

Political Science Unit

Academic Year 2009-2010

Feminist Theory

E789 – Autumn – 6 ECTS
Wednesdays 16:15 – 18:00 (Voie Creuse)

Course Description

This course provides a survey of feminist theorizing with a particular emphasis on social and political theory and on probing the impact of feminist theorizing on international practice. It explores questions such as the how gender is constructed, the significance of diversity and intersecting status positions in gender constructions, how feminist agency and knowledge creation are possible within structures of masculine domination, the contribution of feminist knowledge to moral and democratic theories, and the relevance of these questions to feminist activism and scholarship.

The course is conceptualized as a seminar combining reading and discussion. The purpose is to teach students major currents of feminist theorizing, enable them to employ feminist theorizing in critiquing contemporary scholarship and politics, and help students develop a scholarly standpoint in the context of such debates.

> PROFESSOR

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Syllabus

Requirements

Class Report/Discussion (20%): Seminar participants will be asked to choose a set of one seminar questions (noted for each week on the syllabus below) and to prepare a 10 minute presentation on it, in conjunction with the readings for that seminar. The object of the presentation is to introduce a point of view on the questions in order to stimulate class discussion.

Three Essays (20% each): These essays take the form of take-home exams that respond to questions asking you to integrate several weeks of class readings. Questions will be provide a week before the exams are due.

Participation (20%): Students are expected to have done assigned readings and participate in class discussions in an informed manner.

Required Readings:

Books

Please note that these books are mandatory and it is the students' responsibility to obtain these books by themselves (e.g. via Amazon) and read the required readings before the scheduled class.

Diana Tietjens Meyers, ed. *Feminist Social Thought* (Routledge, 1997)

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Duke University Press, 2003)

Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Routledge 2004)

Articles and Excerpts

Articles will be available in a reader.

Oystein Gullvag Holter, Social Theories for Researching Men and Masculinities: Direct Gender Hierarchy and Structural Inequality. In *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, eds. Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and Robert Connell, pp. 14-34. Sage, 2004.

Donna Haraway, Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14, 3 (Fall 1988): 575-599.

Laurel Weldon, Inclusion and Understanding: A Collective Methodology for Feminist International Relations. In *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, eds. Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True, pp. 62-87. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Iris Marion Young, Social Difference as a Political Resource. In *Inclusion and Democracy* by I.M. Young. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Cynthia Enloe, Margins, Silences, and Bottom Rungs: How to Overcome the Underestimation of Power in the Study of International Relations. In *The Curious Feminist* by C. Enloe. University of California Press, 2004.

J. Ann Tickner, Gendering a Discipline: Some Feminist Methodological Contributions to International Relations. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, 4 (2005): 2173-2188.

Martha C. Nussbaum, Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings. (With comment by Susan Wolf.) In *Women, Development and Culture: A Study of Human Capabilities*, eds. M. Nussbaum and J. Glover, pp. 61-115. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Seyla Benhabib, Cultural Complexity, Moral Interdependence, and the Global Dialogical Community. In *Women, Development and Culture: A Study of Human Capabilities*, eds. M. Nussbaum and J. Glover, pp. 235-255. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Course Outline

September 16 Introductions

Constructions of Gender

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| September 23 | Constructions of Gender – psychological and structural: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What individual-level and structural explanations of gender differences do you find persuasive and why? Are these explanations compatible? | Meyers 1-4 |
| September 30 | Constructions of Gender – post-structural: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If power produces gender, what becomes of the responsibility of individuals?• What role can men play in combating gender subordination? | Meyers 5, 39
Holter |
| October 7 | Constructions of Gender – performative: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the implications of thinking of gender as performative rather than socially constructed?• What political gains or losses result from efforts to destabilize gender? | Meyers 6
Butler 2, 3, 4 |

Theorizing Diversity

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| October 14 | Third World Feminism <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can First World feminists understand Third World feminists?• Why does Mohanty see the need to develop a Third World feminism? What does this move mean for feminist politics and scholarship? | Mohanty 1-5

FIRST ESSAY DUE |
| October 21 | Intersectionality <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does recognizing intersectionality differ from recognizing diversity?• Does such recognition contradict or complicate a common feminist struggle against gender subordination? | Meyers 9, 11, 12, 13 |

October 28	Heterosexism and Queer Theory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is queer theory a separate theory or a branch of feminist theory? Why or why not? • What does queer theory add to feminist theories? 	Butler 5, 7, 9, 10
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French Feminisms

November 4	Woman as Metaphor and Figuration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If woman is a metaphor, does she have a substance? • How can disruptions of gendered figurations produce change? 	Meyers 14-17
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Subjectivity, Agency, Feminist Critique

November 11	The Liberal Self and its Critics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the notion of autonomy useful for feminist theorizing and politics? • Is reason a useful category for feminist theorizing and politics? 	Meyers 7, 19, 20; Butler 1
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**SECOND
ESSAY DUE**

November 18	Feminist Approaches to Knowing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would objectivity mean from a feminist perspective? • What do feminist epistemologies contribute to scientific inquiry? 	Meyers 8, 21, 25; Haraway Weldon
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Feminist Ethics and Moral Theory

November 25	Care and its Critics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the notion of an ethic of care essentialist? • Is the notion of justice useful for feminist purposes? 	Meyers 29, 30, 31, 33, 34
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December 2	Difference, Democracy and Justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do feminist reformulations undermine justice and democracy? 	Meyers 38 Young
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Theorizing International Feminist Practice

December 9	Gender in International Development and Security <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is it fair to say that international politics reproduces gender? Does it stretch feminist theory to find gender everywhere?• In the face of recognizing difference and intersectionality, are the goals of universal development and human rights still tenable?	Enloe Tickner Nussbaum Benhabib
December 16	Feminist Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is a global feminist solidarity possible?• What does feminist struggle mean in a post-socialist, globalizing world?	Meyers 22, 26, 27, 28 Mohanty 9

**THIRD ESSAY
DUE**