with ecofeminism occurs in Week 1 of the course, I came to these readings after I developed the section on culture, beauty and bodies. "Ecofeminism" is thus one guiding set of perspectives for the course, but does not limit the scope of the approaches that I cover. I am optimistic that the incorporation of sustainability issues will provide additional tools for students to strengthen their critical analysis skills, will enable a greater understanding of the issues at the heart of Women's Studies, and will motivate students to live a more self-reflective life.

**Syllabus:**  
**Introduction to Women's Studies (WS100S):**  
**Gender, Bodies and the Environment**  
**Instructor: Irene Browne**

**Course Description**

This course is intended to provide students with an overview of the perspectives, debates and scholarship within the interdisciplinary field of Women's Studies. The course is organized around four overarching questions: "What is feminism?" "What is gender?" "How does the gender system affect our bodies, our lives and our planet?" "How are feminists organizing to produce social change?" Each section incorporates issues of sustainability and the environment (readings directly related to sustainability and the environment are marked with an asterisk on the syllabus):

- What is feminism? We delve into key feminist debates concerning gender inequality; intersections of gender with other sources of social inequality, particularly race, class and sexuality; and tensions surrounding transnational feminist organizing. In this section, we use ecofeminism to provide conceptual leverage in exploring these debates.
- What is gender? In this section, we discuss the social construction of gender and feminist critiques of essentialism. You will be introduced to feminist discussions of intersex and dichotomous gender systems; heteronormativity; constructions of gender in relation to race and ethnicity; and debates on consumerism and social inequality (Schor 2003). The consumerism debates highlight the environmental impact of economic and cultural systems through which gender and other status distinctions are constructed. You can refer to these debates as they cover the material in the next section.
- How does the gender system affect our bodies, our lives and our planet? We interrogate the gender and sustainability implications of the systems of production and consumption that involve body modification and adornment. The topics in this section are: body image and body ideals, food, cosmetics, hairstyles and hair products, and fashion.
- How are feminists organizing to produce social change? Specific readings and topics for this section will be selected by students as part of your final project on social activism. (See course requirements for project guidelines).

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Readings:

Kingsolver, Barbara. 2008. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*. HarperCollins.

All other readings are on e-reserve in the Emory Woodruff library.

Requirements:

- *Weekly memos*  
You are required to submit short (1 page) "memos" on the readings each week. Guidelines for the memos are available on Blackboard. The definition and example of the "feminist vocabulary" word you are assigned (see below) will constitute your memo for that week. Students can opt to take a midterm and final exam rather than write the weekly memos.
- *Feminist vocabulary*  
Students will be assigned concepts that appear in the readings that are central to the author's arguments or to feminist debates (e.g. heteronormativity; social construction; sustainability; posthuman). You should provide a definition of the word from an authorized source, write a "lay definition" for your peers in your own words, explain how the author uses the term in the reading, and give three examples to illustrate the concept.
- *Media assignment*  
You should find 3 media representations of a key issue or debate discussed the readings on bodies, beauty and fashion (weeks 5-10). Guidelines for the media assignment are available on Blackboard.
- *Final Project*  
For the final project, you are required to conduct research on a feminist activist organization or an environmental activist organization and provide an oral presentation of the project to the class.

You are also required to write a final paper on your project. You must draw upon at least 5 readings from the syllabus to discuss the gender and sustainability implications of your organization's activities and goals. For instance, students who select a feminist organization must discuss the sustainability implications as well as the gender implications of the organization. Students who select an environmental organization must discuss the gender implications and the sustainability implications.

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Grading

Participation:	8 pts.
Weekly memos:	40 pts.
Media assignment:	12 pts.
Presentation:	15 pts.
Final paper:	25 pts.

**\*\*\*Memos and assignments are due at the beginning of the class period.**  
**Late submissions will lose points.\*\*\***

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**PART I: WHAT IS FEMINISM?**

**Weeks 1-2: Feminism**

Baumgardner, Jennifer *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*.  
"Prologue: a Day Without Feminism."

\*Klawiter, Maren. 1999. "Racing for the Cure, Walking Women, and Toxic Touring: Mapping Cultures of Action within the Bay Area Terrain of Breast Cancer." *Social Problems* 46(1):104-126.

\*Pellow, David. 2002. "Environmental Racism: Inequality in a Toxic World." Pp. 147-64 in *Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities*, edited by Romero and Margolis.

\*Moghadam, Valentine. 2000. "Transnational Feminist Networks: Collective Action in an Era of Globalization." *International Sociology* 15 (1): 57-85.

Recommended

\*Buckingham, Susan. 2004. "Ecofeminism in the Twenty-first Century." *Geographical Journal* 170(2):146-154.

\*Hurley, Karen. 2008. "Is that A Future We Want? An Ecofeminist Exploration of Images of the Future in Contemporary Film." *Futures* 40(4): 346-59.

