

Wgst 250: Women's Health Activism

Spring 2011 - T, Th 10:10-12:00pm – Leighton 330, Carleton College

Instructor: Dr. Meera Sehgal
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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday: 5-6pm;
Monday & Friday: 1:30-3:00pm & by appointment

Description

This course focuses on women's health movements and feminist activism around reproductive justice in the U.S.. Our explorations will be linked to a Carleton art gallery exhibit titled *Everybody!* that highlights the use of graphic teaching aids, polemical publications and artistic projects by women's health movements to teach women to celebrate "embodied self-knowledge". Thus, we'll be looking at, reflecting, practicing (to the extent possible) and reading about feminist political art in general and specifically in relation to women's health in the context of the 70s to the present. Our intellectual focus will be on the role of feminist activism in shifting the discourse around women's health from medicalized pathology to empowerment.

The course has a major civic engagement component that requires students to work with feminist non-profit organizations on campus or in and around Northfield or in the greater Twin Cities area in ways that:

- contribute to the organization's vision for social justice;
- deepens your intellectual understanding of feminist health activism from 2000 to present;
- enables you to situate the organization and its goals, mission, activities, style of functioning within the wider historical sweep of feminist health movements from the 1960s onwards.

In line with the emphasis on visuality in the *Everybody!* art exhibit, students will be encouraged to develop creative visual approaches to feminist health education in the community through the non-profit they work with. This can include making posters, pamphlets, websites, videos that will be useful for the non-profit. It also includes students, individually or collectively making "guerilla art" that broadcasts what they learn in this class into the world in anonymous, yet powerful ways (i.e. broadcast feminist critiques of the state of women's health and feminist visions of health and wellbeing).

Texts

1. Sandra Morgen. 2002. *Into Our Own Hands: The Women's Health Movement in the U.S., 1969-1990*. Rutgers University Press.
2. Terri Kapsalis. 1997. *Public Privates: performing gynecology from both ends of the speculum*. Durham: Duke University Press.
3. Jennifer Baumgardner & Amy Richards. 2005. *Grassroots: a field guide to feminist activism*. Farar, Straus & Giroux: New York.
4. Keri Smith. 2007. *The guerilla Art Kit: everything you need to put your message out there into the world*. Princeton Architectural Press.
5. ER – articles on Electronic Reserve. Password = wgst

Optional Texts (not required, but useful) – all on reserve in Gould Library

- Nancy Worcester & Mariamne Whatley (eds.). 2004. *Women's Health: Readings on Social, Economic and Political Issues*, Kendall/Hunt, 4th Ed.

- Jael Silliman, Marlene Fried, Loretta Ross, & Elena Gutierrez. 2004. *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice*, South End Press.

- Boston Women's Health Collective. 2005. *Our Bodies, Ourselves, A New Edition for a New Era*, Touchstone.

- Kathy Davis. 2007. *The making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How feminism travels across borders*. Duke University Press.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance, Participation & Making Guerilla art...15%
2. Civic Engagement & Field Journals40%
3. Final Paper.....20%
3. Final Visual Art Project.....15%
4. Theory, practice, activism & art Presentations.....10%

1. Attendance, Participation & Making Guerilla Art = 15%

An ability to communicate effectively is an important life skill. My goal is to help you develop good discussion techniques. Therefore, I expect everyone to be an active participant. This means being an attentive listener, addressing the questions asked, and promoting a positive atmosphere. We will strive to create a respectful and friendly atmosphere. I realize that people have different styles of participation. While evaluating your participation, I will consider not just your verbal contributions, but also your willingness to listen to others and your completion of occasional written assignments.

Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed, however, one unexcused absence during the course of the quarter. Any more than one unexcused absence will significantly affect your final attendance grade. Six unexcused absences will result in an F for this class. Participation includes attending all the additional events listed on the syllabus and engaging in guerilla art outside of class.

Kerri Smith defines guerilla art as “any anonymous work (including but not limited to graffiti, signage, performance, additions, and decorations) installed, performed, or attached in public spaces, with the distinct purpose of affecting the world in a creative or thought provoking way” (p. 11). You are required to engage individually or collectively in 1-2 instances of guerilla during the quarter. Please photograph your guerilla art (as and when you engage in it), email the photo to me and be prepared to show it in class.

2. Civic Engagement & Field Journals = 40%

This segment of the course is designed to provide students with opportunities for learning and working with organizations/sites/people in the community in ways that connect their course-work in WGST with feminist health issues in local community settings. This component provides a venue for students to put theory into practice, to participate in community based organizations and social change efforts, and to think critically about participating as feminists in activism and service learning. A handout with civic engagement possibilities will be circulated in class and students can sign up. You are required to spend on an average of 1-4 hours a week doing service learning.

