

**INTERSECTIONALITY AND WOMEN'S HEALTH:  
Ethnographic Approaches to Race, Class, Gender, and "Difference"  
Anthropology/WGSS 451b/651b  
Monday 1:30-3:20 pm  
Anthropology, 10 Sachem Street, Room 212  
Spring 2014**

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**THIS IS A TECHNOLOGY-FREE COURSE,  
UNLESS YOU ARE USING A KINDLE EDITION.**

**Course Description**

This interdisciplinary seminar, designed for students in Anthropology, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, Sociology, and related fields, explores contemporary intersectionality theory—namely, how the intersections of race/class/gender and other axes of oppression (e.g., based on age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, etc.) affect women's lives, health, and well-being in the contemporary United States. In this course, feminist approaches to intersectionality theory will first be introduced. Then intersectionality will be explored through eight anthropological ethnographies, which highlight two broad themes: a) Poverty, Pregnancy, and Parenthood, and b) Sex, Substances, and Syndemic Suffering.

In this student-led, feminist reading group, we will think, talk, and write about women's lives as portrayed in eleven key books, which examine the multiple forms of oppression faced by poor women/of color in the United States. Through this reading group, students in this course will not only gain broad exposure to a number of exigent women's health issues in the U.S., but will examine the methods of feminist ethnography, policy debates, and the interdisciplinary theorizing of black feminist, medical anthropological, and public health scholars.

In particular, this course will demonstrate how anthropologists studying women's health issues in the U.S. have contributed to social and feminist theorizing through humanistic engagement in women's lives. Topics they have highlighted in their work include reproductive health disparities; poor women's elevated risk in the era of HIV/AIDS; the neglected health problems of girls and adolescents; and the physical and social suffering of minority women in a racist, classist, sexist society. Feminist anthropologists have contributed considerably to theoretical debates about women's agency, oppression, suffering, and resistance to (dis)ease-producing social relations produced by poverty, racism, and patriarchy. By doing so, they have produced a rich corpus of scholarship on

poor/minority women's lives, which complements the theoretical work of black feminist scholars in other disciplines.

Students in this course will be graded on seminar participation, leadership of one seminar discussion, weekly reading responses, two book reviews, and a final comparative book/film essay.

### Course Assignments

**1) Keeping Up, Being There, Breaking the Silence:** This seminar is intended to be a Tuesday morning, feminist reading group, where we engage each other, courteously and constructively, in a thoughtful and reflexive conversation about the relationship between race/class/gender/etc. and women's health in the U.S., as exemplified through a series of eleven feminist texts, plus an additional volume, to be read for the final comparative review paper. Clearly, twelve books in one semester constitutes a heavy reading load; thus, your major assignment is simply keeping up with these readings, being there each Monday afternoon, and "breaking the silence," individually and collectively, about many important issues of racism, poverty, and gender oppression that are rarely discussed, including at Yale. Everyone is expected to participate in these conversations, which are intended to be very friendly and welcoming, but nonetheless thought-provoking and rigorous. You will be evaluated in this course in large part on your classroom engagement over the course of the semester. **20% of the total grade**

**2) Weekly Responses:** Each week, Marcia will post a question about the forthcoming book in dropbox. Each class member will have an individual dropbox folder. By noon on the day of class, please post a one-paragraph (150-300 word) response to the question in your dropbox folder. These paragraphs should demonstrate your close reading of the text, in preparation for class discussion. The first weekly response will be due for the second book, *Black Feminist Thought*. **20% of the total grade, 2% each**

**3) Leading a Seminar Discussion:** Each participant in this seminar will lead the discussion once during the course of the semester. We will decide this schedule on the first day of class. As discussion leader, you are expected to *briefly* (no more than 10-15 minutes) summarize the book in an informal but structured manner. (Please, no reading of prepared written comments. Also, no chapter-by-chapter summaries. Just highlighting of major arguments, themes, and issues.) Please withhold any critical comments for the classroom discussion that follows. Pedagogically, we need to find the value in each book, rather than only looking for faults. As part of your role as discussion leader, you should construct a list of what you consider to be the 5 key questions raised by the book. The first question should deal with methodological issues, and the last should deal with the book's policy implications. The three middle questions should be thematic, asking about the book's major arguments, thematic tropes, and key findings. All questions should be indicated with a descriptive subhead. Please send your list of questions to [marcia.inhorn@yale.edu](mailto:marcia.inhorn@yale.edu) by 5 pm Sunday evening. We will go over the questions together by email, and Marcia will print out for the class on Monday. Your job as seminar leader is to systematically cover these questions during the course of the two-hour

discussion, as well as run the seminar more generally. **15%, including 5% for question construction, 10% for seminar leadership**

