

Contemporary Classics of Feminist Political Theory
Department of Gender and Race Studies
AAST 415-04/PSC 422-001/WS 440-01
Spring 2020

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Office: Manly Hall 314
Office hours: Wednesdays, 12-2,
and by appointment

M/W/F, 10:00-10:50
Classroom: Manly Hall 102

Course description

What is a woman? What's gender? Or sexuality? Patriarchy? How about feminism? Are all women feminists? What, if anything, do all women have in common?

What does it mean to “do” political theory about sex and gender? What issues does feminist political theory help us to understand in new ways?

How have feminist scholars thought about the relationships between gender equality, racial equality, and class difference? And how do ideas and theories about politics translate into political action?

The purpose of this course is to explore these questions by reading, discussing, and analyzing a broad range of classic texts in feminist political theory. Our emphasis will be on work produced in the past forty years, or what is referred to as feminism's “second wave.” While we will cover a wide range of topics and themes, we will pay particular attention to the confluence of gender, race, and sexuality.

Our approach will be divided into three sections: theory, embodied experience, and politics. Under the heading of theory, we will examine feminist methodologies and epistemologies, or ways of inquiring and knowing about the world. Our readings on embodied experience will ask us to consider issues such as objectification and reproduction, as well as the particular subject positions of gendered, racialized, differently abled, and queer bodies as they move through a world in which they are generally treated as deviations from an idealized norm. Our third section, on politics, will focus on a handful of themes central to recent feminist political theory, including sex work, faith and secularism, and the carceral state.

By the end of the semester, you will acquire a significant overview of the central debates, events, questions, and texts that feminist political theorists have engaged with and produced over the past several decades. I intend for the course to serve as a strong foundation for your future work, but it will also be of interest to students curious about any of the above questions.

Course objectives

As the instructor, I will:

- introduce students to major texts and debates within the subfield of feminist political theory.
- situate the texts within their historical context.
- connect the course materials to present-day concerns.

- familiarize students with the wide range of academic resources available to them on campus.
- facilitate the development of students' writing skills by providing frequent written feedback, as well as opportunities for peer review workshops.

Student learning outcomes

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

- identify and describe the major concerns of contemporary feminist political theory.
- distinguish between various schools of feminist thought, such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, queer feminist thought, and Black feminist thought.
- describe contrasting arguments *within* particular schools of thought.
- articulate the tensions between competing methodologies developed by feminist political theorists, such as standpoint theory and intersectionality.
- critically evaluate texts. More particularly, you will be able to identify and appraise an essay's central argument and the key evidence used to support it.
- apply general theoretical arguments to specific contemporary issues beyond those discussed within the texts themselves.

Reading schedule

I. Theory

W, 1/8 No class (Southern Political Science Association conference)

F, 1/10 No class (Southern Political Science Association conference)

What does it mean to do feminist political theory?

M, 1/13 Adrienne Rich, "Claiming an Education" (1977)

Sara Ahmed, "Introduction: Bringing Feminist Theory Home," in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), pp. 1-17.

W, 1/15 María C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You!" *Women's Studies International Forum* 6.6 (1983): 573-581.

bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4.1 (1991): 1-12.

F, 1/17 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor et. al., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, ed. Taylor (2017), pp. 1-25 and 34-43.

Feminist epistemology: standpoint theory

M, 1/20 No class (MLK Day)

W, 1/22 Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specific Feminist Historical

Materialism,” in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and the Philosophy of Science*, eds. Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka (1983), pp. 283-310.

F, 1/24 Patricia Hill Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,” *Signs* 14.4 (1989): 745-773.

M, 1/27 Sandra Harding, “The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory,” *Signs* 11.4 (1986): 645-664.

Feminist epistemology: epistemic violence and oppression

W, 1/29 Linda Martín Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991-92): 5-32.

F, 1/31 Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,” *Hypatia* 26.2 (2011): 236-257.

Feminist methodology: intersectionality

M, 2/3 Hazel Carby, “White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood,” in *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women's Lives*, eds. Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (1997 [1982]), pp. 110-128.

W, 2/5 Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-1299.

F, 2/7 Jennifer Nash, “A Love Letter from a Critic, or Notes on the Intersectionality Wars,” in *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (2019), pp. 33-58.