Field Journals – taking notes while working at your site/agency – to be submitted after every visit. Minimum 4 journals required (detailed 6-8 double spaced pages each). Please refer to handout.

3. Final Paper = 20% - Due during exam week

In this paper, you will need to write a 10-15 page analysis of your civic engagement project. Build upon your field journals to write this paper, detailing how you educated yourself, how you decided what actions to take, how what you did affected you, and how you think it contributed to the public good. Your final paper will be graded on:

- How much effort you put into your civic engagement project
- How much you learned from it
- How meaningful your service was to your organization
- How well you address the issues below:

What is Feminist Activism?

Think critically and engage with the assigned readings to answer the question: what is/is not feminist activism? How do your definitions of feminist activism relate to your civic engagement site?

Description of your Civic Engagement Site/organization

Research your civic engagement site/organization collecting data (brochures, reports, people served, funding sources, organizational charts, interview other permanent workers) to further your understanding of who they are and what they do. Ideally, you should have done this before going to your site. Write a summary of your site. Include as much detail as possible to briefly describe your site to someone. Questions to consider: who do they serve? What needs are they fulfilling? How do clients learn about services? Who financially supports these services? What is the organizational structure – hierarchy, collective? Geographically, is their location of services important? What do you perceive as your organization's strengths? Challenges? Most importantly, how is what your organization does a form of feminist activism?

Community Impact – Why this work matters

How does the work of your organization impact the community? In what ways does it make a difference? How is it recognized? Who would be impacted if the work no longer existed? What can be done to ensure the longevity of the work?

What does feminist health related social change and social justice look like today?

Analyze the current political climate and discuss what feminist health related social change look like today. How does this current state relate to the work at your CE organization/site? What does this mean for your education and/or career paths after graduation? How do your past and present experiences inform your practice of feminist activism today? Do these experiences change how you see feminist activism as part of your future? What does this mean for feminist activism?

4. Final Visual Project/Poster= 15% - Due by last day of class

This visual project requires that you create a project in partnership/ relation with the organization you have worked with. While there is much flexibility in the project, the project should (1) serve the organization in some way and (2) be motivated by social change and/or social justice and (3) demonstrate feminist health activism. Examples could include: designing a poster or website, creating and facilitating a presentation or workshop, creating a newsletter or pamphlet, creating a series of buttons or bumper stickers..... All of these will be displayed around campus, put on the WGST website and then be donated to the organization you have worked with. So, it has to be on a product that is useful to the organization you have worked with. I am open to these being collective projects (please let me know in advance if you'd like to do a collective visual project).

Please write a 2-4 paragraphs reflecting on your visual art/project (these will be displayed on the WGST website) – what do you intend to convey in it; how is it connected to your civic engagement project; what inspired you to construct it in the way you did; do you think the visual medium is an effective means for feminist activism; does this piece connect in any way, shape or form to the feminist art movements that you've read about?

5. Theory, Practice, Activism & Art Presentations = 10%

Students will do a 20-30 minute presentation of their posters that includes both instruction and facilitating discussion that will engage your peers on an issue related to your civic engagement project. Week 8, 9 and 10 will be devoted to these presentations. This is an opportunity to teach about the activism that you have been working on at your organization and encourage others to become inspired on the issue. I expect the presenters to connect theory and practice as it relates to your civic engagement work. Think critically about what you want your audience to leave with – teach and facilitate accordingly. Be creative and have fun. You will need to:

- 1) prepare your classmates in advance through readings or activities;
- 2) illustrate the need for action on this issue;
- 3) facilitate discussion which effectively engages your audience.

Students can assign 1-2 readings to prepare the class for their presentation. Readings are due to me at least one week before your presentation.

Letter to Future Students interested in Academic Civic Engagement (optional – non-graded, but could be used for extra credit, if you'd like) – due during exam week

Based on your experience in this course, write a one page letter to future students interested in civic engagement about this course and your CE organization/site. What words of wisdom do you wish you had as you started this venture? What can you share to help students maximize their experience?

