WST V3311 Colloquium in Feminist Theory:  
Race, Gender, Bodies  
Spring 2013/Wednesdays 9-10:50am/Barnard 405

Course Description:

What is the significance of the body for feminist theory? Why and in what ways does the body matter? The body has been of crucial importance to feminist theorists and to feminist activism more broadly. It has been the subject of contentious debate and disagreement, as well as a productive locus of protest, alliance, collective action and articulation between and among women as political agents. In this course, we will use the preceding questions to frame our exploration of feminist theory as it engages the body. Our discussions will focus on how the body functions as both a model for theorizing broader social and political processes, and at the same time, as a process of embodiment that constitutes individuals in differential ways. The specific site of our engagements will be the black body and its particular historical and cultural salience in the context of the US. The goal of our explorations will be to theorize the link between how we live our bodies on an everyday basis and the various practices that shape and produce their meaning and significance in society. Each of us has not one, but multiple bodies marked by an array of differences – none of which are fixed or unchanging, and none of which ever wholly or solely determine our identities. Looking at how feminists have theorized the black body and how racialized modalities of gendered and bodily difference (as well as ambiguity) have been taken up by women in their articulation of contestatory forms of identification and resistance, our goal is to understand how feminists use theory to question dominant configurations of power and the construction of social difference, as well as how to marshal it for our own purposes both within and beyond the academy.

Course Requirements:

1. **Class attendance is mandatory.** Failure to attend more than two classes for reasons other than a documented medical or other emergency will jeopardize your ability to pass the course.

2. **Electronic Response/Blog Posts** - You are required to post a total of **seven** thoughtful and carefully formulated electronic responses. In Section I of the course (“Critical Frameworks”), you will post a working definition of each of the four key terms that will be defined more extensively in your glossary. Postings will be made every other week as specified in the schedule of readings and discussions. In Section II of the course (“Sites of Interpretation”), you will post three responses to blog prompts composed by each of the student groups leading the discussion each week. You **may not respond to a blog post on the readings for which you sign up to lead a discussion.** Your responses should articulate an original point of view or elaborate on points made by others in the course of our discussions in class or online. Postings should be made on the “Discussions Board” tab on Courseworks **no later than 5pm on the day before they are due.** Postings will be worth 20% of your final grade.

**Please note:** It is my firm policy not to accept any late posts or papers accept for reasons of documented medical or personal emergency. Papers submitted after they are due will be returned ungraded and unread.
3. **Glossary.** Each student is responsible for a five to seven-page glossary due on **Friday, March 15th.** Please submit all papers electronically via email to your TA, Alexandra Hyde: ah3105@columbia.edu. This paper will be a collaborative exercise that will be written together with a fellow student. In this assignment you are to explain and define your understanding of the core concepts of race, identity, gender and the body based on your readings, lectures and class discussions, and will constitute a revision and elaboration of your understanding of the terms discussed in your response posts. This assignment will be described in a detailed handout distributed in class. Your glossary will be worth 30% of your final grade.

4. **“Sparking” a Class Discussion** - Together in a group of approximately 5 of your classmates, each student will be responsible for preparing and leading one discussion with the larger class on a set of texts in Section II of the syllabus. This assignment will involve meeting together prior to your class session to review the reception of and criticism published in response to the primary texts discussed in class that week. On the basis of this research you will formulate a series of questions that establish a link between the concepts and theories of gender, race and the body discussed in Section I of the class, and use these questions to “spark” a 50-minute discussion among your fellow students. You will initiate the discussion online by posting a blog prompt to which the rest of the class will respond online (your prompt must be posted by midnight on the Sunday prior to your discussion). A written copy of your discussion questions should be emailed to me by 7pm on the day before your class presentation. A detailed description of this assignment will also be distributed in class. You will be graded on your level of preparation and leadership of the presentation; on your ability to engage your classmates; on your knowledge of the material and as well as the insightfulness of your own interpretation of the texts. Your discussion facilitation will be worth 20% of your final grade.