II. Embodied experience

Making/doing gender

M, 2/10 Emily Martin, “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male Female Roles,” *Signs* 16.2 (1991): 485-501.

W, 2/12 Judith Lorber, “‘Night to his Day’: The Social Construction of Gender,” in *Paradoxes of Gender* (1994), pp. 13-36.

F, 2/14 Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531.

Universalism and objectification

M, 2/17 Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects," in *The Invention Of Women: Making An African Sense Of Western Gender Discourses* (1997), pp. 1-30.

W, 2/19 Iris Marion Young, "Breasted Experience: The Look and the Feeling," in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (2005 [1990]), pp. 75-96.

F, 2/21 **Peer review workshop - midterm outline due**

Racial difference and identity

M, 2/24 hooks, "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression," and "The Significance of Feminist Movement," in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), pp. 1-42.

W, 2/26 Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface," "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," and "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (2007 [1984]), pp. 53-65 and 110-133.

F, 2/28 Gloria Anzaldúa, "La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Toward a New Consciousness," in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), pp. 78-91.

Midterm paper due

Queering feminist theory

M, 3/2 Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5.4 (1980): 631-660.

W, 3/4 Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ* 3.4 (1997): 437-465.

F, 3/6 Talia Mae Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman,'" in *Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, sixth edition (2012), eds. Nicholas Power, Raja Halwani, Alan Soble, pp. 233-250.

Reproduction

M, 3/9 No new reading. In-class screening of *Made in India* (2010), dirs. Rebecca Haimowitz and Vaishali Sinha.

W, 3/11 Amrita Pande, "Commercial Surrogacy in India: Manufacturing a Perfect Mother-Worker," *Signs* 35.4 (2010): 969-992.

- F, 3/13 No new reading - catch up day.
- M, 3/16 No class (spring break)
- W, 3/18 No class (spring break)
- F, 3/20 No class (spring break)

III. Politics

Global feminisms

- M, 3/23 Uma Narayan, "Restoring History and Politics to 'Third-World Traditions': Contrasting the Colonialist Stance and Contemporary Contestations of Sati," in *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third-World Feminism* (1997), pp. 41-80.
- W, 3/25 Narayan, "Cross-Cultural Connections, Border-Crossings, and 'Death by Culture': Thinking About Dowry-Murders in India and Domestic-Violence Murders in the United States," in *Dislocating Cultures*, pp. 81-117.
- F, 3/27 Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women (Still) Need Saving?" in *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013), pp. 27-53.

The "sex wars"

- M, 3/30 Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (1988), pp. 7-32 and 67-95 (in pages 67-95, read the questions that interest you most and skim the rest).
- W, 4/1 Lisa Duggan, Nan D. Hunter, and Carole S. Vance, "False Promises: Feminist Antipornography Legislation," in *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (2006 [1996]), pp. 43-64.
- F, 4/3 No class (Honors Day)

Faith and secularism

- M, 4/6 Joan Wallach Scott, "Women and Religion," in *Sex and Secularism* (2018), pp. 30-59.
- W, 4/8 No class (Western Political Science Association conference)
- F, 4/10 No class (Western Political Science Association conference)
- M, 4/13 Saba Mahmood, "The Subject of Freedom" and "Topography of the Piety"

Movement,” in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005), pp. 1-5 and 40-78.

W, 4/15 Mahmood, “Agency, Gender, and Embodiment,” in *Politics of Piety*, pp. 153-188.

F, 4/17 **Peer review workshop - final paper outline due**

The carceral state

M, 4/20 Dorothy Roberts, “Making Reproduction a Crime,” in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (1997), pp. 150-201.

W, 4/22 Angela Y. Davis, “Introduction: Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?” and “How Gender Structures the Prison System,” in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003), pp. 9-21 and 60-83.

IV. Onward!

F, 4/24 Ahmed, “A Killjoy Survival Kit” and “A Killjoy Manifesto,” in *Living a Feminist Life*, pp. 235-268.

Exam week **Final paper due** (exact date TBA)

Required texts

None! All readings will be available via a shared Box folder: <https://alabama.box.com/s/ngeml8owiggw67ed7z0gtjlle2yoxj9t>

You may wish to have your own copy of the following texts, of which we will read significant sections (though not more than 50%):

bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*

Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*

Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third-World Feminism*

Assignments and requirements

Presentation (10%): Everyone will be responsible for offering a critical introduction to a reading once over the course of the semester. Guidelines will be distributed in class.

