Feminism and Politics

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School Webpage:
http://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/schoolofgovernmentandpublicpolicy/

Class Meetings: Tuesdays 11am-1pm in GH 813 (Graham Hills building)

General

The School Office is Room 4.36 McCance Building. Messages may be left in the appropriate pigeon-hole in McCance 4.40. Information about exams and other matters relevant to Honours students may be posted on the Honours notice board which is situated between McCance 4.30 and 4.31.

General Class regulations, including marking conventions and policy on plagiarism, can be found within the year handbooks. These handbooks have been uploaded to the Myplace pages for each class. Students should be aware these regulations cover all classes offered by the School of Government & Public Policy. Lack of awareness of these regulations will NOT constitute grounds for appeal.

Myplace

Material relating to this class, lecture notes and important documents, are available on Myplace. A list of politics courses available on Myplace can be found at: http://classes.myplace.strath.ac.uk

Overview

This class provides a critical introduction to feminism and its implications for politics. Over the last few decades, feminists have systematically challenged the longstanding view that politics is gender-neutral by uncovering masculinist bias and drawing attention to the neglected experiences, values and arguments of women. Feminists have also reconstructed key political concepts and practices and expanded the range of issues and ideas understood to be political. Beyond this shared starting point, feminists are divided over the appropriate methods and goals of political analysis and strategy. Thus feminism is itself a site of political struggle. All this makes the relationship between feminism and politics a challenging and rewarding area of study.

The class is taught in ten seminars, plus a revision workshop on a date to be announced. Seminar topics follow three main headings, beginning with core feminist concepts then looking at feminist engagements with the kind of themes that are usually studied under the rubric of politics. We finish by evaluating the ways in which feminists have expanded politics beyond the usual boundaries of the discipline. The class is assessed through written coursework and an exam.
A summary of the class follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Introduction: What is feminism today?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part 1: Core feminist claims</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 2</td>
<td>Sex/gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 3</td>
<td>Power and politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part 2: Feminist engagements with politics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 4</td>
<td>Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 5</td>
<td>Democracy <em>book review due</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 6</td>
<td>State and nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 7</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part 3: Feminist extensions of politics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 8</td>
<td>Reproduction and motherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 9</td>
<td>Identity politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wk 10</td>
<td>Knowledge and the study of politics <em>essay due</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aims

This class aims to:
- provide an overview of contemporary feminist theory and practice and of the main areas of agreement and dispute amongst feminists;
- examine and assess feminist criticisms of the politics discipline;
- foster a critical understanding of feminist reconstructions of political concepts and practices;
- interrogate feminist debates that expand political argument to new issues;
- encourage evaluation of competing strands of feminist argument.

Learning Outcomes

**Knowledge and Understanding**

By the end of this class, you should be able to:
- identify key developments and debates within contemporary feminism;
- understand feminist critiques of mainstream political theory and practice;
- assess the strengths and weakness of feminist reconstructions of mainstream political concepts and strategies;
- assess feminist debates on issues usually positioned as non-political;
- apply feminist arguments to wider political debates.

**Skills (intellectual/transferable)**

Seminar discussions will require you to:
• select, take notes from and review relevant written material;
• prepare, articulate and defend reasoned answers to set questions;
• work collaboratively with others;

The assessed written work of this class will require you to:
• read one key text in detail and convey its arguments in your own words;
• research answers to essay questions by drawing on a range of material;
• understand, analyse and evaluate the material you have read;
• work out and sustain well-structured and convincing lines of argument;
• express yourself clearly and succinctly.

Assessment and Examination

There will be a formal two hour examination at the end of the academic year on a date yet to be decided. This examination will constitute 60% of your final mark. There is a model exam paper included at the end of this handout (Appendix B).

In addition you will be required to undertake two pieces of assessed course work. The first is a book review of no more than 1000 words. This will constitute 10% of your final mark. The last date for submission is Thursday 24th October 2013 (week 5) by 5pm. You can choose any book listed in this handbook, except those recommended for purchase (in other words, you should be reading something other than the core books for the class). Tips for writing a review are included at the end of this handout (Appendix A).

The second piece of assessed course work is an essay of approximately 3000 words. This will constitute 30% of your final mark. The last date for submission is Thursday 28 November 2013 (week 10) by 5pm. You are strongly advised to complete your essay in advance of this deadline. Please choose a question from those listed in last year’s exam paper (Appendix B).

You are strongly advised to complete your course work in advance of the deadline dates. You will be required to submit an electronic copy via Turnitin AND Myplace. This is compulsory. Your results will be published via Myplace.

