

FEMINIST THEORY

24.237J, WGS.301, 17.006, 17.007J
MIT Fall Term 2014

Prof. Sally Haslanger

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Office Hours: TBA
Class meetings: MW 1-2:30, 66-148

Description:

This course will provide a survey of several feminist frameworks for thinking about sex, gender, and oppression. We will begin by considering whether there is a tenable distinction between sex and gender, what it means to say that a category is socially constructed, and how social constructions can be oppressive. We will then take up representative samples of three feminist theoretical approaches (the Humanist approach, the Gynocentric approach, and the Dominance approach), together with sample political applications of them.

Prerequisites: none

URL: <https://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/24/fa14/24.237/>

Course materials available to the public at: <http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/womens-and-gender-studies/wgs-301j-feminist-thought-fall-2014/>

Texts:

E. Hackett and S. Haslanger, *Theorizing Feminisms* (Oxford University Press, 2005)
All readings not in the text will be available on Stellar.

Undergraduate Requirements:

Note that this is an undergraduate CI-M subject for philosophy and women's studies. A CI-M course must:

- require at least 5000 words of writing including one mandatory revision, an equivalent amount of oral presentations, or an equivalent combination of the two;
- include substantial instruction and feedback on student work;
- integrate writing and speaking assignments that relate to the professional discourse in the major field; and
- count communication-intensive activities as a substantial portion of the final grade (> 25%).

All students will be responsible for each week's reading and will write 10 weekly response papers of approximately 400-600 words. Response papers may focus on study questions provided in the text, on questions raised in class, in the media, or in personal reflection on the assigned reading. Further guidance will be provided in class. We will also experiment with the forms in which we write. Students may write their response papers on the class blog, in the form of letters to the editor, and/or op-ed pieces.

Students will each co-lead one class, providing questions for discussion on that day.

A longer research paper (min. 2500 words) will be due **December 10, in class**. A 300 word project proposal must be submitted by 10/22 and draft must be submitted by 11/24.

An important theme of the course will be that there are different perspectives from which one can view a single phenomenon. Because of this, class *attendance* and *class participation* are especially important components of the course. Students are expected to attend all or nearly all classes, and to come to class *having completed the assigned readings indicated for that day*.

For most class meetings, the entire class will read and discuss the same material. However, in several meetings you will be given a choice of readings. For those class meetings, you will be asked to report, either in writing or orally, what was in the reading you chose and what you thought of it. In evaluating your work over the course of the semester, you will be expected to have a basic grasp of the readings others present, and others will be expected to have a basic grasp of what you present; so be ready to ask and to field questions.

In keeping with the CI-M status of the course, approximately 20 % of the grade on each assignment will be based on an evaluation of the style and effectiveness of the communication. Please keep a copy of all work you turn in. Late work will be accepted only under exceptional circumstances, and will be penalized unless an extension is granted in advance. Failure to perform in any of the grading areas listed below will result in a failure of the course.

Graduate requirements:

Graduate students enrolled in the course will be expected to read both the required readings listed and also additional recommended readings. Depending on the number of graduate students in the class, a separate discussion session may be required in lieu of response papers. A single 20-25 page research paper is due at the end of the term. A paper proposal should be submitted 10/22.

Evaluation:

Grading for undergraduates will be as follows:

Class participation and leading discussion - 20%

Ten response papers - 40%

Research paper and presentation - 40%.

Graduates: 80% final paper, 20% attendance, participation, etc.

NOTE: Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. It is also illegal. Plagiarism occurs when you take someone else's words and present them as your own; but even borrowing someone else's ideas can count as plagiarism if you don't cite the source. If in doubt, provide a citation. If you have questions, speak to your instructor. Penalties for proven plagiarism can range from failing the course to expulsion. *Please be aware that **plagiarism of any kind will be severely punished***, up to and including not only flunking the paper, but also having a letter placed in your file at the Institute..

Schedule

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Wednesday, 9/3: Introductory class

Monday, 9/8: Sexism/Sex oppression

I. Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," *TF*, 3-16.

Trina Grillo, "Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House," *TF*, 30-40.

Also recommended:

M. Frye, "Oppression" (pdf)

Wednesday, 9/10: The Challenge of Theorizing

[Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"](#) (4 pp.)

Pat Parker, "[For the white person who wants to know how to be my friend,](#)" also in Gloria Anzaldúa, ed., *Making Face, Making Soul*, 297.