Discussion posts (15%): Everyone is responsible for submitting ten posts to the course discussion board over the semester. There are twelve possible weeks to submit your post (see the assignment schedule); you may skip posting the week you lead discussion and one other week. Each should be in the range of 250-300 words. Please submit your post to Blackboard by 5 am.

Your post should pose a specific question you would like to discuss about the upcoming reading (i.e., the reading that will be discussed in class on the same day that the post is due) and give

your preliminary thoughts about it. You might address ideas or arguments you found confusing, intriguing, or with which you disagreed, or you could relate the reading to events in the news, other classes you've taken, or things you've read. The posts do not need to discuss the readings comprehensively but should instead focus on a particular issue, theme, or even paragraph.

Preparation and participation (25%): This class will be discussion-based and so regular attendance, preparation, and participation are required. Regular attendance will facilitate the development of our class community, which will in turn improve the quality of our discussions.

You may miss three classes (excluding peer review workshops) for any reason, no explanation necessary.

There will be ample opportunity for participation, both in class discussions and in smaller groups. Other forms of engagement, like asking questions, volunteering to read passages aloud, and stopping by during my office hours, also count toward this!

Writing assignments (totals 50%): write a midterm paper (15%) and then a final paper (25%) on two different topics of your own devising. An outline for each paper (each worth 5%) will be due in advance for a peer review workshop.

Lectures

You are invited (though not required) to attend the Gender and Race Studies Spring Lecture Series, which will usually occur on Thursday afternoons. I will distribute more details as they are available.

Assignment schedule

Wednesday, January 8	No class (Southern Political Science Association conference)
Friday, January 10	No class (Southern Political Science Association conference)
Monday, January 13	Discussion post due
Wednesday, January 15	
Friday, January 17	
Monday, January 20	No class (MLK Day)
Wednesday, January 22	Discussion post due
Friday, January 24	
Monday, January 27	Discussion post due
Wednesday, January 29	
Friday, January 31	
Monday, February 3	Discussion post due
Wednesday, February 5	
Friday, February 7	
Monday, February 10	Discussion post due
Wednesday, February 12	
Friday, February 14	

Monday, February 17	Discussion post due
Wednesday, February 19	
Friday, February 21	Peer review workshop
Monday, February 24	
Wednesday, February 26	
Friday, February 28	Midterm due
Monday, March 2	Discussion post due
Wednesday, March 4	
Friday, March 6	
Monday, March 9	Discussion post due
Wednesday, March 11	
Friday, March 13	
Monday, March 16	No class (spring break)
Wednesday, March 18	No class (spring break)
Friday, March 20	No class (spring break)
Monday, March 23	Discussion post due
Wednesday, March 25	
Friday, March 27	
Monday, March 30	Discussion post due
Wednesday, April 1	
Friday, April 3	No class (Honors Day)
Monday, April 6	Discussion post due
Wednesday, April 8	No class (Western Political Science Association conference)
Friday, April 10	No class (Western Political Science Association conference)
Monday, April 13	Discussion post due
Wednesday, April 15	
Friday, April 17	Peer review workshop
Monday, April 20	
Wednesday, April 22	
Friday, April 24	
Exam week	Final paper due

Academic resources

Please feel free to consult with [the UA Writing Center](#). For questions about formatting, grammar, and other more technical aspects of writings, [the Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) is the best online resource.

The Gender and Race Studies Department works with Dr. Sarah Sahn (sfsahn@ua.edu), a Research & Instructional Services Librarian. Dr. Sahn can help with refining a topic and making a research plan, figuring out how best to search for information on a specific topic and identifying the best databases, locating specific resources, and citing them properly. She can also help with citation

managers (especially Zotero). Students are welcome to make appointments to meet with her in person or in small groups. She can also meet via video conferencing or answer questions over email.

Office hours

I have an open door policy for office hours. While you can contact me about meeting at a particular time (especially if you have class during my regular hours), you should also feel free to drop by without prior notice. If you are absent, it is a good idea to stop by and make sure you're caught up. Please know that you do not need to be struggling to come to office hours! I am happy to discuss particular readings, written assignments, how our work connects to other classes you're taking, the Women's Studies minor and the African-American Studies major, or the class in general.