Schedule of Readings & Assignments

Week 1

T, Mar 29 – Introduction & Overview of Course

Film: *Women's Lib Demonstration NYC* (23 mins, 1970) or *Women Organize!* (2000, 30 mins)

Feminist Activism & Art

Th, Mar.31 – Required Reading:

- Morgan bk – ch. 1- Conceiving History
- ER – Johnson, “Revealed at last: the truth about your clitoris”
- ER – Faith Wilding, “The feminist art programs at Fresno and CalArt”

Optional Reading:

Kapsalis bk – ch.4 – On the status of genitals in medical textbook illustrations

Guest Speakers: Hayla Willis on constructa/vulva; Adrienne Falcon on civic engagement; Cindy Reuther, founder of all the first all-girls middle school in the U.S.

Friday, April 1st – Opening of *Everybody! Visual Resistance in Feminist Health Movements, 1969-2009*

On Display from April 1 – May 8, 2011 at the Carleton College Art Gallery

Everybody!, curated by artist Bonnie Fortune, presents work by artists and activists representing historical and visual exchanges around feminist health movements. The exhibition, featuring posters, ephemera, 'zines, multi-media art works and other visual artifacts, begins with the late 1960s and traces evolving creative responses to issues surrounding the health needs of women, men, and transgendered people.

7:30 - 9 pm Opening Reception featuring *Constructa/vulva* - Carleton Art Gallery

Constructa/vulva, honoring the 1970s Feminist Women's Health Movement, encourages audience members to create an idealized vulva with the assistance of human speculums. Featuring **Hyla Willis** and **Faith Wilding** from subRosa, a collective of interdisciplinary feminist artists.

Week 2

T, Apr.5 – Guest speaker, Laurel Bradley, Director of Exhibitions & Curator of the Carleton College Art Collection, on “Everybody! Feminist artists and women's health activism”

Required Reading:

- ER – Proude & Gerrad, “Feminism & Art in the 20th century”
- ER – Frueh, “The body through women’s eyes”
- Baumgartner & Richards bk – ch.6 - Creating Activism
- Guerilla Art Kit, pp. 1-27

Optional Reading:

- ER - Cotter, "Two nods to feminism long snubbed by curators"
- ER - Cornelia Butler, “Art & Feminism: an ideology of shifting criteria”
- ER – Valerie Smith, “Abundant evidence: Black women artists of the 60s & 70s”

Feminist Examinations of Gynecology & its Constitution of Female Bodies

Th, Apr.7 – Required Reading:

- Kapsalis bk - Introduction & ch. 1, The Performance of Pelvics (pp. 3-30)

- Morgan bk – ch. 2, Foundation stories & movement making (pp. 16-40)

Week 3

T, Apr. 12 – Required Reading:

- Kapsalis bk, ch. 2, Mastering the female pelvis: race & the tools of reproduction (31-60)
- Morgan bk, ch. 3, Women of color & the women's health movement (41-70)

Th, Apr. 14- Required Reading:

- Kapsalis bk, ch. 3, Cadavers, dolls & prostitutes (61-80)
- Morgan bk, ch. 4, Feminist health clinics as feminist practice (70-105)

Week 4

T, Apr 19 – Required Reading:

- Kapsalis bk, ch. 5, Annie Sprinkle's "Public Cervix Announcement" (113-130) and ch. 7, The other end of the speculum: Woman-centered alternative practice (161-180)

7:30 p.m. All required to attend talk by Terri Kapsalis, "*Gynecology for Men and Other Health Care Performances*". Location: 104 Boliou Hall

Wednesday, April 20, 8:00 p.m. All required to attend *The Hysterical Alphabet: a multimedia history*

Produced by Theater Oobleck

A history of hysteria delivered with humor and critical insight. Terri Kapsalis reports episodes from medical lore in a "hysterical" version of the alphabet with Danny Thompson's disquieting film collages and John Corbett's musical manipulations.

Location: Nourse Little Theater

Th, Apr.21 Required Reading:

- Morgan bk - ch. 6, The women's health movement, Doctors & Organized Medicine (120-152)

Week 5 – Prep work for Conducting Civic Engagement Projects

T, Apr.26 - Readings Resources for conducting workshops at LJA:

On body image and images of women as a health issue – here your focus would be on the sources of girls images of their bodies and the impact those images have on their health.

