WMST/PHIL 346: Feminist Theory

Class Meeting: Monday and Wednesday, Noon-1:15 pm
Office Hours: Tuesday 11am-Noon and Thursday 1-2pm; by appointment if you can’t make office hours
E-mail: areihel@siue.edu (best bet for getting ahold of me except during office hours)
Course site: BLACKBOARD; latest syllabus, required PDF readings, study guides for exams, links to relevant blogs and news articles, writing tips, announcements/reminders, etc.

ABOUT THE COURSE

This course will address Feminist Theory from a variety of disciplines. While much of the work we will read is based in philosophy, feminist theory also draws from sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, communication theory, and a variety of disciplines that deal with related topics. After all, the theory has weight because reality has weight, and real phenomena are rarely handled by just a single discipline. Theory can drive practice. But examining practice can give rise to theory, and so on. Indeed, a theory which doesn’t ring true when brought to bear on lived experience may well prove false. And practices that fail to respond to well-developed concepts, pattern analysis, and abstract thoughts are practices that are doomed to repeat their mistakes.

Because the category ‘women’ includes individuals with different preferences, different goals, different educational backgrounds, different natural and acquired skills, and of different racial, ethnic, economic, and national backgrounds, we will be careful about generalizing to all ‘women’ when we critically read and discuss feminist theory. In addition, we should give careful thought to how people of any gender are affected by some of the same structures and practices which feminist theory finds to be problematic.

In this class, we will use the term ‘feminism’, and learn about a variety of feminisms. Feminism is not monolithic, and feminists disagree with each other about a variety of issues from gender separatism (should women live separately from men?) to the nature of gender (is it biological and/or cultural?) to how many genders there may be (two, more, a spectrum) to how one should think about transgender (are transgender women fully women?) to whether being a stay at home mother can be feminist (is it always oppressive, or if women authentically wish to do so is that feminist too?) to what the goal of feminist political action is (political equality under the law or economic equality or the elimination of cultural attitudes which contribute to the oppression of women?). As you might suspect by now, more could be added to the list.
Texts

- Marilyn Frye. *The Politics of Reality*. (supposed to be available from Textbook Services)
- Miranda Fricker. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (ditto)
- PDFs on our Blackboard site.

Where possible, PDFs should be printed (2 pages to a sheet is fine) and brought to class OR downloaded to an e-reader or laptop and brought to class.

*If this is not possible for financial reasons (you cannot afford printing costs; you do not have a laptop or tablet), I expect you to have read these and to either know the content or to have taken notes on the articles as you read them on-line which can use for reference in class. They are fair game for quizzes.*

Three Fallacies to Which We Must Not Fall Prey

Fallacies are errors in reasoning. Knowing about them allows us to identify them in others and avoid them in ourselves, thereby letting our decisions be based on the best possible thinking. It is impossible to be without error, but we should strive to avoid known pitfalls in thinking.

There are three fallacies which commonly crop up in thinking about women and values. Watch out for these in others (including me) and in yourself:

1. **Ad hominem**
   
   Latin for “against the man” or “against the person.” It is an attack on a person, rather than an attack on the quality of their argument, that attempts to prove that the argument given by the person should not be persuasive. EXAMPLES:
   
   - He is a man, so any argument he gives about women’s rights should be discounted on its face.
   - She is a homely academic, so anything she says critiquing popular culture’s portrayal of women is just because she can’t live up to that standard.

2. **Overgeneralization**
   
   Takes something which may well be true of some members of a group, and applies to all members of that group **without reason for believing it to be true of all except that it is true of some**. EXAMPLES:
   
   - Betty Friedan famously described the plight of housewives who, despite some or a complete college education, cook and clean and rear children and support their husband’s careers and finally come to ask themselves “is this it? Is this all there is?” Friedan called this the “problem with no name” and many people assumed it was true for all women.
   - Women in countries where conservative forms of Islam are the state religion, such as Saudi Arabia, are often not allowed to drive cars or go out without a male family member as an escort, and are required to adhere to strict dress requirements. They have limited political and business participation in society. Many people assume this is the plight of women under all forms of Islam.
   - All women are X.

