Feminist Political Theories
PS 458/558
Date/Time, Room

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Course Description
This course looks at the relationship between feminism, gender, and the state. In particular, it addresses questions such as: what is gender oppression and to what degree is gender oppression the result of action or inaction by the state? Can the state offer potential solutions to relieve or eliminate it? There is a great deal of diversity in feminism and feminists do not always see eye to eye on what it means to be a man or woman, the source of gender oppression, the solution—if any—to oppression, and the place of the state in women’s lives. Larger questions include what is equality, what is democratic state, how do we live with difference?

This course is divided into two sections. The first introduces a variety of feminisms: liberal, socialist, cultural, women of color, sexuality, and postmodern. The second section focuses on different themes relating to gender and the state such as policies that concern reproduction, female genital mutilation, the family, citizenship, and war. Contemporary (and often contentious) debates in feminism in the United States will be explored.

Texts
There are required texts for this course. The book, bell hooks’ Feminist Theory from Margin to Center (1984 or 2000) and Lisa Duggan’s, The Twilight of Equality? are available for purchase at the University Bookstore. The rest of the required reading materials will be posted on the course’s Blackboard website. These readings may be downloaded from the Blackboard site each week.

Important Note: This syllabus is subject to change as the course progresses. These periodic changes will be announced in class and sent through email. Check your email regularly and note my email policy. I will often use emails to the class to alert you to changes to the schedule or readings, extra information or public lectures, and so on. You should make sure your current email is linked to the Blackboard system and check email and Blackboard regularly for these updates.

Course Requirements
The focus of this course will be intensive reading and discussion of upper-level material. Regular attendance and careful preparation (ie reading and note-taking) of all assigned materials every week is expected of all students and will be taken into account in assigning your final grade.
1. **50 percent of grade:** Bi-weekly response papers (5 response papers, 2-3 pages each, double-spaced, typed), due at the beginning of class. The professor will provide questions for each paper for you to respond to. Please keep in mind that these papers should be more than summaries of the week’s readings, but rather evidence of your engagement with the reading. In the papers, I want you to address two or more of the assigned readings. If there is only one author assigned for that week, address the various chapters within the reading assignment. While the form and the content of the papers can vary, please make sure to 1) identify the central argument of the authors of the readings you discuss; 2) state your response to the argument (do you agree, disagree, etc); and 3) use evidence from the texts to support your own ideas. See response paper guidelines on blackboard and grading rubric. Any papers turned in late will result in a ½ grade reduction per day.

2. **40 percent of grade:** 2 in-class exams, worth 20% percent each. They are closed book. They will consist of short answer and one essay question, which I will circulate one week before the exam.

3. **10 percent of the grade:** Participation. This includes being prepared to discuss the readings in class, engaging in active and thoughtful discussion and listening respectfully. You are required to bring a copy of the day’s readings to class, and you need to make sure you have read that day’s readings in advance of class so that you can intelligently discuss them.

   Please note that “active and thoughtful” participation is in no way limited to providing “correct answers” to questions; rather, it means any participation in discussion that is a sincere attempt to come to terms with the material and/or advance the class’s consideration of the issue at hand. Such attempts may include raising your own questions about the text, pointing out connections that you see, responding to another student’s comments, and so forth.

   “Listening respectfully” means taking the texts’ and other students’ ideas seriously, and making an honest effort to understand their basis, even when those ideas are not agreeable to you. Listening respectfully also applies to yourself; it means taking your own ideas seriously, and speaking them when appropriate, while allowing your ideas to develop over time, and while pursuing an understanding of their basis. See participations guidelines on blackboard.

4. **PS 510 Requirements for graduate students** are the above but also include additional readings, leading a discussion for one seminar class and a paper on a topic discussed with me in advance. Graduate students will have additional readings per week, will prepare to lead a discussion for a portion of one class and a write a research paper on a topic discussed with me in advance. The paper will be 15-20 pages that reviews and analyzes current research literature. Graduate students are also required to meet as a group with the professor for half hour a week.

See me for details.
Class Policies

1. **CLASSROOM CONDUCT:** We are all accountable to create a climate of mutual respect in the classroom. While differences of opinion and perspective are vital and will be encouraged, common courtesy as well as University policy prohibit personal attacks and discriminatory conduct.

2. **READING:** This is a reading intensive course. Students must come to class having read all the assigned materials and prepared to engage in active discussion.

3. **RE-GRADING OF ASSIGNMENTS:** You may request the re-grading of a graded materials in this course. Students who wish to have materials re-graded may choose to do so if the following steps are taken:
   - Student must wait at least 24 hours.
   - Student must read through the assignment thoroughly before requesting a re-grade.
   - Student must provide a written statement of why he or she would like the exam re-graded, which will be turned in with the original assignment.
   - The grade on the exam may be raised, lowered, or left the same.

4. **EMAIL CORRESPONDANCE:** Please identify yourself and the name of our course in all correspondence with the instructor. Also, when you email, please be aware that you should write grammatically. That is not to say that emails could affect your grade, but you should act professionally in this medium like in all communication. Do not expect an immediate response to your email—it is not appropriate to ask a question about an assignment the night before it is due.

