

FEMINIST POLITICAL THEORY
POL4 344

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Wednesday 9:50-12:20
PNE 349

Course Description

In this course, we will investigate some of the themes and dimensions of feminist theory that have emerged in the last two centuries. This is neither a comprehensive survey nor a history of feminist thought; rather the aim is to tour some of the range and complexity of thinking theoretically about gender. Given the geographical, historical, and disciplinary scope of what now travels under the name of feminist theory, our tour will of necessity be introductory. We begin by questioning the terms of our endeavor: what is meant by feminism, women, politics and theory? What tensions and exclusions mark the very project of “feminist theory”? We will then explore the continuing significance of ‘Western’ feminist theory’s emergence through the paradigms of liberalism and socialism in the 18th and 19th centuries, paying particular attention to the ways in which feminist theorists have encountered differences of sexuality, race and class. Next we’ll investigate some of the new theoretical frameworks developed or adapted by contemporary feminist scholars, from radical feminism to those indebted to poststructural, critical race and postcolonial rubrics. We’ll go on to analyze several specific issues--including pornography, the politics of reproduction and body image--in light of these approaches and arguments. Finally, we’ll explore the implications of these categories, paradigms and rubrics for the study of gender in so-called non-Western, postcolonial contexts. To what extent is ‘Western’ feminist theory useful for understanding practices and experiences shaped by very different cultures, histories and geographies? How might the study of such practices and experiences in ‘non-Western’ contexts confirm, challenge, or even transform ‘Western’ feminist thought? And importantly, in what ways might these very questions productively unsettle the very distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western,’ “First-World” and “Third-World” that pervade so much contemporary discourse about the “oppression of women”?

Books to Purchase: There are only three books for this course and all are on sale at the College bookstore; all three are required so contact me if you have any difficulty purchasing them. All assignments marked with an asterisk (*) are available in our Sakai course conference.

Please make sure you have all the readings for the course and that you bring the relevant readings to class every day .

J.S. Mill, *On the Subjection of Women*

Catharine MacKinnon, *Only Words*

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

Course Requirements:

Reading: Please take heed: this is a reading-intensive course. You must set aside sufficient time, space, and energy for reading and re-reading what are often difficult materials.

Discussion participation: Discussion of the readings for each session is a central part of this course, and is indispensable to your pleasure and learning. Attend faithfully; participate vigorously.

To prepare for discussions, please think about the following questions well before class: What are the arguments of the reading(s)? How do the readings relate to one another? What are the terms and assumptions the author employs? Do you agree or disagree with the arguments of the author and on what grounds? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments?

Needless to say, you can't participate in discussion if you don't attend class, so as discussion is a vital part of this class, student attendance (**on time**) is an important component of the participation grade.

As part of students' participation, **on February 4**, all students will be required to sign up in pairs for a class session during the semester; the students will then be responsible for the readings for that session.

What this means is that the students will 1) post to the entire class a set of questions posed by the readings **on the morning (by 11 a.m.) of the class for which they are responsible** and 2) will make an 15-20 minute in class presentation on the main points of the readings.

NOTE: These presentations should NOT summarize the readings but rather provide an analysis of the readings as they relate to the larger themes of the course. Students not responsible for the readings on any particular day are still expected to be well prepared and able to discuss the readings thoroughly.

IN PREPARATION FOR THE PRESENTATION, STUDENTS ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO PROCEED THROUGH THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- 1) Consult the two documents concerning oral presentations (i.e. "Presentation Guidelines" and "Evaluation of Oral Presentation") carefully and often.
- 2) Discuss with one another all the readings and your presentation strategies, and **only then meet with me to talk about how you plan to approach the presentation.**
- 3) Meet with our public speaking tutor to practice and fine tune your presentation. *Note: students who meet with a public speaking tutor will automatically receive a 1/3 grade bump for the presentation grade (tutors will notify me when they've met with specific students).*

Writing: Writing assignments for this course include two 6-8 page essays, and a final paper of 12-15 pages. three 6-8 page essays.

The first essay will be graded Pass/Fail, but will also have a “shadow grade” (i.e. the grade it would have received).

For the second and third paper, all students must submit a draft of the paper in advance (*copied to me at reuben@wellesley.edu*) to be read and evaluated by a fellow student well before the final due date (see summary of important dates below). Peer editors must return drafts with comments to one another within **48 HOURS**.

PLEASE NOTE: The final versions of the second and third papers, along with the drafts with peer editors’ comments (with names clearly marked), must be submitted electronically (to reuben@wellesley.edu) by 11 a.m. on the date due.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO WRITE POLITICAL THEORY PAPERS, CONSULT THE FOLLOWING TWO DOCUMENTS ON OUR SAKAI COURSE CONFERENCE: “Writing Program Grading Standards” and “Paper Writing Guide.”

