

## WS 3321: Family Violence

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**Office Hours:** Wed. 9am-10:30am  
**Office Hours Location:** LART 233

**Asynchronous / Online: Spring 2023**



“Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”

BELL HOOKS

### Course Description

Drawing from the disciplines of Women’s Studies, Black and Chicana/o Studies, American Indian Studies, Disability Studies, Psychoanalysis, Political Science, Social Work, and History we will consider family violence using an interdisciplinary and intersectional frame. This means family violence will be examined in the context of sex/gender, racial formation, class structure, sexuality, and ability to understand victimization, perpetration, and institutional responses. In short, this course utilizes an interdisciplinary, transnational, and intersectional approach to understand how and why family violence occurs, methods to prevent and detect violence, and how communities respond to family violence. We will also explore how gendered socialization and everyday practices in media, law, medicine, and education contribute to violence within families---and what steps we can use to end family violence.

### Extended Course Description and Roadmap

A premise of this course is that the family is a gendered institution. This does not imply that families are made up only of women and men, girls and boys, but rather, the family, as an institution, is organized and established by power. Said in another way, educational, religious, legal, social, and political customs, which are also gendered, work to shape ideologies around the family and our experiences within them. These are also impacted, conditioned, and altered by the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and ability, which interact to determine how we think about families. In short, the family is constructed differently across time and space.

“Powerless women have always used mothering as a channel – narrow but deep – for their own human will to power, their need to return upon the world what it has visited on them.”  
Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* p. 38

After reviewing the syllabus during Week 1, Week 2 will commence with a close reading of Hannah Arendt’s distinction between violence and power. After arriving in the U.S. as a refugee escaping Nazism in the 1930’s, homeless and stateless, Hannah Arendt set out to understand the nature of human freedom and the rise of murderous totalitarianism. While not explicitly concerned with *gendered* power – or family relations – Arendt’s insight will give us a frame to think theoretically about how power is often used interchangeably with violence. As a contrast, we will consider how violence works to shore up a power that has lost its legitimacy. This is an important distinction so that we may not fall into the trap of reproaching *power*. Instead, we will learn to reproach and distinguish the *impersonation of power*, which is violence. We will also consider the origins of uncontested despotism from which the *paterfamilias* rules.

After learning to differentiate between power, force, authority, strength, and violence, we will explore ancient and modern accounts of the family as a political and social institution. In this section of the course, we will read various accounts of justice in the family from both the ancient and modern world. This includes accounts of the family as pre-political or non-political, on the one hand, and a political phenomenon, on the other hand. For example, we will read about the gendered effects of the family on the development of children’s potential (Socrates), the importance of the family for the moral development of classes (Plato), essentialist and traditional views of women and men in the family (Rousseau), and theories that describe the family as an institution bound up with both mastery and subservience (Marx and Engels). While the family is seldom thought about as a violent institution, it’s worth considering that women and children are more likely to be killed, battered, or abused within their own families than anywhere else in the world.

On this same thread, during Week 4, we will consider the external forces that speak loudest about protecting and supporting “families” while hindering the development of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and poor families. For example, we will read Dorothy Roberts’ account of enslavement and the ensuing generational trauma left on families ranging from rape and forced birthing to child separation and neglect. We will compare this with the recent plight of undocumented families forcibly separated by Border Patrol as part of a pilot program started right here in El Paso. These examples help us to unpack “romantic” conceptions of the family which are infused with protectionism, privilege, and whiteness. In other words, as Black families (first, through slavery and later through incarceration) and undocumented families (through forced separation and deportation) are torn apart, we consider the racial dimensions of family violence.

During Week 5, we will address the public and private realms of society to examine how family violence remains hidden and how stories of family abuse are portrayed in popular culture. We will look specifically at the story of La Llorona and La Malinche from a Chicana feminist perspective to challenge patriarchal attitudes about women. We will also include Black feminist accounts of what Patricia Hill Collins describes as “controlling images” that trap women through their sexuality and fertility. Next, we learn about the so-called “private realm” of family, sex, and reproduction and its inextricable link to the state (marriage/divorce, parental rights, inheritance of property), exposing legal, social, and political traps for women to fall into. This inequality is further explored in Week 6 where we see how economic dependency can make it hard to escape physical, sexual or psychological abuse. In Week 7 we study the origins of domestic violence law and the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality. For example, we will learn how “domestic privacy” came to replace the “chastisement prerogative,” and how the racialized double-standard for wife beating emerged in the postbellum South.