Extensions and late assignments

A two-day extension can be requested for either the midterm paper or the final paper, as long as it is done at least 48 hours in advance of the regular due date, via email.

Late assignments will lose one-third of a letter grade (i.e., an A- becomes a B+) for every day that they are late, including weekends, except in cases of illness or other documented emergencies.

Assignments not submitted will receive an F. All assignments must be submitted in order to pass the course. I reserve the right to alter any reading or writing assignments during the semester.

General grading rubric

A (100-90): demonstrates careful and thorough reading of the text; answers all parts of the question(s); provides a clearly articulated thesis; outlines the way in which thesis will be explicated; defends and supports thesis in the body of the paper using textual evidence; considers counter-arguments, if appropriate; argues, does not summarize; structurally elegant; writing is clear and straightforward. Excellent work.

B (89-80): demonstrates familiarity with the text, though may rely more on lecture and discussion than on own reading, or may demonstrate a cursory reading; provides a solid thesis but may not explain how it will be defended, support it thoroughly with textual references, or develop arguments as fully as they ought to; may make selective use of text to support claims; structurally, individual points may feel disconnected from one another. Writing is clear but with room for improvement. Good, but not excellent, work.

C (79-70): a weak, if appropriate or topical, thesis that either does not require a strong defense or relate entirely to the original question(s); demonstrates minimal passing acquaintance with the material; evidence may be drawn primarily from lecture; substance of paper may tend toward summary of the text rather than critical engagement; does not attend to counter-arguments; individual paragraphs may be well-crafted but the paper overall lacks a sense of cohesion and attention to detail. Fair, but not good, work.

D (69-60): does not provide a clear thesis; may not respond to the question(s); does not support claims with evidence; emphasizes opinion or summary over analysis; paper lacks structure; does not otherwise demonstrate mastery of the concepts presented and analyzed in class; lack of organization makes paper difficult to follow; neglect of grammar, style, and writing.

F (59-0): does not provide a thesis or respond to the question(s); may be purely opinion or summary of text(s); no attempt to convey an interpretation of the material; lacking structure, coherence; no attention paid to grammar, style, and writing.

Academic integrity

You are expected to be familiar with - and adhere to - the official Academic Misconduct Policy provided in the UA Catalog.

Technology

Laptops and tablets are permitted for accessing e-books and readings on Blackboard. This is subject to change if they become a source of distraction. Phones are *verboden* (forbidden).

Content note

Given the nature of the course, some of the materials we read will deal with topics that may have personal resonance, such as misogyny, sexual violence, abuse, and racism. If there are specific materials or topics that you anticipate will be particularly challenging for you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have beforehand and, if necessary, find alternative materials.

If you ever feel the need to step outside during a class discussion, you may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.

Accessibility

I am committed to the full inclusion of all students. Please speak with me if you have a condition (whether apparent or non-apparent, learning, emotional, physical, or cognitive) that will require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures.

I also encourage you to contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) for information about accommodations. If you have a diagnosis, ODS can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. By making a plan through ODS you can ensure appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to me (or any other instructors).

If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please see the University's FAQs on the UAct website.

If you intend to be absent from class for religious observance, please see the Guidelines for Religious Holiday Observances and notify me in writing or via email during the first two weeks of the semester. I will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course.

Personal resources

If you face challenges securing food or housing and believe this may affect your performance in the course, I urge you to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so and I will try to connect you with available resources.

For students dealing with anxiety, depression, distress, or other concerns, the [Counseling Center](#) can offer resources. They can be reached 24 hours a day at 205.348.3863.

[The Women and Gender Resource Center](#) (205.348.5040) provides free, confidential, and voluntary counseling and advocacy services to members of the UA community who are victims/survivors of interpersonal violence. Services are also provided to family and friends who have been impacted by the abuse, to Shelton State students, and to anyone who is victimized on the UA campus.

Resources outside of UA include [the National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) (1.800.799.7233) and [RAINN's National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline](#) (1.800.656.HOPE); both of these organizations also offer a chat option.

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help sustain a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility and am required to share with the University information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that is related to me. I can, though, help connect you to resources like those above.