**4) Two Book Reviews:** During the course of the semester, each student will write two, 2-page, single-spaced review/analysis papers, focusing on two books from different sections of the course. The first book review *must be turned in before spring break*. The first page should a) begin with an interesting introduction, which will grab the reader's attention, b) provide a brief description of study sites and methodology, and c) be followed by two to three paragraphs describing the book's major arguments, themes, and findings. This review section should end near the top of the second page. Most of the second page should be devoted to your analysis of a) the book's major strengths, b) the book's major weaknesses, and c) finally, intended audiences—who would benefit from reading the book, including which academic audiences (and possibly lay audiences as well). Please write in the third-person. No personal pronouns (eg, "I think...") are included in professional book reviews. An example of a brief book review will be provided. These short book reviews are preparation for the longer comparative book review. Book reviews are to be printed out and turned in at the beginning of class on the day that the book is being discussed. Do not review the book for which you are leading the seminar discussion. Graduate students in the course will be expected to write three reviews, one for each section of the course. **20% total, 10% each**

**5) Comparative Book/Film Review Essay:** Each participant in this seminar will write one, final 15-page, double-spaced paper, comparing three works: 1) one of the ethnographies read in class (other than those used for previous book reviews), 2) one of the ethnographies from the additional reading list, and 3) *either* one of the films ("Precious," "Winter's Bone"). After a brief introduction, the essay should summarize and critically analyze (i.e., find strengths and weaknesses) each book and movie (about 3 pp each). But the final third of the essay (about 5 pp) should be explicitly comparative, synthetic, and thematic, examining the books'/film's similarities and differences and attempting to outline some common theme(s). The strengths and weaknesses of each book/film can either be included in the individual reviews, or in this comparative section. A brief conclusion is also recommended, and should identify academic and lay audiences for the works. References to other books are allowed in the essay, but are not required. Please cite the works in a brief bibliography at the end. This printed essay is due *on Monday, May 5 by 5 pm*, in my Anthropology department mailbox. Graduate students will be given an additional 5 pp, for a 20-page essay. **25% of total grade**

### **Schedule of Readings**

(All books are available at Yale Bookstore and on 24-hour reserve in Bass Library)

#### **Part I. Intersectionality in Black Feminist Thought**

Jan. 13, Introduction to the Course

Jan. 17, Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

Jan. 27, Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*

Feb. 3, Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*

## **Part II. Poverty, Pregnancy, and Parenthood**

Feb. 10, Leith Mullings and Akala Wali, *Stress and Resilience: The Social Context of Reproduction in Central Harlem*

Feb. 17, Alyshia Galvez, *Patient Citizens, Immigrant Mothers: Mexican Women, Public Prenatal Care, and the Birth Weight Paradox*

Feb. 24, Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*

Mar. 3, Kathryn Edin and Timothy J. Nelson, *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City*

Mar. 24, Film, "Precious"

## **Part III. Sex, Substances, and Syndemic Suffering**

Mar. 31, Renee White, *Putting Risk in Perspective: Black Teenage Lives in the Era of AIDS*

Apr. 7, Sabrina Marie Chase, *Surviving HIV/AIDS in the Inner City: How Resourceful Latinas Beat the Odds*

Apr. 14, Emily Mendenhall, *Syndemic Suffering: Social Distress, Depression, and Diabetes among Mexican Immigrant Women*

Apr. 21, Miriam Boeri, *Women on Ice: Methamphetamine Use among Suburban Women*

April 28, Final class party and film, "Winter's Bone"

May 5, Comparative Book Review due, in mailbox by 5 pm

## **Additional Ethnographies for Final Comparative Essay**

- 1) Khiara Bridges, *Reproducing Race: An Ethnography of Pregnancy as a Site of Racialization*
- 2) Pamela Ericksen, *Latina Adolescent Childbearing in East Los Angeles*
- 3) Sandra Lane, *Why Are Our Babies Dying? Pregnancy, Birth, and Death in America*
- 4) Robin Levi and Ayelet Waldman, *Inside This Place, Not of It: Narratives from Women's Prisons*
- 5) Leith Mullings, *On Our Own Terms: Race, Class, and Gender in the Lives of African American Women*
- 6) Erica Prussing, *White Man's Water: The Politics of Sobriety in a Native American Community*
- 7) Carolyn Smith-Morris, *Diabetes among the Pima: Stories of Survival*
- 8) Elisa Sobo, *Choosing Unsafe Sex: AIDS-Risk Denial Among Disadvantaged Women*
- 9) Claire Sterk, *Fast Lives: Women Who Use Crack Cocaine*
- 10) Claire Sterk, *Tricking and Tripping: Prostitution in the Era of AIDS*