For Week 8 and 10, we will do a deep dive into the gendering of violence. We will consider patriarchy from a Hobbesian perspective (i.e. the Monarchy as an extension of patriarchal authority) and contrast Hobbes’ views with Locke and Rousseau. We will also read Adrienne Rich’s account of violence and mothering and consider Chicana feminist contributions around machismo. During these weeks we will also explore the gendered dynamics of same-sex violence, counteracting and questioning the idea that violence only occurs in heterosexual relationships. In part, this examination looks to expose the heterosexist and cisgendered frame from which we come to consider family violence so that we may properly identify behaviors of abuse that do not fit mainstream perceptions of victims (women) and perpetrators (men).

The final Block of the course looks at global accounts of family violence that are connected to male supremacy. For example, during Week 11, we will look at the practice of foot binding, which continued for over a millennium in China. This form of mutilation was done to girls by their mothers to ensure marriageability. During Week 12, we examine the similarities of foot binding to the tradition of Suttee. Suttee is an outlawed practice in India, where a woman (or girl) must throw herself onto the funeral pyre of her dead husband as a final expression of loyalty to him and his family. In places where it is common for young girls to be married off to elderly men, this amounts to the self-immolation of children as a sacrifice to patriarchal authority. Finally, during Week 13, we will look at female genital mutilation, a gruesome practice still being performed today to, similarly, “ensure marriageability,” and enhance beauty and cleanliness.

The conclusion of the course will look at interventions into family violence. We will study several justice movements that use theories of intersectionality to combat the problem of family violence. Specifically, we will look at the #metoo movement, men’s groups that have organized around ending violence, and consider love without tyranny. It is my hope that this course will prepare you to think critically about family violence and consider solutions to curb and prevent it.

**A Note about the Nature of the Course:** Primarily, this course engages both the mind and the heart. Because intimate relationships and families form the most fundamental parts of who we are, when we bring up a discussion of violence, we can stir up a range of emotions. That said, this course does require your engagement with first-hand accounts of violence. Whether or not you have experienced violence in your own family, it is important to consider how reading about violence may cause sorrow, rage, grief, anxiety, and/or helplessness. While completely normal, it is important to pay close attention to these feelings. If you ever sense that the material is getting to be “too much” – meaning, it starts to interfere with your personal or academic life, please reach out. If you need assistance, I will be eager to connect you with the appropriate resources. In addition, because of the sheer prevalence of domestic and sexual violence, I approach the topic assuming there are students in class who have direct experiences. That said, you should feel no pressure to talk about

these in the online discussions, but know that there are resources available at UTEP. Again, you are warmly encouraged to reach out to me or someone on campus who can help.

**Commitments:** The commitments made in this syllabus inform the reading selections, course design, roadmap, and the spirit in which we engage with the scholarship. As Dr. Cornel West says, “education is not some abstraction... It is a profoundly human affair.” Just as higher education is designed to foster the development of whole human beings, this class works to understand and acknowledge how racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism operate in our daily lives. This acknowledgement is an attempt to counteract the forces that sustain inequality in the classroom, on our campus, in our cities and states, and around the world. This class is committed to intersectionality as both a disciplinary method and political project.

#### Land Acknowledgement

As members of the University of Texas at El Paso community, we acknowledge that we are meeting on unceded Indigenous land. We would like to recognize and pay our respects to the Indigenous people with long ties to the immediate region: Lipan Apache, Mescalero Apache, Piro, Manso, Suma, Jumano, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Piro/Manso/Tiwa Indian Tribe of the Pueblo of San Juan de Guadalupe, and Tortugas Pueblo. We also acknowledge the nations whose territories include present day Texas: the Carrizo & Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Caddo, Tonkawa, Comanche, Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, and the peoples of Chihuahua and northern Mexico from whom most/many of our students descend, such as the Rarámuri, Tepehuan, Wixarika and Nahuatlaca peoples. Finally, we recognize all of the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories here in Paso del Norte, on Turtle Island. The University of Texas at El Paso honors your history and cultures and we seek greater awareness of the myriad ways in which your legacy can guide us in fruitful partnerships and mutually fulfilling relationships.

#### Disability & Special Assistance

If you need any academic accommodations to be successful in this course, or if you are dealing with a particularly challenging life circumstance, please communicate with me as soon as possible and we will figure out a way forward.

Individuals with disabilities have the right to equal access and opportunity. In support of this endeavor, Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at UTEP provides needed accommodation to those who believe or suspect a disability and need assistance in their pursuit of higher education including the opportunity to participate and benefit from all University sponsored programs, social activities and events. CASS ensures that reasonable accommodations and services are afforded to students with disabilities such that they have equal opportunities to achieve their academic and professional goals. CASS staff serves as liaisons between students and faculty, administrators, and outside agencies.

