Professor’s contact information:

Pat Boling  
Office: BRNG Hall 2256, Phone: 494-3711, Email: boling@purdue.edu 
Office Hours: Monday 1:30-3:00, Tuesday 3:00-5:00 pm, & by appointment 
*Let’s try to talk about ideas and interpretations face-to-face, not by email. Let me know if you’d like to talk outside my scheduled OH

Course Description

The unifying theme of this course is embodied experience, knowledge, and thinking. We will read broadly from texts dealing with women’s bodies, modes of disciplining the body such as diet, exercise, cosmetic surgery, images of beauty; differences along axes of gender, class, race and sexual orientation; and issues related to standpoint theory, social constructions of gender, and gender as performance. The course starts out by discussing what feminist theory is and does, and attending to feminist research methods and questions. If there is a “slant” to all this, it is probably a somewhat social science-y, philosophical approach to feminist theory, reflecting my background as a political scientist and theorist--but I endeavor to be mindful of the variety of backgrounds from which students come to this course and inclusive of many theoretical and methodological approaches. I have also invited a few scholars from across the disciplines to do guest appearances, in order to provide you with some exposure to diverse approaches to doing feminist research.

Required texts (ordered from University bookstore and Folletts’, or buy them on line)


Kirsch, Gesa, Ethical dilemmas in feminist research: the politics of location, interpretation, and publication, Albany: State University of New York Press 1999 ISBN: 0-7914-4210-1


Course Requirements:

1. **Class Participation:** The quality of seminars is dependent on the preparedness and creativity of the group in attendance. Much of the quality of this seminar will depend upon our engagement with the texts, as a group, and bringing our own thinking and research to group discussions, so I expect you to attend regularly, prepared to discuss the assigned readings, and to speak up when you have something to say (which should be at least occasionally—you’re on notice, shrinking violets!). We’ll talk about discussion ethics in class—but remember the image of a lively conversation going on around a dinner table or with a group of friends: people listen to and react to one another’s ideas, stories, and points, right? That’s what we’re aiming for!
   - Please note that I expect you to attend every class. Having said that, no one’s perfect, and missing one week of classes will not cause a problem. But if you miss two or three classes in a course that only has 12 substantive meetings plus 2 weeks of presentations, you’re missing a substantial chunk of the class. So do your best: there’s a lot to the saying, “half of life is showing up.” If there’s some unforeseen crisis, e.g., an act of nature like a flu pandemic or a blizzard, or a personal one like appendicitis or a death in the family, I will work with you to try to make sure you get what you need to out of the class, and recalibrate my expectations about attendance.

2. **Reader reports:** using the format below, please write reader reports addressing the readings for any 3 class meetings between September 1 and November 17. These must be handed in electronically no later than 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday. Please keep a portfolio that includes all of your reader reports and other written work, including your exams and papers and any reflections or responses that might be assigned from time to time in class. For your reader report, please use this format:

   1) What are the author’s most important arguments? how convincing are they?
   2) How does the author make and defend these arguments, in terms of rhetoric, evidence, explanation, etc?
   3) What is the article, chapter or book contributing to feminist methods or theory that is new or important?
   4) How did the reading compare with other works we have read so far, as well as to other works that were assigned for this week?
   5) What are your criticisms or comments about the reading? (You might want to deal with a book by breaking it down into smaller chunks, e.g., chapters or sections, and spend a bit of time reckoning with core ideas and arguments in a careful, detailed way. Generally reader reports, whether they cover several articles or chapters or a single book, will come to 3-5 single spaced pages.)

3. **Little paper** that reviews research inspired by feminist theory and/or feminist approaches to conducting research: I’ll pass out a couple of recent journal TOCs and explain this assignment fully in class on August 25th.
4. **Midterm:** You will write in response to several essay questions dealing with materials in the first part of the course. The exam will be passed out in class on **October 13**, and is due by 10:00 pm on **October 18**. Late exams and papers will lose 5% of their face value grade for every day they are turned in late, including holidays and weekends.

5. **Paper:** You will be expected to write a paper on a topic of your choosing, drawing on appropriate theoretical, philosophical, and feminist texts and, if appropriate, pertinent research and data. I anticipate that most of you will write about topics that come from your home departments or main areas of interest and expertise, and that you’ll end up teaching me a lot about literature, American studies, COM, and so on.
   - The key to making this assignment one you learn something from and for which you do some interesting original research is to identify a genuinely interesting topic and figure out a feasible approach to it. With that in mind, please come to my office hours and discuss your topic with me no later than **October 13**.
   - The papers themselves are due by 10:00 pm on Tuesday December 16. Since you’ll be giving oral presentations of your papers in class on December 1st and 8th, you will want to have the lineaments of the arguments in place by then, or it will be a pretty painful experience! The papers should be about 20-25 pages in length, well-written, fully referenced (MLA style is fine, other styles are OK if you check with me first), and drawing on appropriate sources.