The course work and exam are intended to assess your substantive knowledge of topics covered in the class. They should demonstrate your ability to:
• identify relevant developments and debates in contemporary feminism;
• understand feminist critiques of mainstream political theory and practice;
• assess feminist reconstructions of key political concepts and strategies and feminist efforts to expand the remit of politics;
• apply feminist arguments to wider political debates.

The course work and exam are also intended to assess your study skills. They should demonstrate your ability to:
• convey the argument of a key text in your own words;
• research answers to essay questions by drawing on a range of material;
• understand, analyse and evaluate the material you have read;
• work out and sustain convincing lines of argument;
• express yourself clearly and succinctly.
Format of Teaching

Seminars are intended to maximise effective student participation. Discussion will be structured around the seminar questions listed for each topic below. Expect also to participate in group work and general discussion: the format will vary. Note that ALL students are expected to read at least TWO of the listed seminar readings in advance of every seminar so you can contribute to discussion.

Reading

Books Recommended for Purchase

There is no one set text for this class because there is no one book that covers all or most of the topics. However, the following two cover several of the seminar topics and it would be useful to have at least one. You should be able to buy them second hand. I try if possible to draw one seminar reading from each every week, along with something available online:


How to Use the Reading List

Reading is listed under weekly topics. You are all expected to read at least TWO of the listed seminar readings in advance of every session so that you are able to contribute to the discussion. Also do the beyond the reading list activities before the seminar if you have time, they should be relatively light relief and help show how your readings apply to empirical issues. When you are preparing for the essay and exam, you will need to draw selectively on the further reading. If you have difficulty getting hold of the specified reading, you are expected to use your initiative and look for other appropriate material. You are encouraged to make use of newspapers and the internet, as well as of the feminist journals which can be accessed through the library such as Signs, Women’s Studies International Forum and Women and Politics (all at 301.4 Serial and online via the library website).
Week 1
Introduction: What is Feminism Today?

This introductory session will provide an orientation to the structure and demands of the class. You will be introduced to feminist theory and practice. We will be examining competing definitions of feminism and its many faces: its diverse ideological strands, shifting ‘waves’ over time, and different forms in different places around the world. We will also ask whether feminism is still alive and/or still relevant, in the face of claims about a postfeminist age.

Seminar questions
• How would you define feminism?
• What different types of feminism are there?
• Is feminism still relevant?

Seminar reading: PLEASE READ AT LEAST TWO

Beyond the reading list
Take a look at these short newspaper articles which give sharply contrasting pictures of the relationship of young women and men to feminism in the UK today:
Alibhai Brown, Yasmin (2013) ‘Today’s Young Women have Betrayed Feminism’, The Independent, 17 June, online at http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/todays-young-women-have-betrayed-feminism-8660798.html

Further reading
Munro, Ealasaid (2013) ‘Feminism; A Fourth Wave?’. PSA online at [http://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/feminism-fourth-wave](http://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/feminism-fourth-wave)
Week 2
Sex/Gender

The aim of this seminar is to explore the feminist sex/gender distinction and with it the political implications of the argument that gender, as distinct from sex, is socially constructed. Along the way, we will consider the characteristics of different genders, and arguments about the reasons how and why these have emerged in their current form, and assess the challenge to feminist thinking posed by the claims of transgender or transsexual people.

Seminar questions
• What is sex? What is gender?
• What are the main features of femininity and masculinity? How have feminists explained their development?
• In what ways does feminist thinking illuminate or obscure the experiences of transgender/transsexual people?

Seminar reading: PLEASE READ AT LEAST TWO

Beyond the reading list
Watch this video on ‘transgender basics’ from the Gender Identity Project and the LGBT Community Centre in New York, available here http://lgbtlatestscience.wordpress.com/2009/12/20/transgender-basics-video-and-vocabulary/ (just under twenty minutes long).

Further reading
http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/13493/1/MJCC_005_01_Art03_Al_Ali_%283%29.pdf
This seminar will explore what feminists have to say about the nature and extent of power. We will start by examining radical and socialist feminist theories of patriarchy before turning to alternative ways of thinking about power that have emerged more recently within feminism. We will attempt to evaluate these diverse approaches by applying them to the situation of the Pakistani school girl and campaigner Malala Yousafzai, which has recently received much media attention. We will also explore the implications of the claim that power extends deep into our personal lives and, indeed, shapes the very distinction between public and private realms that is fundamental to Western political traditions. This, feminists have argued, requires us to rethink our very notions of politics.

**Seminar questions**

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of feminist theories of patriarchy?
- What other ways of understanding power have been developed by feminists?
- Which approach, if any, best illuminates the struggle of Malala Yousafzai?
- What are the implications of claiming the personal is political?

