

Feminist Political Thought

Lent Term 2022

Course convenor: Rebecca Buxton (she/her)

This course aims to introduce students to some of the main debates in feminist political thought. The focus is on discussions and differences within and between feminists, rather than seeking justifications for feminism itself. The aim here is to teach a course *on* feminist theory *with* a feminist ethos. It therefore also seeks to challenge and unpack several core assumptions of mainstream feminism and interrogate the relationships between misogyny and other forms of oppression.

The course includes weeks focusing on conceptions of womanhood, the meanings of various forms of feminism, and different contemporary challenges that feminists have considered, such as work, reproduction, and sex. We will finish with a discussion of feminist utopias and the end point of feminist politics.

Teaching

The course comprises 7 seminars. Students are expected to read the set texts for each session and to participate actively in the discussion. The readings below are set out in the order I suggest you tackle them, though this is of course up to you. Students will be asked to volunteer for short presentations throughout the term. The questions on each week of the reading list indicate what students may wish to present on.

Assessment

The course will be assessed by a 3,000-word essay that explores a question of relevance to the core themes and topics of the course.

Overview

Week One	Womanhood and the Politics of Gender
Week Two	Black Feminism and Intersectionality
Week Three	Patriarchy and Misogyny
Week Four	Work and Marxist Feminism
Week Five	Reproduction
Week Six	Sex, Love, and Desire
Week Seven	Feminist Utopias

Preparatory reading (optional)

Miriam Schnier (1994) (ed) *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings World War II to the Present*, Vintage

Akasha Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (eds.) (1982), *But Some of us are Brave*, Feminist Press

Lorna Finlayson (2016), *An Introduction to Feminism*, Cambridge University Press

Week 1. “Womanhood” and the Politics of Gender

Q: To what extent is gender a political concept? Or what does it mean to have adopt an ameliorative approach to the concept of gender?

Set reading

Simone de Beauvoir (1949), “Women’s Situation and Character” in *The Second Sex*

Judith Butler (2006) *Gender Trouble*, Routledge Classics (originally published 1990), “Chapter One: Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire”, pp. 2-46

Sally Haslanger (2000) “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” *Noûs* 34(1), pp. 31–55

Talia Mae Bettcher (2014) “Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39(2)

Further reading

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), “Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses” in *Feminism without borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*, Duke University Press

Iris Marion Young (1994), “Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective” *Signs* 19(3) pp.713-38.

Jemima Repo (2015), *The Biopolitics of Gender*, “Chapter Two: On trans sexology and the origin of the sex/gender distinction as a political tool”, Oxford University Press

Amia Srinivasan, “What is a woman?” Philosophy Bites interview:
<https://philosophybites.com/2017/01/amia-srinivasan-on-what-is-a-woman.html>

Sally Haslanger (2017), “Social Construction: Gender and Other Social Categories” in *Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, Ann Garry, Serene Khader, and Alison Stone (eds). New York: Routledge

Joan Scott (1986), “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, *The American Historical Review*, 91(5), pp. 1053-1075

Oyewumi, Oyeronke (1997), *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Wendy Brown (1997) “The Impossibility of Women’s Studies”, *Differences: A journal of feminist cultural studies*, 9(3), pp. 79-101

Week 2. Black Feminism and Intersectionality

Q: Feminist politics is incomplete without intersectionality. Discuss. Or how should we build coalitions between feminisms?

Set reading

bell hooks (1981), *Ain't I A Woman?* "Chapter Five: Black Women and Feminism", Pluto Press

The Combahee River Collective (1983), "A Black Feminist Statement", in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* by Barbara Smith

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1(8)

Maria Lugones (2010), "Towards a Decolonial Feminism", *Hypatia*, 25(4), pp. 742-75

Further reading

Patricia Hill Collins (2000), *Black Feminist Thought*, Introduction and Chapter One

Angela Davis (1981), *Women, Race, and Class*.

Hazel Carby (1982), "White Woman Listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood" in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in Seventies Britain*, Routledge

Sara Ahmed (2007), "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory*, 8(2), pp.149-168

bell hooks (1984), *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Chapters One, Two, and Three

Audre Lorde (1984), *Sister Outsider*

Cherríe Moraga; Gloria E. Anzaldúa (eds.) (1981), *This Bridge Is Called my Back: Writing by Radical Women of Colour*, Persephone Press

Sarah Haley (2016), "No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity"

Danielle L. McGuire (2010), *At The Dark End of The Street: Black women, Rape, and Resistance*, Penguin Random House

Week 3. Patriarchy and Misogyny

Q: To what extent is patriarchy a distinctive form of oppression? Or Can we meaningfully discuss the oppression of all women?