**Grading:**

- Reader reports (3 times during the semester) 15%
- Participation (attendance) 10
- Little paper reviewing feminist-inspired research (9/8) 15
- Midterm (10/18) 30
- Final paper (12/16) & presentation (12/1 and 12/8) 30

~CLASS SCHEDULE~

*Most readings listed here are either from assigned books or on Blackboard; if a reading is marked with an asterisk, it’s a PDF file on Blackboard. There are a few things that are only available as handouts, or on reserve, and I’ll let you know about them when we get to them.*

**August 25 Introductions!**

- Discuss: what is feminist theory? What’s it good for? Is there any such thing as feminist methods, and if so, what makes a method “feminist”?
- Little papers reviewing research inspired by feminist theorizing to be explained and assigned today
Sept 1  Feminist research and theory

- Part I of Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, eds., Feminist Perspectives on Social Research (pp. 3-94)

Sept 8  Feminist research and theory, con’t

- Little papers reviewing research inspired by feminist theorizing due today (explained in class on August 25); we’ll discuss these for about half the class
- Chapters 12, 13 and 15 of Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, eds., Feminist Perspectives on Social Research
- Visit from Patsy Schweickart, ENG and WS (at 7:00 pm)

Sept 15  Feminist research and methods

- Chapters 14, 16, 17-21 of Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, eds., Feminist Perspectives on Social Research
- Visits from Cheryl O’Brien, POL; Ximena Arriaga, PSY

Sept 22  Feminist methods and class, race, gender, sexuality

- Part 2 of Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, eds., Feminist Perspectives on Social Research (pp. 101-204)
- Visits from Evie Blackwood, ANTH and Venetria Patton, ENG and AAS

Sept 29  Social Construction of bodies

- Young, “Lived Body vs. Gender,” “Throwing Like a Girl,” and "Breasted Experience" (chapters 1, 2 and 5 of On female body experience)
- Visit from Jennifer Freeman Marshall, ENG and WS

Oct 6  Social construction of bodies, panopticons, and boob jobs

These chapters from Weitz, The Politics of Women’s Bodies, 3rd edition:
1. “A History of Women's Bodies,” Rose Weitz;
2. “Believing Is Seeing: Biology as Ideology,” Judith Lorber;

Also read: *Kathryn Pauly Morgan, “Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women’s Bodies,” Hypatia v. 6 n. 3, 25-53
Oct 13  Bodies and race, ethnicity and poverty
  •  Read
    •  *Uttal, "Nods that Silence"
  •  Also read these chapters from Weitz, The Politics of Women’s Bodies, 3rd edition:
    9. "'Get Your Freak On': Sex, Babies, and Images of Black Femininity,” Patricia Hill Collins;
  •  Midterms handed out today, due Monday October 18 at 10:00pm

Oct 20  Rejecting dualisms, masculinity, “dude you’re a fag”
  Read
  •  Also read these chapters from Weitz, The Politics of Women’s Bodies, 3rd edition:
    5. “Affronting Reason,” Cheryl Chase;
    20. "'Holding Back': Negotiating a Glass Ceiling on Women's Muscular Strength,” Shari L. Dworkin;
  •  Don’t forget, midterms should be sent to me (as attached Word files please) by 10:00 pm on Monday October 18


Oct 27  Thin bodies
  •  Bordo, Introduction, Anorexia Nervosa, Reading the Slender Body, “Material Girl,” and Postmodern Subjects (all from Unbearable Weight)

Nov 3  Fat Bodies
  •  Also read this chapter from Weitz, The Politics of Women’s Bodies, 3rd edition:

- Joy Nash's "A Fat Rant" (7:45 minutes; we’ll watch this in class). Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUTJQlBI1oA

**Additional resources**: Paul Campos' 45 minute speech on "Fat Identity and Politics," given on January 26, 2010 at UCLA’s Center for the Study of Women. Campos is the author of "The Obesity Myth: Why America's Obsession with Weight is Hazardous to Your Health." In this talk, he discusses efforts to make fat people thin, through weight-loss diets, drugs, and surgery. Campos sees weight as a political and social issue and notes that body size is often used as a tool of discrimination, especially against women. Recent discussions of body weight have been dominated by health policy concerns over the so-called obesity epidemic. Despite a long tradition of feminist critique of fat hatred as a problem of patriarchy, there has been very little critique of the growing emphasis on the importance of slenderness for health reasons. Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-GgXY0oLjI

Nov 10  Performing gender
- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (read all but chapter 2, Prohibition, Psychoanalysis and the Heterosexual Matrix)

**Additional resource**: Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*

Nov 17  Ethics of feminist research
- Gesa Kirsch, *Ethical dilemmas in feminist research* (OK to skip chapter 5, do read intro)

Nov 24  Thanksgiving break

Dec 1  student presentations

Dec 8  student presentations

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NB: in the case of a major campus emergency, course deadlines, requirements, and percentages, may be subject to changes that may be necessitated in the event there is a revised semester calendar. In case of an emergency, look for changes in the syllabus (course requirements, etc.) on Blackboard, or contact me at boling@purdue.edu, or by phone at 494-3711.

**Plagiarism**: do not borrow sources without citing them properly, whether from books, articles, websites, or anywhere else. Cite work appropriately (major ideas should be attributed to their source), and put quotations in quotation marks. If you are discovered plagiarizing, you will receive an “F” for the assignment and I will turn you in to the head of the department or the Dean of the Graduate School (as the case may be).