**Seminar Reading: PLEASE READ AT LEAST TWO**


[http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/913/1/Empowerment_final.pdf](http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/913/1/Empowerment_final.pdf)

**Beyond the reading list**

The shooting and subsequent recovery of Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani campaigner for the right of girls to education, has received much media attention and her campaigning has since been given a global stage. There are many articles about her online, such as


**Further reading**


Week 4
Equality

The aim of this seminar is to explore feminist arguments about how best to achieve equality between women and men (and indeed if such a goal is desirable at all). We will be exploring two key theoretical debates: equality of opportunity versus equality of outcome and equality versus difference, as well as considering recent shifts in equality policy. We will pay particular attention to the empirical case of equality in the workplace.

Seminar questions
• What is equality?
• In what ways is the pursuit of equality between women and men in tension with recognition of the differences between them?
• How best can equality be achieved in the workplace?

Seminar reading: PLEASE READ AT LEAST TWO

Beyond the reading list
Take a look at the Fawcett equal pay campaign website:
http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/equal-pay/.

How far have we come? If you can get hold of it, you might enjoy watching the film Made in Dagenham (2010) about the struggle for equal pay at a Ford factory in 1968. You can see clips from the film here:
http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBE77ECDEB8C3D868.

Further reading


The aim of this seminar is to examine and evaluate feminist critiques and reconstructions of democracy. We will be considering evidence for and explanations of the limited representation of women in both established and new liberal democratic institutions, and feminist strategies in response. We will also cover the feminist contribution to more deliberative and participatory approaches to democracy – their efforts to expand democracy beyond its liberal democratic limits.

**Seminar questions**

- Why should it matter who our representatives are?
- How can a higher proportion of women in liberal democratic institutions be achieved?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses for feminists of more participatory and deliberative approaches to democracy?

**Seminar reading: PLEASE READ AT LEAST TWO**


**Beyond the reading list**

Check out the Interparliamentary Union’s stats on women in parliaments around the world at http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm.

**Further reading**


The aim of this seminar is to examine and assess feminist approaches to the state and nation. We will look at feminist critiques of the gendered inequalities within and generated by state and nationalist mobilization. Conversely, we will examine feminist efforts to piggyback their concerns onto nationalist movements and/or gain influence over the state as a potential vehicle for progressive change for women. We will close by examining current debates on Scottish independence through feminist lenses.

**Seminar questions**

- Is the state a vehicle of positive change for women or a key source of their oppression?
- Is nationalism a vehicle of positive change for women or a key source of their oppression?
- How should feminists vote in the independence referendum?

**Seminar reading: PLEASE READ AT LEAST TWO**


**Beyond the reading list**

Check out the campaign website of Women for Independence [http://www.womenforindependence.org/](http://www.womenforindependence.org/) and the launch blog for Better Together Women [http://bettertogether.net/blog/entry/better-together-women-launches-on-international-womens-day](http://bettertogether.net/blog/entry/better-together-women-launches-on-international-womens-day). See if you can find feminist analysis of the Scottish referendum debate online, such as this: [http://www.policymic.com/articles/41183/scotland-independence-vote-could-it-be-a-feminist-utopia](http://www.policymic.com/articles/41183/scotland-independence-vote-could-it-be-a-feminist-utopia).

**Further reading**


Week 7
Development

The aim of this seminar is to examine and evaluate feminist reconstructions of development. If feminism and politics are considered in a global frame then development becomes a central concern, one which is central to transnational feminist organizing and which has generated an enormous literature. We will be exploring feminist critiques of the mainstream concept of development before surveying competing proposals for change. We will focus particularly on controversial ecofeminist reconceptualisations of development.

Seminar questions
• Why and in what ways have mainstream theories and practices of development functioned to marginalise women?
• What are the main feminist strategies for the reconstruction of development?
• What are the strengths and weaknesses of Vandana Shiva’s ecofeminist interrogation of development?

Seminar reading: PLEASE READ AT LEAST TWO

Beyond the reading list
Watch this 2011 interview with Vandana Shiva: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9K0cZGqgHA&noredirect=1.(16 mins).

Further reading


Week 8
Reproduction and Motherhood

This seminar will explore feminist efforts to extend political debate to women's reproductive capacity and mothering role. There are wide-ranging debates to be found in the literature on this topic, offering many different views about the technological changes and power relations surrounding birth and mothering, and many differing strategies to help women gain more autonomy and equality in this regard. We will focus particularly on Firestone’s radical feminist critique of the capacity to give birth as the source of women’s oppression, before going on to examine the now widespread discourse about reproductive rights, closing by examining the distribution of responsibility for caring for children.

Seminar questions
- Is the capacity to give birth the source of women’s oppression?
- What are reproductive rights and why are they considered important?
- How might we achieve a redistribution of responsibility for looking after children?