3. **Straw man**
   
   Based on the fact that knights and soldiers first learned to fight and win against a straw dummy or straw man. It becomes an easy victory, but should not be mistaken for a real one. Straw man fallacies paint either a non-existent version of the opponent’s position, or choose an extreme version of the opponent’s position, thereby allowing an apparent argumentative victory. However, the victory is meaningless. EXAMPLES:
• arguing in favor of abortion on the grounds that all anti-abortion folks want to keep women barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen
• arguing against abortion on the grounds that all pro-choice folks want consequence-free promiscuous sexual activity to deliberately undermine family values

Content Warning

This course, like many courses which deal with the stuff of real life while also using theory as a tool, will sometimes involve content which is uncomfortable to discuss, even to read about. We may discuss or read about sexual assault and rape. We may discuss or read about sexual harassment and street harassment. We may discuss or read about bullying, firing of, and violence against transgender and gender non-conforming persons. We may discuss racism, both in terms of acts of systematic violence/privilege/discrimination (housing practices in the US) and in terms of individual racist acts (the shooting in Charleston this summer at an AME church).

This may be difficult for you as a person who cares about the welfare of others. It may be particularly difficult if you or a loved one has ever experienced these. It may also be difficult for you if people like you are implicated in the systems that feminist theory identifies as problematic.

I acknowledge this. We can work together to find techniques to help you work through the readings and concepts. I also work very hard to structure a classroom environment conducive to discussing difficult issues without students being subject to ad hominem arguments. Let me know if you anticipate difficulty with any particular subject so that we can come up with a plan that lets you engage the material without excessive distress.

Civility

Many of the topics we will discuss in this course are contentious in mainstream America. We are likely to find that we disagree with each other, despite the self-selection that may have occurred in choosing this course out of all others.

However, you need not stay silent for fear of reaction to your position nor need you say what you think I or others wish to hear. Civility concerns how we treat each other when we interact in groups of two or more, and is most tested when reasonable people of good will disagree, as they indeed do.

P.M. Forni of the Johns Hopkins Civility Project suggests that civility is fundamentally about respect for persons and requires us to behave in ways that ensure we are respected by others and that we treat others as persons with rich interior lives and genuine needs much like our own, though perhaps different in form and content. We will do our best to adhere to the following rules for classroom behavior which are adapted from Forni’s book Choosing Civility:

1. ARRIVE ON TIME, DON’T LEAVE EARLY, AND DON’T INTERRUPT OR ALLOW YOUR DEVICES TO INTERRUPT
2. PAY ATTENTION AND LISTEN: genuinely listen rather than merely hearing; don’t assume that you know what people are going to say before they say it; make sure you are listening to what people say rather than to your assumptions about who they are or what else they believe; assume others may know something of value that you do not yet know
3. SPEAK KINDLY AND DON’T SPEAK ILL: acknowledge that your words have the power to hurt, and consider this when choosing how you speak; the tone of your voice can be as damaging as the words you choose
4. RESPECT OTHERS’ OPINIONS: Two ways of showing disrespect for others’ opinions... One, telling them their opinions are crazy, stupid, worthless, evil, and the like. Two, by assuming what we think
must be what they think also. Respecting others’ opinions doesn’t mean giving ours up or becoming relativists; requires us to recognize that others are entitled to look at the world differently and that when they share their views they can expect a fair hearing.

5. ASSERT YOURSELF: Robert Bolton: “The assertive person stands up for her own rights and expresses her personal needs, values, concerns, and ideas in direct and appropriate ways. While meeting her own needs, she does not violate the needs of others or trespass on their personal space.” It means not backing down, but not being aggressive in standing up for your values or yourself.

6. ACCEPT AND GIVE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM: I will be criticizing your work, but I will generally tell you how you can improve your work. For instance, I will tell you what the problem is and, where possible, what to do differently next time to do better. I will also acknowledge what you did well so that you can keep doing it. This is constructive criticism. When you criticize others (authors or peers or instructor), this is fine and even necessary so long as the criticism is constructive.