IN SUMMARY, the course grade will be based on class participation (including presentations and discussion questions) as well as on the three papers. For the second and final papers, *paper grades will include an evaluation of the completeness of the initial draft, the quality of your comments on your peer editor’s draft, and the quality of the final draft of each paper.*

This course complies with the Wellesley College grading policy <http://www.wellesley.edu/registrar/grading/gradingpolicyfaq>). While that policy asks faculty to hold each 100- and 200-level course with 10 or more students to an average of no higher than 3.33, it does not require faculty to grade on a "curve." There is no arbitrary limit on the number of A's, B's, C's etc., and every student will be assigned the grade she earns and deserves according to the grading standards of the college.

ON DEADLINES: All assignments are expected to be submitted by the due dates. **First papers turned in after the deadline will not be accepted.** **Second and third papers turned in after the deadline are considered late, and will be downgraded accordingly (½ grade for up to every day late).**

Contact me *in advance* if a religious holiday interferes with a course assignment, or if you have a disability that will affect the timing of your work.

ABOUT PLAGIARISM: Plagiarism is a serious violation of the Honor Code and standards of academic honesty, and is unfair to all other students in the class. Prior to turning in the first paper, all students enrolled in this course must read the *New York Times* article on internet plagiarism:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/education/02cheat.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>

Students must also be familiar with the definition of plagiarism available here: http://www.wellesley.edu/studentlife/aboutus/honor/citation_101.

Papers found to have plagiarized any material from any source will receive an automatic “F” on the paper, and such incidents will be brought to the attention of the Honor Code Council. Please contact me *prior to turning in the first paper* if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. Please read the details of the college’s honor code here: <http://www.wellesley.edu/studentlife/aboutus/honor>

LAPTOP POLICY: Laptops, iPads/Pods, cell phones, and other electronic devices may NOT be used in the classroom (the sole exception is when they are being used for a presentation). All electronic devices must be switched off for the duration of class (not just silenced). They are distracting to others and they disrupt the free interchange of ideas and class discussion. Moreover, the latest research shows that laptop note taking can be “detrimental to learning” (See Mueller and Oppenheimer, “The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking,” *Psychological Science* 25 (6), June 2014:1159-1168). If you have medical reasons for bringing a laptop into class, please meet with me and bring the requisite medical documentation.

Any student with disability accommodation needs should contact Jim Wice in Disability Services (781-283-2434, jwice@wellesley.edu) **during the first two weeks of class** so that he can review the request and notify all instructors of the approved accommodations.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT DATES:

January 28: First day of class

February 4: First paper topics posted on course conference; sign up for presentation dates in pairs

February 13: First papers due as an electronic attachment (reuben@wellesley.edu) by 11 a.m.

February 18: In class writing workshop (*attendance required*)

February 26: Second paper topics posted on course conference

March 6: Second papers due to peer editors (*cc'd to reuben@wellesley.edu*) by 11 a.m.

March 16: Second papers (*along with edited drafts*) due by 11 a.m.

MARCH 19-27: SPRING BREAK

April 23: Final paper topics posted on course conference

APRIL 29: RUHLMAN CONFERENCE; NO CLASS

May 6: Last day of class

May 9: Final papers due to peer editors (*cc'd to reuben@wellesley.edu*) by 11 a.m.

May 19: Final papers (*along with edited drafts*) due by 11 a.m.

Reading Assignments and Course Schedule:

I. INTRODUCTION: DEFINING OUR TERMS (Jan. 28-Feb. 4)

Jan. 28: Introduction: Feminism, Theory and Political Theory

Feb. 4: What are "Women," and Why Should "We" be Afraid of Theory?

Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider**

Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd, Eds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990)*

bell hooks, "Feminist Theory: A Radical Agenda," *Talking Back* (Boston: South End Press, 1989)*

María C Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for 'The Woman's Voice'," *Women's Studies International Forum* 6(6), 1983*

II. 'WESTERN' ORIGINS OF FEMINIST THEORY (Feb. 11-18)

Feb. 11: Liberal Feminist Theory and Its Limits

Stuart Hall, "Variants of Liberalism," *Politics and Ideology*, James Donald and Stuart Hall, Eds (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986)*

J.S. Mill, *On the Subjection of Women*, selections

Catharine MacKinnon, "Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination," *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987)*

Feb. 18: Socialist Theory and Feminism—Fit or Misfit?

Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988) pp. 51-69; 207-228*

Alexandra Kollontai, pp. 9-27, "The Social Basis of the Woman Question," pp. 58-73, "Working Woman and Mother," pp. 127-39, and "Sisters," pp. 216-224, *Selected Writings* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977)*

IN-CLASS WRITING WORKSHOP

III. FEMINISM AND METHODOLOGY (Feb. 25-March 11)

A. Feb. 25: Fitting the Categories Together: Historical Materialism, Feminist Standpoint and the Uses of Essentialism

Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," *Women and Revolution*, Lydia Sargent, ed. (South End Press, 1981), pp. 1-41*

Chandra Mohanty, "Women Workers and Capitalist Scripts: Ideologies of Domination, Common Interests, and the Politics of Solidarity," *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, M.J. Alexander and C. Mohanty, eds.*

Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specific Feminist Historical Materialism," S. Harding, ed. *Feminism and Methodology**

B. March 4: Postmodernism, Post-Structuralism, Anti-Essentialism

Joan Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, pp. 22-40*

Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-21*

Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13 (1988)*

C. March 11: Theorizing Gender and Sexuality

Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, Ann Snitow, et al, eds. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983)*

Shane Phelan, "(Be)Coming Out: Lesbian Identity and Politics," *Signs* (Summer, 1993)*

Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston, MA: Routledge, 1984)*

IV. APPLICATIONS OF FEMINIST THEORY (March 18-April 8)

A. March 18: Feminism, Pornography and the Politics of Language

Catharine MacKinnon, *Only Words*, selections

Statement by MacKinnon and Dworkin (on Sakai)*

Nadine Strossen, "A Feminist Critique of 'The' Feminist Critique of Pornography," *Applications of Feminist Legal Theory to Women's Lives*, D. Kelly Weisberg, ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996)*

Wendy Brown, "The Mirror of Pornography," *States of Injury**

B. April 1: Feminism, Freedom and the Politics of Reproduction

Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," in D. Kelly Weisberg, ed. *Applications of Feminist Legal Theory to Women's Lives: Sex, Violence, Work, and Reproduction* (Temple University Press, 1995), pp. 971-984*

Sidney Callahan, "Abortion and the Sexual Agenda," *Commonweal* 113 (April 25, 1986): 232-238*

Killing the Black Body, chapters: Introduction, chs. 2, 3, 7

Wendy Brown, "Reproductive Freedom and the Right to Privacy," *Families, Politics, and Public Policy*, Irene Diamond, ed. (New York: Longman, 1983): 322-381*

C. April 8: Bodies, Beauty and Eating Disorders

Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (William and Morrow and Co., 1991), "Culture," and "Hunger," pp. 58-85, 179-217*

Susan Bordo, "Whose Body is This?: Feminism, Medicine and the Conceptualization of Eating Disorders," *Unbearable Weight* (University of California Press, 1993), pp. 45-69)*

Jill Meredith Collins, "Nurturing Destruction: Eating Disorders Online," *Off Our Backs* 34 (11/12): 20-22*

Michelle LeLwica, et al, "Spreading the Religion of Thinness from California to Calcutta: A Critical Feminist Postcolonial Analysis," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25 (1): 19-41*

Fatima Mernissi, "Size 6: The Western Women's Harem," *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001)*

V. TRAVERSING BORDERS (April 15-22)

A. April 15: Anti-Orientalist, Postcolonial and Global Feminism

Susan Moller Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" *The Boston Review*, October/November 1997*

Maivân Clech Lâm, "Feeling Foreign in Feminism," *Signs* 19 (4): 865-893*

Alison M. Jaggar, "Saving Amina: Global Justice for Women and Intercultural Dialogue," *Ethics & International Affairs*, Volume 19.3 (Fall 2005)*

"Female Circumcision: Prevalence and Nature of the Ritual in North Africa," *The Female Patient* 26 (August 2001): 23-32*

"The Ritual: Disfiguring, Hurtful, Wildly Festive," *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 1997*

Virginia Braun, "The Women are Doing it for Themselves: the Rhetoric of Choice and Agency around Female Genital 'Cosmetic Surgery'," *Australian Feminist Studies* 24 (60): 233-249*

B. April 22: Feminism, Gender and Islam

Fatima Mernissi, "Regulation of Female Sexuality in the Muslim Social Order," in *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 46-64*

Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and On Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women," in *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 5-18*

Rachel Anderson Droogsma, "Redefining Hijab: American Muslim Women's Standpoints on Veiling," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 35(3): 294-319*

Muslim Women's League, "An Islamic Perspective on Women's Dress," December 1997. <http://www.mwlnusa.org/topics/dress/hijab.html>

Mariam Goma, "American Hijab: Why My Scarf Is A Sociopolitical Statement, Not A Symbol Of My Religiosity," November 3, 2014. <http://www.xojane.com/issues/american-hijab>

VI. CONCLUSION: WITHER FEMINISM, POST-FEMINISM, ANTI-FEMINISM? (May 6)

Sarah Projansky, "The Post-Feminist Context: Popular Redefinitions of Feminism" in *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2001): 66-89*

Christina Hoff Sommers, "The Gender Wardens" in *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women* (Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 255-75*

Susan Faludi, "Blame It on Feminism," *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1991)*

Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, "Femininity and Feminism: Or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong" in *All about the girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, Anita Harris, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004): 59-67*

Phyllis Schlafly, "How the Feminists Want to Change Our Lives," *Stanford Law and Policy Review* 65 (Spring 1994): 65-73*