

THE DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES  
FEMINIST RESEARCH SPEAKERS SERIES WINTER 2017 PRESENTS

# LIQUID GOLD & FEMINIST KILLJOYS: Commodifying Maternal Care in Affective Economies of Human Milk Exchange

a lecture by Dr. Robyn Lee

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Friday, January 27, 2017; 3:00 – 4:30

Senate Chamber  
(3-26 Arts and Convocation Hall)

## Abstract:

In emerging practices of human milk exchange affective bonds are generated and sometimes commodified through the donation and sale of milk. Altruism is harnessed in order to promote donations of milk, which become part of global and technologized flows. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's conception of 'affective economies', this paper traces the production of breast milk as a commodity through reliance on feelings of care for vulnerable children. Criticizing the provision of potentially lifesaving breast milk to sick and premature infants risks becoming a "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed, 2010). Nevertheless, in a historical context of transnational harms caused by the infant formula industry, which gave rise to the Nestle Boycott, and wet nursing under slavery in North America, careful attention must be paid to how maternal love and care are capitalized upon in the booming international markets for human milk.

## Biography:

Robyn Lee is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. Previously, she was a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow at Brock University, and she holds a PhD in Social and Political Thought from York University. Her research interests include contemporary social theory, gender, sexuality, care work, and embodiment. Robyn's recent publications have appeared in *Hypatia*, *Environmental Politics*, and *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, with articles forthcoming in *Feminist Theory and Work, Gender, and Organization*. She is currently completing a monograph entitled *Power, Pleasure, Poetics: The Ethics and Politics of Breastfeeding*, and co-edited a forthcoming special issue of *Studies in Social Justice* entitled "Consuming Intimacies: Bodies, Labour, Care, and Social Justice."



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