Gina Crosley-Corcoran, "[Explaining White Privilege to A Broke White Person.](#)"

Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *TF*, 78-92

Also Recommended:

Charlotte Bunch, "Not by Degrees: Feminist Theory and Education." (pdf)

Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory" *TF*, 405-12

Monday 9/15: Film TBD

Wednesday 9/17 – Forms of Social Construction

S. Wendell, "The Social Construction of Disability," *TF*, 23-30.

J. Kadi, "Stupidity Deconstructed," *TF*, 40-50.

S. Haslanger, "Gender & Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?" *TF*, 16-23.

Monday, 9/22: Social Construction of the Body

J. Yoder, "Biological Essentialism: Our Bodies, Ourselves?" (pdf)

Dillon, "Tell Grandma I'm a Boy" (pdf)

Dean Spade, "Mutilating Gender," *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 315-32. (pdf)

Also Recommended:

Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* (Routledge, 2012), chs. 1-2; part of ch. 4 – pp. 27, 36-42; ch. 5. (pdf)

II. UNIVERSALIZING APPROACHES TO SEX OPPRESSION

A. Humanist Feminism ("The Sameness Approach")

Wednesday, 9/24: Classic Liberal Feminism

J.S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Ch. 1, *TF*.

Sojourner Truth, "Ar'n't I a Woman," *TF*.

Also recommended:

J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Ch 2-3. (pdf)

Monday, 9/29: Film TBD

Wednesday, 10/1: Feminist Existentialism

S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Introduction and selections from Ch. 1, *TF* + (pdf)

J. Butler, "Gendering the Body" (pdf)

Monday, 10/6: Cross-Cultural Capabilities?

M. Nussbaum, "Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings," *TF*.

A. Sen, "More than 100 Million Women Are Missing," *TF*.

Wednesday 10/8: Domestic Violence

S. Schechter, "Social Change on Behalf of Battered Women," *TF*. **OR**

K. Crenshaw, "Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *TF*.

Monday 10/13: Columbus Day – no class

B. Gynocentric Feminism ("The Difference Approach")

Wednesday, 10/15: Gynocentrism

I. Young, "Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics," *TF*.

At least one of the following:

J. Addams, "Women and Public Housework," *TF*.

A. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," *TF*.

P. Gunn Allen, "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism," *TF*.

Also recommended:

S. Haslanger, "Epistemic Housekeeping and the Philosophical Canon." (pdf)

Monday, 10/20: Feminism and Militarism

S. Ruddick, "Notes Toward a Feminist Maternal Peace Politics," *TF*.

Also recommended:

Cynthia Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism*, chs. 1-4, pp. 1-92 (pdf).

Wednesday 10/22: Midterm reflection.

No new reading. Final project proposal due. No reflection paper this week.

C. The Dominance Approach

Monday, 10/27: Difference or Dominance

C. MacKinnon, "Difference and Dominance," *TF*.

S. Bartky, "Foucault, Feminism, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," *TF*.

Wednesday, 10/29: Socialist Feminism and Women's Work

Iris M. Young, "Socialist Feminism and the Limits of Dual Systems Theory," *TF*.

Also recommended:

Ann Ferguson and Rosemary Hennessy, "[Feminist Perspectives on Class and Work.](#)" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State," *Signs*, 19, 2 (1994): 309-36. (pdf)

Monday 11/3: Pornography

C. MacKinnon, "Not a Moral Issue," *TF*.

John Stoltenberg, "Confronting Pornography as a Civil Rights Issue," *TF*, 298-310

L. Duggan, N. Hunter, and C. Vance, "False Promises: Feminist Anti-Pornography Legislation," *TF*.

Also recommended:

C. MacKinnon, "Desire and Power," *TF*.

Wednesday, 11/5: Lesbian Alternatives

M. Wittig, "The Category of Sex," and "One is Not Born a Woman," *TF*.

M. Frye, "Willful Virgin or Do You Have To Be a Lesbian To Be a Feminist?" *TF*.

b. hooks, "Seduced by Violence No More," *TF*.

Also recommended:

Leslie Feinberg, "Walking Our Talk," *TF*.

Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," *TF*.

Monday, 11/10: Veterans' Day – no class

III. LOCALIZING APPROACHES TO SEX OPPRESSION

A. Feminist Identity Politics

Wednesday, 11/12 :

Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement"

G. Anzaldúa, "La conciencia de la Mestiza"

M. Matsuda, "On Identity Politics"

Monday, 11/17:

D. Roberts, "Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies," *TF*.

Wednesday 11/19:

N. Fraser, "Multiculturalism, Antiessentialism, and Radical Democracy: A Genealogy of the Current Impasse in Feminist Theory."

Next 4 classes devoted to topic modules selected by class.

Monday, 11/24 – Draft of final paper due

Wednesday, 11/26 – (optional class)

Screening and discussion of: [*Forbidden Voices: How to Start a Revolution with a Laptop.*](#)

Directed by Barbara Miller. Color, 95 min. 2012.

Thanksgiving Break – no reflection paper this week

Monday, 12/1: Veiling and the Construction of Gender

A. Al-Saji, "[The Racialization of Muslim Veils: A Philosophical Analysis.](#)"

Wednesday, 12/3: Masculinities (Guest lecturer: Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa)

bell hooks, selection from *We Real Cool*

R. W. Connell, "The Social Organization of Masculinity," in *Masculinities*.

Monday, 12/8: Epistemic Injustice (Guest lecturer: Abby Jaques)

M. Fricker, "Epistemic Justice as a Condition of Political Freedom"

Wednesday, 12/10: Final paper due, short presentations.