Late Assignment Policy

Late assignments will be docked a letter grade for every 24 hour period the assignment is late. This applies to missed in-class assignments or exams, as well as papers. The only exceptions arise if you have prior consent of the instructor (an extension) or an excused absence. Incompletes for the course will be given only to students who have a justified and documented excuse and satisfactorily complete the bulk of the course during the regular term. With rare exception, quizzes cannot be made up since answers are discussed in class the day of the quiz.

Special Assistance

If you have a documented learning difficulty which may entitle you to reasonable accommodations, please present your DSS ID to me as early as possible in the term and speak with me about how I can be of assistance. If you have had a documented learning disability in the past, or believe that you may now be having difficulty at the college level as a learning disability surfaces that was previously controlled by your parents’ or school’s assistance, please contact Disability Support Services (http://www.siue.edu/dss/) to initiate an assessment. You are entitled to reasonable accommodations by law and my personal values.

If you are struggling with accessing and interpreting information the way I teach or through our readings, or struggling with class discussion or small groups, please also speak with me about how we can help you out, whether or not you have a documented learning difficulty.

Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is, generally, misrepresentation of authorship or origin of work you claim as your own for a particular class. Cheating and/or plagiarism will be rewarded with a failing grade on the assignment at a minimum and possibly in the course in egregious cases such as getting others to do your work for you or wholesale copying. I will report all instances to the Dean and the Provost even if I do not fail you in the course. Academic dishonesty includes using your own work twice for different assignments, from this or other courses. SIUE’s policy is at http://www.siue.edu/lovejoylibrary/services/instruction/plagiarism.shtml.

Discussing ideas and arguments with your peers and using their feedback is not plagiarism or cheating, nor is brainstorming, unless you base your work substantively on another person’s intellectual work, for which you claim credit. Your task, after all, is to be developing your skills at reflecting on women and values. Turning an assignment in to me is an implicit statement that it is generated uniquely by you for this assignment in my course with all input from others—peers or scholars—explicitly attributed in citations.
Where you use an idea or a point (which is not common knowledge) made by a peer or an author, be sure to offer an acknowledgements section at the end of the paper or a specific footnoted citation thanking your peer by name for the idea, or a parenthetical citation referring the reader directly to the page number in the original source and to the author and title of the source as detailed in a bibliography. To properly attribute during in-class exercises simply mention an author’s name. We cite for three reasons:

1. To give credit where credit is due (to avoid plagiarism and respect the work of others)
2. To give sufficient information for others to find out more (so that each of your works is a resource in its own right)
3. To show the reader that our claims are based in authoritative sources (so that the premises of your argument are well-justified)

We will use MLA style. For further guidance on this, see the Purdue OWL website’s guide to MLA parenthetical in-text citation and bibliographic citation.

Grading and Assignments

While this is not technically a writing course, clear use of written English is necessary in order to effectively analyze and communicate in philosophy and in any academic field or profession. For this reason, most assessments involve writing or oral communication. I expect you are already able to clearly communicate in written and spoken English. If you know that you have, or discover that you have, difficulty with written English, please use our Writing Center (http://www.siue.edu/IS/WRITING/) for assistance, being sure to schedule appointments to go over rough drafts well in advance of due dates.

While I assume you have basic communication skills, we will work together to develop the basics of argumentative writing such as thesis statements, marshalling your evidence, and presenting it in a logical order that best supports your argument. Argumentative writing is distinct from other forms of writing and thus requires development in its own right. It is essential to any use of theory to solve real world problems. This will serve you well regardless of your major or chosen profession; after all, job cover letters, graduate school essays, and oral job interviews are all venues in which you do your best if you mount sustained, lucid arguments concerning why you are the best candidate for the situation.