Set reading

Iris Marion Young (1990), *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Chapter Two: "The Five Faces of Oppression", Princeton University Press

Kate Manne (2018), *Down Girl*, Chapter Two: "Ameliorating Misogyny", Oxford University Press

Sylvia Walby (1990), *Theorising Patriarchy*, Chapter Eight: "From Private to Public Patriarchy", https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/21680/1/1990_Walby_Theorising_Patriarchy_book_Blackwell.pdf

Moya Bailey & Trudy (2018), "On misogynoir: citation, erasure, and plagiarism", *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), pp. 762-768

Further reading

Wendy Brown (1995), *States of Injury*, Princeton University Press

Iris Marion Young (1980), "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility and Spatiality" *Human Studies* 3(2), pp. 137-56

Miranda Fricker (2007), *Epistemic Injustice*, Oxford University Press

Manon Garcia (2021), *We Are Not Born Submissive*, Harvard University Press

Week 4. Work and Marxist Feminism

Q: What is the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy? Or Is the wages for housework movement still relevant?

Set reading

Kathi Weeks (2011), *The Problem with Work*, Introduction, Duke University Press

Angela Davis (1971), "Women and Capitalism: Dialectics of Oppression and Liberation" https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/5144727/mod_resource/content/2/Women%20and%20Capitalism.pdf

Iris Marion Young (1984), "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual Systems Theory." In *Women and Revolution: The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, a Debate on Class and Patriarchy*, edited by Lydia Sargent,

Patricia Hill Collins (1990), "Work, Family, and Black Women's Oppression", in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, pp. 45-68.

Further reading

Juno Mac and Molly Smith (2018), *Revolting Prostitutes*, Chapter 2: "Work", Verso

Angela Davis (1981), *Women, Race and Class*, Chapter 13: "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework"

Lorna Finlayson (2016), *An Introduction to Feminism*, Chapter 11: "Not in Our Name: Colonialism, Capitalism, and the Co-option of Feminism"

Silvia Federici (1974), "Wages Against Housework", Falling Wall Press

Mariarosa Dalla Costa (1975), "A General Strike", in Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming, eds., *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework, and the Wages Due*, pp. 125-127.

<https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/10/20/mariarosa-dalla-costa-a-general-strike>

Week 5. Reproduction

Q: What are the consequences of artificial reproductive technology for feminist politics?

Set reading

Gerda Neyer and Laura Bernardi (2011), "Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood and Reproduction" *Historical Social Research*, 36(2), Special Issue: Fertility in the History of the 20th Century: Trends, Theories, Policies, Discourses

Shulamith Firestone (1970), *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Verso (2015 reprint) Chapters One "The Dialectic of Sex" and Four "Down with Childhood"

Elizabeth Anderson (1990), "Is Women's Labor a Commodity?", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 19(1), pp. 71-92

Further reading

Sophie Lewis (2019), *Full Surrogacy Now*, Introduction, particularly the section on "The Gestational Commune"

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, Chapter Eight

Week 6. Sex, Love, and Desire

Q: Should feminists be sex positive? Or Is feminist pornography possible?

Set reading

Catherine McKinnon (1991), *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, “Chapter 11: Pornography: On Morality and Politics” Harvard University Press

Patricia Hill Collins (2000), *Black Feminist Thought*, Chapter Six, “The Sexual politics of Black womanhood”, Routledge (second edition)

Amia Srinivasan (2018), “Does anyone have a right to sex?”, *London Review of Books* 40(6)

Elisa Glick (2000), “Sex Positive: Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Politics of Transgression” *Feminist Review*, 64, pp.19-45

Further reading

Revolving Prostitutes (2018), Chapter One: “Sex”, Verso

Martha C. Nussbaum (1998), “Whether From Reason Or Prejudice”: Taking Money For Bodily Services” *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 27(2), pp.693-72

Ellen Willis (1981), ‘Lust Horizons: Is the Women's Movement Pro-Sex?’ in *No More Nice Girls* (1992), pp. 3-14

Andrea Dworkin (1998), “Dear Bill and Hilary”, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1998/jan/29/gender.uk>

Clare Chambers (2017), *Against Marriage*

Week 7. Feminist utopias(?)

Should feminists aim to alter the category of gender or eradicate it?

Set reading

Shulamith Firestone (1970), *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, “Conclusion: The Ultimate Revolution”, Verso 2015 reprint

Donna Haraway (1984), “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, pp. 149-181.

Laboria Cuboniks (2015), *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation*, <http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/qx8bq.txt>

Noah Berlatsky (2013), “Imagine There's No Gender: The Long History of Feminist Utopian Literature”, *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/04/imagine-theres-no-gender-the-long-history-of-feminist-utopian-literature/274993>

Further reading

Valerie Solanas (1967), *SCUM Manifesto*

Linda M. G. Zerilli (2020), *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, Chapter Three: “Feminists Make Promises: The Milan Collective’s Sexual Difference”

Feminist utopia fiction recommendations (optional)

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1905), *Sultana's Dream*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1915), *Herland*

Joanna Russ (1975), *The Female Man*