CASS at UTEP: Phone:(915) 747-5148 Union Building East Room 106 [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu)



I HAVE DECIDED  
TO STICK WITH  
**LOVE.**  
HATE IS TOO GREAT  
A BURDEN TO BEAR.  
MARTIN LUTHER KING

#### Title IX

The University of Texas at El Paso is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment that is free from discrimination based on sex in accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded educational programs or activities.

Title IX protects students, employees, applicants for admission and employment, and other persons from all forms of sex discrimination including sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and acts of sexual violence. Sexual violence may include rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, sexual coercion, stalking, and relationship violence. Title IX prohibits institutions from excluding, separating, denying benefits, or otherwise treating individuals differently on the basis of sex. Sex based discrimination is prohibited at UTEP both by law and by University and UT System policies.

For additional information or questions, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, who can be reached by phone at (915) 747-8358, by email at [titleix@utep.edu](mailto:titleix@utep.edu), or by mail at 500 W. University Ave., El Paso, TX 79968, Kelly Hall, Room 312.

In addition to or in lieu of contacting the Title IX Coordinator, inquiries and complaints may also be sent to the Assistant Secretary of the Office for Civil Rights by mail at 1999 Bryan Street, Suite 1620, Dallas, TX 75201-6810, by phone at (214) 661-9600 or by email at [OCR.Dallas@ed.gov](mailto:OCR.Dallas@ed.gov).

### Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

1. Consider the family as a gendered, raced, and classed institution with heterosexist assumptions and narratives around disability;
2. Engage with theories of power and violence;
3. Examine family violence patterns from a cross-cultural, intersectional, and global perspective;
4. Explore strategies and models for intervention and prevention;
5. Apply interdisciplinary and intersectional methods of research and practices in class assignments;
6. Know the personal and social consequences of family violence;
7. Understand how women and children have been particularly affected by family violence;
8. Engage in critical thinking and writing skills.

### Course Reading and Materials

You are expected to complete a series of readings each week; these will form the foundation for our online class discussions. You are expected to read closely and carefully. You should also be fully prepared each week to discuss the assigned reading on the Reading Response forums. Please note: There will not be enough time to discuss all the readings each week, but you are expected to use the ones we don't discuss to supplement your reading responses. If you have trouble with the reading and/or the concepts contained in online lectures, you are warmly encouraged to contact me directly for clarification.

### Required Books

All reading will be available for free as a link on Blackboard.

### Structure of the Course

While completely online and asynchronously taught, the structure of the course emphasizes active and participatory ways of learning based on interactive forums, online class discussions, student research, and writing projects. The course is designed to emphasize the importance of collaborative learning, writing and critical thinking skills, and the open exchange of ideas. We will attempt the difficult task of integrating theory and practice, analysis and experience.

### Course Requirements and Grading

The following components will comprise your semester grade:

Introductory Essay	50 points
Reading Responses & Reactions	600 points
Exam #1	100 points
Exam #2	100 points
Exam #3	100 points
<u>Final Reflection Essay</u>	<u>50 points</u>
Total	1000 points

94-100	A	74-76	C
90-93	A-	70-73	C-
87-89	B+	67-69	D+
84-86	B	64-66	D
80-83	B-	60-63	D-
77-79	C+	0-59	F

### Written Projects

In addition to doing a lot of reading this semester, you will also be doing a lot of writing. All writing, whether done in class or for formal papers, should be in the form of polished, academic prose. Part of the challenge of all writing assignments will include learning to be selective about what you write, as well as learning to convey your ideas to your readers in an interesting, elucidating manner. The grading standards will be very rigorous, and I expect all writing you do for this course to show evidence of serious intellectual endeavor. Further, all writing should be carefully revised, edited, and polished--virtually free of grammatical, typographical, and spelling errors. Be sure to use spell check, grammar check, and take advantage of the Writing Center for your writing assignments.

### Assignments

You will be responsible for writing an introductory essay, reading responses & reactions, three exams, and a final reflection essay. By knowing basic facts, understanding history and theory, and applying your knowledge sets to create dynamic insights to understand significant social problems, you will be prepared to think and act critically.

### **Introductory Essay (50 points)**

After reading the course road map and syllabus, write a short, 2-paged (750-1000 word) essay introducing yourself to the students in class and answering the questions on the prompt.