- Diane Levin & Jean Kilbourne, So Sexy, So soon: The new sexualized childhood.
- Sharon Lamb & Lyn Brown, Packaging Girlhood: rescuing our daughters from marketers schemes
- From Jean Kilbourne. 1999. *Deadly Persuasion: Why women and girls must fight the addictive power of advertising*. The Free Press read:
 - Ch. 1, "Buy this 24-year-old...";
 - Ch. 2, "In your face....";
 - Ch. 3, "Bath Tissue is like marriage"
- Watch Film: Jean Kilbourne's *Still Killing Us Softly* or *Beyond Killing Us Softly: the Strength to Resist*
- OBOS, Chapter 1, "Body Image", pp. 3-18
- From Nancy Worcester & Mariamne Whatley (eds.), *Women's Health: Readings on Social, Economic and Political Issues*, Kendall/Hunt, 5th Ed., 2008. Hereafter W/W:
 - Ch. 8, #101, Black, "Extreme Makeover: Feminist Edition", 422-424
 - #102, Beagle, "The pressures of perfectionism"
 - #103, Warbanski, "The ugly side of the beauty industry", 426-430
 - #104, "The high price of beauty"
- ER – Eve Ensler, "The Good Body"
- ER – From Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber. 2007. *The Cult of Thinness*. 2nd Ed. Oxford University Press, New York. Read:
 - Ch. 3, "Selling the body beautiful..."
 - Ch. 4, "There's no business like the body business..."

On Nutrition & eating disorders – here your focus would be on how nutrition, energy, metabolism and body image are special issues for women and girls. Read:

- from W/W, Ch. 8:
 - #92, “Nourishing ourselves”
 - #93, “Fatphobia”
 - #94, “Mental health issues related to dieting”
 - #95, “We’ll always be fat, but Fat can be Fit”
 - #96, “The obesity myth”
 - #99, “I’m not fat, I’m Latina”
 - #97, “Making a way outa no way”
 - #98, “Good enough”

- OBOS, Ch. 2, Eating Well

On Sexuality & Health

W/W, Chapter 9:

- #105, Pastor, “Education for Sexual intimacy and agency”
- #106, Advocates for Youth, “Adolescent sexual health in Europe & the U.S.”
- #107, Advocates for Youth, “Effective sex education”
- #108, Johnson, “The Truth About Your Clitoris”
- #109, Tolman & Higgins, “How being a Good Girl can be Bad for girls”
- #110, Douglass & Douglass, “The orgasm gap”
- #111, “The new view manifesto...”
- #112, Jordan, “A New Politics of Sexuality”
- #113, Porter, “Do ask, do tell”
- #114, Thyer, “For better lesbian health, fewer barriers to care”
- #115, Moser, “Health care without shame: some background for the practitioner”

Joni Blank,
OWL program website

Th, Apr.28 – Reading Resources for conducting Workshops at LJA

On Menarche & Menstruation

- Lorber & Moore, Ch. 5, “If a situation is defined as real: PMS & menopause”. In Judith Lorber & Lisa Jean Moore, *Gender and the Social Construction of Illness*, AltaMira Press, 2002.
- Articles from Nancy Worcester & Mariamne Whatley (eds.), *Women’s Health: Readings on Social, Economic and Political Issues*, Kendall/Hunt, 5th Ed., 2008. All from Ch. 5:
 - #65 Steinem, “If men could menstruate”
 - 66, “Female adolescence: puberty and growing up”
 - 67, “Just don’t go with the flow”
 - 68, “the selling of PMS”
 - 69, “To bleed or not to bleed”
- ER - “Menarche and the (Hetero) sexualization...” (4th Ed., W/W)
- ER - “Blood and Milk: constructions of female bodily fluids in western society” (4th Ed., W/W)
- ER, “Women, Menstruation and 19th Century Medicine” (W/W., 3rd Ed.)
- OBOS, p. 91, “The truth about SARAFEM”
- OBOS, pp. 641-643 “Endometriosis”
- W/W, Ch. 13, #9, “Endometriosis: New developments”
- Watch Films: *Period Piece* (20 minutes) & *Period: The End of Menstruation* (54 minutes)

Week 6 – Civic Engagement Project Week

Monday, May 2 – Mid Term Break

T, May 3 – No Class – On Site Project Execution & Visits

Conduct workshops at for 5-8th graders at LJA

Th., May 5 – No Class – On site Project Execution & Visits
Conduct workshops for 5-8th graders at LJA

Week 7

T, May 10 – Required Reading:
Baumgardner & Richards bk – Introduction, Prologue, ch. 1-4
Morgan bk – ch. 7, 8, 9

Th, May 12 – Required Reading:
Baumgardner & Richards bk – ch. 5-7 & Epilogue
Morgan bk – Ch. 9 & 10 & afterwork

Week 8 - Theory, Practice, Activism & Art Presentation Week

T, May 17 – Presentations

Th, May 19- Presentations

Week 9 - Theory, Practice, Activism & Art Presentation Week

T, May 24 - Presentations

Th, May 26 - Presentations

Week 10

May 31st – Last Day of Class
Remaining presentations & wrap up