5. **Close Reading Paper** - Each student will prepare a close reading that theorizes the conceptualization of the body presented in two of the required readings for the course. A selection of text excerpts will be distributed April 24th and the format of the paper will be discussed in detail on May 1st. Your final paper is due on **Monday, May 13th. Once again, absolutely no late papers will be accepted.** A final word of caution: please be advised that you will not be allowed to pass the course if this final paper is not of satisfactory quality. You final paper will be work 30% of your final grade.

**Academic Honesty:**

**Barnard Honor Code:** Students affirm that all work turned in is their own, and that they have fully and accurately cited every written source, including web-based sources, in their writing. Students that do not comply with the Honor Code will face appropriate sanctions.

**Required Texts:**
The following texts are available for purchase at Book Culture (536 West 112th Street). All other article length texts are available on Courseworks (click on the “Class Files” link at the upper left of the screen and you’ll find the texts in the “Shared Files” folder).

- Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*
- Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*
- Deborah Willis, *Black Venus*
- Danzy Senna, *Caucasia*
Schedule of Readings:

**I. CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS: A Feminist ‘Toolkit’ for Theorizing the Body**

**Wed., Jan. 23rd**  
*Course Introduction*  
Glossary Prompt Distributed in Class – Select writing partners

**Wed., Jan. 30th**  
*Biological/Physiological Bodies*  
Elizabeth Grosz, “Bodies and Knowledges,” “Body-Cities,” “Volatile Bodies”  
*Response post: What is a ‘body’?*

**Wed., Feb. 6th**  
*Body Boundaries*  
Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, Chapters 6-10  
Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Selected excerpts

**Wed., Feb. 13th**  
*Bodily Difference: Gender and Sexual Difference*  
Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women”  
Judith Butler, “Bodies that Matter,” “Performatives Acts and Gender Constitution”  
*Response post: What’s the difference between gender and sexual difference?*

**Wed., Feb. 20th**  
*The Gendered Production of Racial Difference*  
Hortense Spillers, “Momma’s Baby, Poppa’s Maybe”  
Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, Chapters 1, 2 and 6  
Beth Coleman, “Race as Technology”

**Wed., Feb. 27th**  
*The Social Construction of Racialized Bodies*  
Evelyn Hammonds, “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality”  
Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race”  
*Response post: What is ‘race’?*

**Wed., March 6th**  
*Intersectionality and the Mutual Constitution of Racialized and Gendered Subjects*  
Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” and “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color”  
Barbara Fields, “What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly”

**Wed., March 13th**  
*From Bodies to Subjects: Identity, Subjectivity and the Politics of Interpellation*  
Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” and “Who Needs Identity”  
Louis Althusser, “Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects”  
Teresa de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender”  
*Response post: What is ‘identity’?*

**Glossaries Due: Friday, March 15th**

**Wed., March 20th**  
SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
II. SITES OF INTERPRETATION: Why Do Black Bodies Matter?

Wed., March 27th

Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerrotypes”
Cherise Smith, “Rethinking Carrie Mae Weems”
Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience*, Chptrs. 1-2
*Blog post due

Wed., April 3rd

Anne Cheng, “Skin Deep: Josephine Baker and the Colonial Fetish”
Sander Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies”
Deborah Willis, *Black Venus* – Selected essays TBA
*Blog post due

Wed., April 10th

Film: “Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire”
bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze”
Manthia Diawara, “Black Spectatorship”
Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”
*Blog post due

Wed., April 24th

Danzy Senna, *Caucasia*
Film: “Good Hair”
Kobena Mercer, “Black Hair/Style Politics”
*Blog post due

** Close Reading Prompt Distributed in Class **

Wed., May 1st

Jesse Weaver Shipley, “Circulation, Repetition, and Digital Fatigue in Ghana's Azonto Dance Craze.”
Manthia Diawara, “1960s in Bamako: Malick Sidibé and James Brown”
Videolink: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfcKzQg9IxU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfcKzQg9IxU)
*Close Reading Workshop

** Final Close Reading Papers due Monday, May 13th**