Here is what grades will mean in our class: As are reserved for excellence, Bs indicate a solid command of the material, Cs indicate some competency in some areas of the course or low command of the material overall, Ds indicate some small effort or skill and a poor command of the material overall, and Fs indicate the usual. You need not be uniformly excellent to expect an A. But some excellence will be expected, combined with solid command of other areas, in order to meet the point expectations required for the following grades:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90-100%</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>60-69%</td>
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<td>F</td>
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**SMALLWORK: HOMEWORK, IN-CLASS EXERCISES, and READING QUIZZES-30%:**

Occasional homework assignments will be given out; these will sometimes help us to prepare for the next day’s discussion, ask you to do some very brief research online to establish some facts, or provide a brief activity related to some current event.

At random intervals, I will ask each student to write down an interesting and important point from the reading, or to come up with a discussion question. These will be collected and become part of your grade. Be prepared for this everyday.

Reading quizzes will be unannounced pop quizzes over the readings; these are designed to test your reading comprehension rather than memorization—thus they will be open-book and open-note—and to bring out major points from the readings before we begin our class discussion. The
number of quizzes is unspecified; they may occur two days in a row or have a week or two between them. This is part of how I will assess attendance. Be prepared for this every day.

**REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRIES-15%:**
Four entries over the course of the term; 1-2 pages long in 12 pt Times New Roman font with 1” margins; TASK: reflect further upon some aspect of class discussion, a reading, or something you have experienced in your own life or have seen in the media (pop culture; current event; public policy, etc.) and do so by explicitly using theoretical concepts from the course (such as Frye’s theory of oppression) or texts. These will be Pass/Rewrite. Passing grades will be worth 1/1; Rewrites will be worth 0/1 until the rewritten journal entry achieves passing quality; if you do not rewrite by the deadline, these will remain 0. **Clearly label these as Jrnl #1, Jrnl #2, etc. If you have to rewrite one, clearly label it as “Jrnl #1 REWRITE” and so on.**

**MID-TERM TAKE HOME EXAM-15%:** some multiple choice and some essay questions; will cover everything to that point in the term.

**POSITION PAPER-20%:** argumentative essay taking a position on a topic; topic choice will be left to the student; though instructor will provide a list of possible topics, student may suggest one not on the list; must address at least one objection to your position, give good support, use course texts, and avoid fallacies. Peer review of complete rough drafts will occur the day before papers are due, so be prepared to have the paper finished the class day before it is due.

**FINAL EXAM-20%:** some multiple choice and some essay questions; cumulative, though focusing on material since mid-term.

Students with poor attendance will see several forms of penalty:
- When you miss an unannounced reading quiz, you will not be allowed to make it up
- Class discussion invariably helps people to become more proficient with concepts, even if students think they understand the readings very well on their own
- Exam questions are sometimes based on issues we discussed in class
- You get less knowledge!

The first item above is open to negotiation if you are absent for what would be considered an excused absence. See me to establish whether it is; documentation will be required.

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**ALWAYS HAVE THE READINGS DONE FOR THE LISTED CLASS DAY AND BRING THEM TO CLASS EVERYDAY, BRING AT LEAST ONE INTERESTING AND IMPORTANT POINT FROM THE READING**

By the end of the 2nd week, you will contribute to choosing a unit later in the course. In addition, I am finalizing arrangements for guest speakers. Thus, the syllabus contains only the first 5 weeks of readings. **The full reading schedule will be provided during the 3rd week of classes.**

Readings from Fricker or Frye (books) will be indicated with their names. Readings from the anthology will be indicated with FTR for “Feminist Theory Reader.” PDF readings which will be posted on Blackboard in the Readings folder are indicated “Bb.”

**UNIT 1: Basics of Feminist Theory, Sex, and Gender**

**Mon 8/24**
Syllabus overview and discussion of stereotypes of feminism, concerns about the course, what you see as the biggest issues today with respect to gender or other feminist concerns, etc.