### **Reading Responses & Reactions (600 points)**

Your primary assignment is to write weekly reading responses, reactions, and critical thinking questions to be submitted to the online forums. These assignments are designed to help you develop good study habits and facilitate interaction with your peers. You will be required to write these short reading responses on a weekly basis AND respond to two of your classmates' reading response questions. Your reading responses should be relatively short (500-750 words) **due every Thursday by 11pm**. There is a uniform 4-paragraph format for your reading responses that you must follow.

The Reading Reaction portion of this assignment requires your active participation and engagement with others in the course by responding to TWO student questions online in a 200-250-word response. Your response should be an attempt to answer the question posed at the end of the student response. Participation in class is not only about how much you say, but how well you listen and respond to your classmates with insight and respect.

Each Reading Response is worth 50 points. These points will be divided between your initial post (40 points) and your two peer responses (10 points). There are a total of 13 opportunities to post reading responses each week, but you are only required to post 12. This means you can miss ONE assignment, no questions asked. My recommendation is to save this for an unforeseen circumstance as there will be NO make-ups or late work accepted for these assignments. You may submit reading responses early if you wish, but zero credit will be given for late assignments. Your reading reactions will be **due every Monday evening by 11pm**.

### **Exams (300 points)**

You will complete three exams which will cover each Block (1, 2, and 3), with the Introduction to the course included in Block 1. These exams will contain multiple choice, fill in the blank, and T/F questions. The tests will be timed at 60 minutes and will remain available for students to take during a 24-hour period.

### **Final Reflection Essay (50 points)**

This assignment is a short 2-paged reflection on what you have learned during the semester. Think about the readings and discussions we have had throughout the course and take this writing opportunity to reflect on your experiences. What difference does it make that you took this course? Has it given you a new or deeper understanding of the world around you? Which reading was the most insightful? What recommendations would you make to improve this course? Was the format useful for your learning and comprehension of difficult subject matter? How will this new knowledge impact your future studies, your relationships with others, or the kind of work you want to do?

True passion stakes no claim. Like  
democracy, it does not own, control, or  
master the other. It lets the other be.  
*Jacqueline Rose*

## Due Dates and Academic Honesty

Academic life places all of us under demanding time constraints. Please mark your calendar with due dates for the assignments and begin working on these projects early in the semester. To get credit for your work, you must meet the due dates. **You will receive zero credit for late assignments; however,** I will consider any reasonable and extenuating circumstances. If you find that you must turn in an assignment late due to an unforeseen circumstance, please contact me as soon as you recognize there is a problem. Remember: it is your responsibility to notify me to make these arrangements.

I expect students to do their own work and to act with integrity. I take cheating very seriously and follow the university's policies on academic honesty, cheating, fabrication, helping others to cheat, or plagiarism (presenting the work of others as if it were your own, including material you find on the Internet). Any of these offenses will result in receiving a failing grade in the course and being reported to university authorities. Please note that, on written assignments, exact quotes must be placed in quotation marks, and the source of the quote must be cited in full. In addition, all ideas that come from another source—other than your own thoughts—must be cited in full. These include any ideas you have paraphrased or rephrased, but which originated in someone else's writing or expression.

According to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution, “Any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person without giving sufficient credit, taking an examination for another person, or any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.”

The following are resources that students can use to stay academically honest:

1. [Avoiding Plagiarism \(PDF\)](#)
2. [Deterring Academic Dishonesty Student Resource \(PDF\)](#)

## Diversity and Inclusion

Women's and Gender Studies supports an inclusive learning environment in which diversity and individual differences are understood, respected, and appreciated. We believe that all students benefit from training and experiences that will help them to learn, lead, and serve in an increasingly diverse society. All members of our program must accept the responsibility to demonstrate civility and respect for the dignity of others. Expressions or actions that disparage a person's race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, gender, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, age, veteran status, or disability are contrary to the mission of our program. All our faculty and staff are responsible for promoting inclusive spaces for all, including students with children and breastfeeding mothers. While a Women's and Gender Studies student, you will be given an equitable opportunity to contribute and succeed. The diversity of lived experiences and knowledge that you bring to our courses are considered a resource, strength, and benefit. Thank you for the diversity you bring to our program!

Policy on Children in Class: It is our belief that if we want diversity in academia, that we should also expect parents and children to be present in some form. Currently, the university does not have a formal policy on children in the classroom. The policy described here is thus a reflection of Women's and Gender Studies' commitment to student, staff and faculty parents. If you are breastfeeding or are the guardian of a child, feel free to bring them to class if there is a gap in childcare. You may sit near the door, and we understand if you must step out occasionally to meet their needs.

Furthermore, I would like to create a learning environment for my students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities. To help accomplish this:

- If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official UTEP records, please let me know.
- I (like many people) am still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it.