Seminar reading: PLEASE READ AT LEAST TWO
Firestone, Shulamith (1979) The Dialectic of Sex, London: Women’s Press, chapters 1 - and 10 as well if you have time, the whole book is online here: http://hagocrat.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/firestone-shulamith-dialectic-sex-case-feminist-revolution.pdf, chapter 1 is also online here: http://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/firestone-shulamith/dialectic-sex.htm.

Beyond the reading list
The BBC has a useful set of webpages laying out debates on the rights to abortion, you should focus particularly on those dealing with ‘women’s rights’ arguments, introduced here: http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/abortion/mother/introduction.shtml, with feminist arguments in favour here: http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/abortion/mother/for_1.shtml/ and against here: http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/abortion/mother/against_1.shtml.

Further reading


Week 9
Identity Politics

The aim of this seminar is to assess feminist debates about identity as a site and source of political struggle. We will be considering whether women have a common identity that can form the basis of feminist politics and whether shared identity can ever be an adequate or stable basis for political organisation. This will involve revisiting some of the themes raised in the discussion of sex and gender in the earlier part of the class. We will contextualize these arguments in relation to wider debates about the relationship between identity and politics.

Seminar questions
- What is identity?
- What is identity politics? Why has it been criticized within feminism and are the criticisms justified?
- Is a shared identity among women a necessary prerequisite of feminist politics?

Seminar reading: PLEASE READ AT LEAST TWO

Beyond the reading list
TBC

Further reading


The aim of this final seminar is to examine feminist efforts to politicise knowledge – to expose the gendered power structures underpinning claims to knowledge and truth and to produce counter-hegemonic knowledge claims as a form of resistance. In particular, we will be focusing on feminist critiques of the partial and exclusionary nature of the academic discipline of politics and their efforts to reconstruct the discipline in more inclusive and subversive ways. We will be assessing whether there is a distinctively feminist approach to political theory or political science.

**Seminar questions**
- In what ways and why has the study of politics been biased toward men?
- How convincing are feminist criticisms of the norms of objectivity and rationality?
- How would you design a feminist research project on a politics topic?

**Seminar reading**

**Beyond the reading list**
TBC

**Further reading**


APPENDIX A: WRITING A BOOK REVIEW

‘The overall purpose of a book review is to interest and inform potential readers and to give them your considered opinion of a book. It should evaluate a book from your perspective rather than simply summarising or describing the book’s content.

Depending on your specific purpose in writing it, your review should contain some or all of the following points:

• full details of title, author and publication
• a brief résumé of the book, or what the subject of the book is, its theme/thesis/argument and how the content is organised
• comments on the author’s style, or how the book is written
• information about the author’s purpose in writing the book, or why the book was written
• comments on the theoretical perspective taken
• comments on the book in relation to other material in the field including when the book was originally written (and revised), the author’s qualification and experience, whether the book introduces any new concepts or data, and whether the author is reviewing material
• comments on how the book relates to your knowledge, your experience, your beliefs…
• information on the standard of the details such as an index, a bibliography or graphic material …
• an evaluation of the overall strengths and the weaknesses of the book.

Support any statements you make, including your opinions, with reasons and examples. A few well-chosen quotations can convey the flavour of the author’s style as well as illustrating a point. (Give the page reference for a quote immediately afterwards.)

Your own honest and well thought-out opinion of a book is of more value to your learning and to your readers than your version of someone else’s opinion. A book review can be technically excellent but dull to read unless you convey to your reader the impact the book has on you.’


Note that most journals have a book review section: check out relevant feminist journals for some recent examples.
Answer TWO questions

1. ‘Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism’ (hooks 2000). Assess the strengths and weaknesses of this definition of feminism.

2. Compare and contrast TWO feminist theories of power. Which do you find the most convincing?

3. ‘We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond…with the idea of nature that has been established for us’ (Wittig 1992). Critically explore the implications of this statement with the concepts ‘sex’ and ‘gender’.

4. Assess the proposition that gender equality is a hollow promise in late capitalist societies.

5. Anne Phillips (1994) supports the ‘conviction that changing the composition of existing elected assemblies is only part of a wider project of increasing and enhancing democracy’. Why is this conviction widely shared by feminist theorists of democracy?

6. In what ways and to what extent is national identity ‘gendered’?
7. Compare and contrast **TWO** feminist approaches to development. Which approach do you find the most convincing?

8. Describe and assess feminist proposals for the redistribution of childcare responsibilities.

9. 'To pursue coalition politics, feminists have to learn that our allies are best chosen on the basis of their political commitments, not their identities' (Adams 1989). Discuss.

10. Evaluate feminist critiques of 'objectivity'. Answer with reference to examples from research into politics.

END OF PAPER