

COURSE OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE

In her introduction to *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asks, “Are there even women?” Implicit in this question are two problems that will structure this seminar over the course of the semester: (1) What is gender? and (2) Who are women? In trying to make sense of these questions, our discussion will focus on the general theme of *difference*. Are differences in sex and gender *socially* or *naturally* constructed? Should feminism be a politics of *difference* or of *sameness*? How do differences in race, class, sexuality, and embodiment shape the lived experience of women? Finally, does equality imply erasing these differences?

The first part of the course will introduce a number of conceptual and theoretical tools for analyzing sex and gender. Problems will include the tension between essentialist and anti-essentialist feminisms and the concept of intersectional analysis. The second part of the course will focus on navigating how race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality interact in the formation of identities. For the final part of the course, students will select an issue in feminist theory or practice (e.g., reproductive rights, sexual violence and sexual labor, transfeminism), outlining and analyzing that issue using the concepts discussed throughout the semester.

METHODS AND OBJECTIVES

This seminar is intended to be an inter-disciplinary introduction to feminist theory and will draw from texts in political theory, philosophy, economics, sociology, and anthropology. As such, it presupposes no *particular* background. However, students are encouraged to draw on their own disciplinary background in class discussion and in their final projects. Though the course emphasizes recent feminist thought, attention will also be paid to the historical roots of these ideas in social, political, and economic activism inside and outside the academy.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All students are required to purchase the following texts.

1. Elizabeth Hackett and Sally Haslanger, eds. (2005). *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [TF]
2. WGS 7150 course reader [CR]

ASSIGNMENTS AND CLASS POLICIES

1. Weekly attendance is mandatory, and your attendance and participation will comprise 5% of your grade.
2. Midterm paper (35%)
3. Class presentation (15%). During the first week of class you will select a specific reading for which you will prepare a 15-minute class presentation, clearly discussing the main arguments of the text and providing thoughtful questions for class discussion. Class presentations are designed to communicate to the class an idea or concept, a line of argument, or a philosophical problem in an organized and interesting way.

4. Final project: case study (45%). By mid-semester you should identify an issue or problem you would like to focus on for your final project. Your final project will take shape as a research paper of 7–10 pages, though the last two weeks of class will be devoted to open discussion and brainstorming, and students are encouraged to workshop their paper or arguments during this time.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Week 1: Introduction to Course Themes

Handout: Selections from Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression,” in *TF*.

PART I: METHODS

Weeks 1–2: Essentialism and the ‘Difference Approach’

Readings:

- *Genesis* 1–3 [CR]
- Sarah Grimke, selections from *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* (1838) [CR]
- Charlotte Witt, “What Is Gender Essentialism?” in *Feminist Metaphysics*, pp. 11–26 [CR]
- Carol Gilligan, “Moral Orientation and Moral Development” [*TF* 200–10].

Weeks 2–3: Navigating Sex, Gender, and Nature

Readings

- Mary Wollstonecraft, “Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise From the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society,” chap. 9 of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* [CR]
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Human Nature (1890)” in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Nonfiction Reader*, pp. 44–52 [CR]
- Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I A Woman?” [*TF* 113].
- Sherry Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, pp. 68–87 [CR].

Weeks 4–5: The Social Constructivist Thesis

Readings

- Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction*, selections from pt. 4, “The Deployment of Sexuality,” pp. 77–80, 92–114 [CR]
- Simone de Beauvoir, introduction to *The Second Sex* [*TF* 114–24].
- Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?” [*TF* 16–23].
- Susan Wendell, “The Social Construction of Disability” [*TF* 23–30].
- Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” in *Theatre Journal* 40:4 (1988), pp. 519–31 [CR].

Week 6: Intersecting Identities

Readings

- Elizabeth Spelman, “Woman: The One and the Many,” in *Inessential Women*, pp. 133–59 [CR].

- Trina Grillo, “Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master’s House” [TF 30–40].
- Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” [TF 292–7] and “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, pp. 110–4 [CR].

PART II: APPLICATIONS

Weeks 7–8: Intersections: Gender and Race

Midterm paper due

Readings

- W.E.B. duBois, “The Damnation of Women,” from *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, pp. 171–91 [CR].
- bell hooks, “Black Women and Feminism,” in *Ain’t I a Woman?*, pp. 159–96 [CR].
- Elizabeth Martínez, “La Chicana,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought*, ed. Alma M. García, pp. 32–4 [CR].
- Anna Nieto-Gómez, “Chicana Feminism,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought*, pp. 52–6 [CR].
- Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color” [TF 159–73].

Weeks 8–9: Intersections: Gender, Race, and Class

Readings

- Friedrich Engels, selections from “The Family,” chap. 2 of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* [CR].
- Herbert J. Gans, “Race as Class,” *Contexts* 4:4 (2005), pp. 17–21 [CR].
- Jane Addams, “Women and Public Housekeeping” [TF 187–8].
- Betty Friedan, “The Problem that Has No Name,” chap. 1 of *The Feminine Mystique*, pp. 57–79 [CR].
- Angela Davis, “On the Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Middle-Class Perspective,” in *Women, Race, and Class*, pp. 222–43 [CR].
- Joan Acker, 2010, “Is Capitalism Gendered and Racialized?,” in *Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Social Class*, ed. Susan Ferguson, pp. 115–25 [CR].

Weeks 10–11: Intersections: Gender, Gender Identity, and Sexuality

Readings

- Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born a Woman,” from *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, pp. 9–20 [CR]
- Judith Butler, “The Compulsory Order of Sex/Gender/Desire” and “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions,” in chaps. 1 and 3 of *Gender Trouble*, pp. 9–11, 163–90 [CR].
- Evelyn Hammonds, “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality” [TF 552–64].
- Leslie Feinberg, “Walking Our Talk” [TF 521–6].

- Gayle Salamon, “Transfeminism and the Future of Gender,” in *Women’s Studies on the Edge*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott, pp. 115–36 [CR]

Weeks 12–13: Framing Global Feminism

Readings

- Amartya Sen, “More than 100 Million Women Are Missing” [*TF* 150–9].
- Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others” [*TF* 78–92].
- Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?,” *American Anthropologist* 104:3 (2002), pp. 783–90.
- Uma Narayan, “Cross-Cultural Connections, Border Crossings, and Death by Culture” [*TF* 62–78].
- Dorothy Ko, “Gigantic Histories of the Nation in the Globe: The Rhetoric of Tianzu, 1880s–1910s,” chap. 1 of *Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*, pp. 9–37.

PART III: CASE STUDIES

Weeks 13–14: Final Project Workshops