**Wed 8/26**
Handout, Learning How To Read Theory
Handout, Excerpt from Hilde Lindemann, *An Invitation to Feminist Ethics*, “What Is Feminism?”
Frye, “Introduction” xi-xvi

**PRO TIP:** Apply the tips on how to read theory to Frye and Lindemann
Mon 8/31
  FTR, Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, “Introduction” 34-42
  FTR, Akiko, “The Day the Mountains Move” 28

Wed 9/2
  Frye, “Sexism” 17-40

Mon 9/7  LABOR DAY  NO CLASS

Wed 9/9
  Frye, “Oppression” 1-16
  FTR, hooks, “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression” 51-57

Mon 9/14  DUE: Journal #1
  Bb, Butler, “Preface (1999)” from *Gender Trouble*

Wed 9/16
  FTR, Delphy, “Rethinking Sex and Gender” 58-68

Mon 9/21
  HANDOUT, Transgender Terminology
  Guest Speaker: Sayer Johnson

Wed 9/23
  FTR, Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come” 133-143
  Bb, Paquette, “8 critical facts about the state of transgender America” *The Washington Post*

Mon 9/28
  Bb, Jeffreys, “Transgender Activism: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective”, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*
  Bb, Herman, “TERF Wars: ‘Radical Feminists’ Are Going After Transgender Activists, But Why?” *International Business Times*
  Bb, Natacha, “A Detailed Response to Sheila Jeffreys”

UNIT 2: Mini unit on bodies, food, and power

Wed 9/30
  FTR, Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” 404-418

Dr. Reiheld is out of town Thursday 10/1 – Sunday 10/4 presenting at the Feminist Ethics and Social Theory conference in Clearwater Beach, FL (go to afeast.org to see the range of issues addressed at the conference). See her before she leaves if you need to. Allow longer than usual for replies to e-mail during the conference.

Mon 10/5
  Bb, Schwartzman, “Appetites, Disorder, and Desire” *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*

UNIT 3: Intersectionalities

Wed 10/7
  FTR, Reed, “The Poetical is Political: Feminist Poetry and the Poetics of Women’s Rights” 92-105
  FTR, Excerpt from “Introduction: Theorizing Intersecting Identities” 148-top of 150
  FTR, Rushin, “The Bridge Poem” 252-3
Mon 10/12
FTR, Aflutun, “We Egyptian Women” 29-33
FTR, Sayeed, “Chappals and Gym Shorts: An Indian Muslim Woman In the Land of Oz” 270-6
FTR, Martinez, “La Chicana” 43-35

Wed 10/14  DUE: Journal #2
Bb, Croom, “Say Her Name: Billie Holiday and the Erasure of Black Women’s Experience”, The American Prospect

Mon 10/19
FTR, Anzaldua, “La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness” 254-262
FTR, Lorde, “I am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities” 276-280

UNIT 4: Feminist Theories of Knowledge (Feminist Epistemologies)

Wed 10/21
Bb, Hoagland, “Why Lesbian Ethics?”
Receive Takehome Midterm Exam (will cover Units 1, 2, and 3)

Mon 10/26
Fricker, Introduction 1-8
Fricker, “Chapter 1: Testimonial Injustice” 9-29

Wed 10/28  DUE: TAKEHOME MIDTERM
OPTIONAL BACKGROUND READING FOR GUEST SPEAKER (a 5-10 minute skim of pp72-77 will probably set you up adequately): Reiheld, “Patient Complains Of...: How medicalization mediates power and justice” International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics
Guest Speaker: Alyson Spurgas

Mon 11/2
Fricker, “Chapter 2: Prejudice in the Credibility Economy” 30-59

Wed 11/4
Fricker, “Chapter 7: Hermeneutical Injustice” and “Conclusion” 147-177

Mon 11/9  DUE: Journal #3
Bb, Reiheld, “I Can’t Hear You When You’re Angry: Righteous Anger, Silencing and the Abuse of Civility”

UNIT 5: Sexual Ethics

Wed 11/11
FTR, Connell, “The Social Organization of Masculinity”
Bb, Kimmel, Excerpt from Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men
• Chapter 1: Welcome to Guyland (pp1-8)
• Chapter 9: Hooking Up: Sex in Guyland