5. **ELECTRONIC DEVICES.** Wireless devices including Blackberries and cell phones must be turned off prior to class. I strongly prefer that laptops not be used during class, you must see me personally if you would like to be exempted from this rule.

6. **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND PLAGIARISM.** All work in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. For the consequences of academic dishonesty, refer to the Schedule of Classes published quarterly. Violations will be taken seriously and are noted on student disciplinary records. If you are in doubt regarding the requirements, please consult with the instructor before you complete any requirement of the course. Please review the University’s policies at: [http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/judicial/conduct/sai.htm](http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/judicial/conduct/sai.htm)

7. **DISABILITY SERVICES.** If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon. Please bring a notification letter from Disability Services outlining your approved
accommodations. For information on Disability Services, go to
http://ds.uoregon.edu/DS_home.html

Course Plan

I. Introduction to Feminist Theory: Women, Men and the State
In this section, we will look at several approaches to feminism. For each one, try to answer the following questions and compare with the other approaches
• What does it mean to be a woman? To be a man?
• Are women and men different?
• What causes women’s subordination? How much of that is due to action or inaction by the state?
• What is the right path to eliminating subordination? How large a role should the state play in it?

Week One:
Course Introduction: What is gender? What makes it political?
Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis”
Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”
Judith Lorber, Paradoxes of Gender
Roberta Sigel, Minority Consciousness and Politics
Carol Gilligan, Concepts of Self and Morality
Richard Weissboard, Redefining Dad: How Society Keeps Fathers Away from their Children

Week Two:
Liberal Feminism
- John Stuart Mill, The Subjection of Women (chapters 1, 4)
- Susan Moller Okin, “John Stuart Mill, Liberal Feminist”

For 510:
- Mary Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Women”
- Carol Pateman, The Sexual Contract

Marxist and Socialist Feminism/ A Few Words About Cultural Feminism
- Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union.”
- Carol Gilligan. 1977. “In a Different Voice: Women’s Conceptions of Self and Morality.”
For 510:
- Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Towards the Political Economy of Sex”

Week Three:
Feminisms and Women of Color
- Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes”

For 510:
- Patricia Hill Collins, The Politics of Black Feminist Thought
- Shane Phelan, Getting Specific

Week Four:
Postmodern Feminism
- Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of “Postmodernism”

For 510:
- Joan Scott, “Experience”
- Nancy Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a Post-Socialist Age”

Week Five:
Feminism and the Critique of Neo-Liberalism
- Lisa Duggan, The Twilight of Equality
- Joan Williams, Reshaping the Work – Family Debate

II. Regulating the Body
Shifting gears, we will now start the first of three sections looking at contemporary debates in feminist theory. In this first section, we will be looking at controversies surrounding who controls women’s bodies, how they do it, and why. For each issue we cover, think about the following:
- Are women’s bodies treated differently than men’s? If yes, why?
- How does the regulation of women’s bodies either subordinate or liberate women?
• How are these regulations tied with larger ideas about what “womanhood” or “manhood” means?
• How might some of the feminist approaches we looked at in section one respond to these debates?

**Week Six: Reproduction**

- Nancy Langston. 2003. “Gender Transformed: Endocrine Disruptors in the Environment.” (This is a very interesting read despite the dry title.)
- Eileen McDonagh. 1996. “From Choice to Consent in the Abortion Debate.”

**For 510:**
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, Sexing the Body
- Dorothy Roberts, “Race, Gender, and Genetic Technologies: A New Reproductive Dystopia,” 2009

**Week Seven: Pornography**

- Catharine MacKinnon. “Not a Moral Issue” and “Pornography: On Morality and Politics”

**Female Genital Surgeries**


**III. Regulating Men’s and Women’s Political Lives**

We now turn to contemporary debates about women’s political lives: whether family is empowering or oppressive; and what citizenship means. While some of these topics may seem “private” and non-political, we will examine the extent to which the state is involved in creating and maintaining each. The central questions for this section include:

• How is the state involved in family, citizenship, and welfare?
• Does the state’s involvement enhance or restrict freedom?
• Is there any alternative to state involvement? If so, what?
• Is it possible to divorce our political lives from our bodies or are they inherently tied together?

**Week Eight:**

**Marriage and Family**
- Sharon Hays. 2003. Selections from Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform

In class video: Frontline’s Let’s Get Married

**For 510:**
- Joan Tronto, Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for the Ethics of Care

**Week Nine:**

**Citizenship**
- Mary Dietz. 1987. “Context is All: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship.”

**For 510:**
- Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality”
- Donna Haraway, “Cyborgs”

**Week Ten:**

**Masculinist and Militarized States**


IV. Conclusion - Regulating Identity
There is no simple consensus in feminist theory. Postmodernists and women of color have challenged assumptions about what it means to be a woman. Further, the theorists we have read have very different ideas about what action feminists should take. In the final class, we review who constitutes the “we” in feminism and what actions we might take. We will discuss the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality.

• Is there a useful distinction between sex and gender? If yes, what is it? If not, why not?
• Does Butler offer a real possibility for women or is her argument “feminism for academicians”?

Wrap-up