**PART II: WHAT IS GENDER?**

**Week 3: The Social Construction of Gender**

FILM: *One in One Thousand*

Preves, Sharon. 2003. "Beyond Pink and Blue" (Chap. 1) and "Stigma, Secrecy and Shame" (Chap. 3) in *Intersex and Identity*.

Lorber, Judith. 2002. "Heroes, Warriors and Burqas: A Feminist Sociologist's Reflections on September 11." *Sociological Forum* 17(3): 377-396.

\*Schor, Juliet. 2007. "In Defense of Consumer Critique: Revisiting the Consumption Debates of the Twentieth Century." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611, May, 16:32.

## **HOW DOES THE GENDER SYSTEM AFFECT OUR BODIES, OUR LIVES AND OUR PLANET?**

### **Week 4: Bodies**

Katz, Sydney. "The Importance of Being Beautiful."

Dittmar, Helga et al. 2006. "Does Barbie Make Girls Want to Be Thin?" *Developmental Psychology*.

\*Foek, Anton. 1997. "Sweatshop Barbie: Exploitation of Third World Labor." *The Humanist* 57: 9-13.

\*Toffoletti, Kim. 2006. Chapters 1 and 2 in *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body*. I.B. Tauris.

Hunter, Margaret. 2003. "Black and Brown Under the Knife." In *Race, Gender and the Politics of Skin Tone*.

### **Week 5: Food**

\*Kingsolver, Barbara. 2008. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*. HarperCollins.

\*Seager, Joni. 2003. "Pepperoni or Broccoli? On the Cutting Wedge of Feminist Environmentalism." *Gender, Place and Culture* 10(2):167-74.

\*Adams, Carol. 1991. "Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals." *Hypatia* 6(1): 125-147.

Hornbacher, Marya. 2006. *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia*. HarperCollins.

### **Week 6: Hair**

Harvey, Adia. 2008. *Doing Business with Beauty: Black Women, Hair Salons and the Racial Enclave Economy*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Rodgers, Joni. 2002. *Bald in the Land of Big Hair: A True Story*. HarperCollins.

### **Weeks 7-8: Cosmetics and Skin Products**

\*Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2008. "Yearning for Lightness: Transnational Circuits in the Marketing and Consumption of Skin Lighteners." *Gender & Society* 22(3):281-302.

Perry, Alex 2005. 'Could You Please Make Me a Shade Lighter?' *Time* Monday, November 28, 2005.

### **Weeks 7-8, cont.**

\*Mire, Amina. 2001. 'Skin-Bleaching: Poison, Beauty, Power, and the Politics of the Colour Line.' *Resources for Feminist Research* 28: 13–38.

\*Barrett, Julia. 2005. "The Ugly Side of Beauty Products." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 113(1).

\* Slicer, Deborah. 1991. "Your Daughter or Your Dog? A Feminist Assessment of the Animal Research Issue." *Hypatia* 6(1):108-124.

Online lecture by Kathy Peiss: "American Women and the Making of Modern Consumer Culture" at <http://www.albany.edu/jimmh/vol1no1/peiss.bak>

### **Weeks 9-10 Fashion**

FILM: *Walmart: The High Cost of Low Price.*

Featherstone, Liza. 2005. "Down and Out in Discount America." *The Nation* January 3.

\*Barbaro, Michael. 2007. "Wal-Mart Puts Some Muscle Behind Power-Sipping Bulbs." *The New York Times*, January 2.

Salzinger, Leslie. 2003. *Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories*. University of California Press.

Nelson, Adie. 2000. "The Pink Dragon is Female." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 24(2): 137-144.

Crane, Diana. 2000. *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity in Clothing*. Univ. of Chicago Press.

\*Schor, Juliet. 2003. "Cleaning the Closet." In *Sustainable Planet: Solutions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by Juliet Schor and Betsy Taylor.

#### Recommended

Brydon, Anne and Niessen (eds.) *Consuming Fashion*.

## **PART IV: HOW ARE FEMINISTS ORGANIZING TO PRODUCE SOCIAL CHANGE?**

### **Weeks 11-12: Activism**

#### Recommended

\*Hill, Julia Butterfly. 2001. *The Legacy of Luna: The Story of a Tree, a Woman, and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods*. HarperCollins.

(Student-selected readings for activism projects.)

\*Additional readings on sustainability

Ayero, Javier and Debora Swistun. 2008. "The Social Production of Toxic Uncertainty." *American Sociological Review* 73(3):357-379.

Kroll-Smith et al. 2000. *Illness and the Environment: A Reader in Contested Medicine*. NYU Press.

Bryson, Lois, Kathleen McPhillips and Kathryn Robinson. 2001. "Turning Public Issues into Private Troubles: Lead Contamination, Domestic Labor and the Exploitation of Women's Unpaid Labor in Australia." *Gender & Society* 15:754-72.