Mon 11/16
Bb, Thomas Mappes, “Sexual Morality and the Concept of Using Another Person”
Bb, Hazel/Cedar Troost, “Rape Culture, Explicit Verbal Consent, and Body Sovereignty”
Wed 11/18
Bb, Driver, “Queer Femmes Loving FTMs: Towards an Erotic Transgendered Ethics”
Bb, Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy, Excerpts from The Ethical Slut: A practical guide to polyamory, open relationships, and other adventures
• Chapter 1: Who is an ethical slut?
• Chapter 3: Our Beliefs
    Interlude: The Unethical Slut
Receive Position Paper Guidelines/Topics

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Mon 11/30
Bb, Moira Carmody, “Ethical Erotics: Reconceptualizing Anti-rape Education”
Bb, Bussel, “Beyond Yes or No: Consent as a Process”

Wed 12/2  DUE: Journal #4
Bb, Schmitt, “Profeminist Men and Their Friends”

UNIT 6: THE POSITION PAPER
Mon 12/7
ROUGH DRAFT OF POSITION PAPER DUE
Receive Final Exam Study Guide

Wed 12/9
PEER REVIEW OF ROUGH DRAFTS DUE

Fri 12/11 11:59 pm
POSITION PAPER DUE ON BLACKBOARD. Look in Assignments folder for submission area.

FINAL EXAM PERIOD
Monday 12/14  10 am – 11:40 am
Sarah LaChance Adams. *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers, What a “Good” Mother Would Do.*
Adams is one of the foremost philosophers of motherhood. As you may recall, feminism gives serious position to women’s experiences as a source of knowledge, and as a topic on which we ought to seek knowledge. Adams does that here with motherhood in a very readable style.

Angela Y. Davis. *Women, Race, & Class.*
Davis goes into much greater depth than hooks did in the essay we read, with respect to how the women’s movement has tended to avoid attention to the problems of black women, how black women have been erased from history (even narratives about slavery tend to focus on black men), and how historical and social forces have shaped black families and black women’s lives. It is easily readable and not densely theoretical, more a work of history than of theory, but with insights that can inform theory.

An easily readable anthology, edited by Tom Digby, addressing some important issues in feminism with piece both about men doing feminism and by men doing feminism. Filled with narratives and little bits of theory where useful.

Roxanne Gay. *Bad Feminist.*
Gay is a prolific blogger and columnist for several newspapers. She is also a “bad feminist.” But what does that mean? What would a good feminist be? This collection of her essays discusses pop culture with a theoretical twist, has real moments of humor and lightness, and vacillates between despair and optimism. Essay topics include Scrabble, violence, fairy tales, race, longing, and *The Hunger Games.*

A quite difficult long-form book, very theoretical, but worth slogging through it the topic is of interest.

This is the whole book that Hoagland referred to in our short reading from her.

Eva Feder Kittay. *Love’s Labor.*
This book is canonical within a sub-field of feminism and ethics called “care ethics.” In it, Kittay persuasively argues that society depends for its very existence on the unpaid labor of people who care for children, the elderly, the ill, the disabled. She also argues that all people are dependent at some point in their lives, and all people require “dependency workers” to care for them at some point in their lives. To stigmatize dependency and dependency work (“women’s work”) as we do in America is a grave error. She lays out an ethical principle of *doula.* Well worth reading if you have any interest in the devaluation of motherhood and caregiving.

LeMoncheck is known for her interrogations of sexuality, in particular of her careful thinking about when being viewed sexually is sexual objectification, and what makes objectification wrong. In this book, she seeks to disrupt perceptions that feminism supports a narrow view of women’s sexual desire, pleasure, and preference. This is really a book in Philosophy of Sex.

Laurie Shrage. *You’ve Changed: Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity.*
This anthology of essays edited by Shrage covers a wide philosophical territory and many perspectives. It is a really good book to read if you want more than one perspective on how sex reassignment does or does not change who we are, and how much of our identity depends on both how we are perceived by others as well as by ourselves.