

Contemporary Feminist Political Theory: Gender, Race, and Sexuality

AAST 502-006/WS 510-005
Mondays, 2:00-4:30
Lloyd Hall 318

Professor Gallagher
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Office hours: by appointment

Course description

Political theory has traditionally associated men with citizenship, public life, and affairs of state, while subordinating or ignoring women's interests, experiences, and voices. Feminist political theory challenges this imbalance, while also expanding the boundaries of what ought to be considered "political." Motivated by a concern for inequality in everyday life, feminist political theory seeks to provide a philosophical framework with which to address injustice, while also inquiring about the existential condition of those who identify as women, trans*, or genderqueer. In so doing, feminist political theory pries open the category of "woman" to reveal its complexities, contradictions, and promise.

For example, how can feminist theory speak to the interests of all women without presupposing that women share some similar essence simply by virtue of being women? Should it even try to do so? How can feminism build political coalitions across categories of difference, such as ability, age, class, race, and sexuality? How are women particularly vulnerable to the economic and political effects of globalized capitalism and how can this be addressed? How do we combat the objectification of women? Are practices like surrogacy and sex work compatible with women's political and social equality? How is the family a political and economic unit and how has its configuration changed over time? And how do ideas and theories about politics translate into political action?

In order to address these questions, we will read influential works from contemporary feminist scholars who come from a variety of intellectual traditions and possess differing political commitments. These texts not only disrupt the historic exclusion of women from political theory but also the exclusionary tendencies in some early feminist writing. We will also be joined periodically by scholars whose works we read to discuss their research and the course's larger themes.

Reading schedule

All readings are available in a shared Box folder:

<https://alabama.box.com/s/wezi1izposdndzalzrmyurt65hvmuxas>

WEEK 1 | INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST POLITICAL THEORY (August 23)

Paul N. Edwards, "How to Read a Book"

Adrienne Rich, "Claiming an Education" (1977)

The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)

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.

WEEK 2 | SEX AND GENDER (August 30)

Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough," *The Sciences* 33.2 (1993): 20-24.

Judith Lorber, "'Night to his Day': The Social Construction of Gender," in *Paradoxes of Gender* (1994), pp. 13-36.

Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531.

WEEK 3 | NO CLASS (September 6)

WEEK 4 | EMBODIMENT (September 13)

Emily Martin, "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles," *Signs* 16.3 (1991): 485-501.

Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality," in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (2005 [1990]), pp. 27-45.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory," *NWSA Journal* (special issue: *Feminist Disability Studies*) 14.3 (2002): 1-32.

WEEK 5 | IDENTITY: BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT (September 20)

bell 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.

Audre Lorde, "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. 60-65 and 110-133.

Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), pp. 69-96.

WEEK 6 | IDENTITY: LATINX FEMINIST THOUGHT (September 27)

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

Linda Martín Alcoff, "Decolonizing Feminist Theory: Latina Contributions to the Debate," in *Theories of the Flesh: Latinx and Latin American Feminisms, Transformation, and Resistance* (2019), eds. Andrea J. Pitts, Mariana Ortega, and José Medina, pp. 11-28.

María Luisa Femenías, "From Women's Movements to Feminist Theories (and Vice Versa)," in *Theories of the Flesh*, pp. 38-52.

WEEK 7 | INTERSECTIONALITY (October 4) - MIDTERM PAPER DUE

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.

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

Jennifer C. Nash, "A Love Letter from a Critic, or Notes on the Intersectionality Wars," in *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (2019), pp. 33-58.

WEEK 8 | QUEERING FEMINIST THEORY (October 11)

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

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

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.

WEEK 9 | SOLIDARITY (October 18) - with guest PROFESSOR SALEM

Linda Martín Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991-92): 5-32.

Iris Marion Young, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective," *Signs* 19.3 (1994): 713-738.

Sara Salem, "On Transnational Feminist Solidarity: The Case of Angela Davis in Egypt," *Signs* 43.2 (2018): 245-267.

WEEK 10 | OPPRESSION (October 25)

Marilyn Frye, "Oppression," in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (1983)

Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990)

Sandra Bartky, "On Psychological Oppression," *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (1990)

WEEK 11 | THE STATE (November 1)

Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," *Signs* 8.4 (1983): 635-658.

Wendy Brown, "Finding the Man in the State," in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (1995), pp. 166-196.

WEEK 12 | THE SEX WARS (November 8) - with guest PROFESSOR BRACEWELL

Cherríe Moraga and Fran Moira, "Played between white hands [with response]," *Off Our Backs* 12.7 (1982).

Lorna Bracewell, "Third World Feminism and the Sex Wars," in *Why We Lost the Sex Wars: Sexual Freedom in the #MeToo Era* (2021), pp. 129-179.

WEEK 13 | NEOLIBERALISM (November 15) - with guest PROFESSOR JONES

Catherine Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," *Cultural Studies* 28.3 (2014): 418-437.

Angela Jones, "I Get Paid to Have Orgasms': Adult Webcam Models' Negotiation of Pleasure and Danger," *Signs* 42.1 (2016): 227-256.

WEEK 14 | THE CARCERAL STATE (November 22) - with guest PROFESSOR TERWIEL

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.

Anna Terwiel, "What Is Carceral Feminism?" *Political Theory* 48.4 (2020): 421-442.

WEEK 15 | ANTICOLONIAL FEMINISMS (November 29)

María Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25.4 (2010): 742-759.

Kang Kang, "To Dismantle the Master's Tools: An Interview with Françoise Vergès," *South of the South* (2020)

Serene Khader, "Introduction: Imperialism in the Name of Feminism" in *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic* (2019), pp. 1-20.

EXAM WEEK | FINAL PAPER DUE

Assignments

Discussion posts (20%): Everyone is responsible for submitting ten posts to the course discussion board over the semester. There are thirteen possible weeks to submit your post; there are no posts due weeks 3, 7, or the week you lead discussion. Each post should be in the range of 400-500 words; they are due by 11:59 the evening before class.

Your post should pose a specific question you would like to discuss about the week's reading(s) 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. Please be sure to have the text(s) with you in class.

One aspect of participation will be your turn as the *note taker*. Notes will be shared in a communal Google doc, available to everyone. In practice, feel free to take notes however you like during class as long as you transcribe them into the doc. It must be on a different week from when you are discussion lead.

Discussion lead (15%): Everyone will be responsible for offering a critical introduction to the week's readings and initial discussion questions once over the course of the semester. Guidelines will be distributed in class.

Midterm paper (20%): You will be given a list of prompts to choose from in order to write a 6-8 page paper.

Final paper (20%): You will significantly revise and expand your midterm paper, in addition to producing a proposal for an upcoming conference you are interested in applying to, such as the NWSA or SEWSA.

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.

Policy on missed exams and coursework

A two-day extension can be requested for the midterm 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. It is always better to turn things in late than not turn them in at all!

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.

Attendance policy

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. If you are sick, check in with me when you're feeling better. We'll ensure you are caught up.

Recording policy

Without prior approval from the instructor of this course, students may not record course content and/or post course content publicly, including on social media sites. Students who record and/or post course content without instructor approval may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action.

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

If you'd like to meet with me, send me an email with three or four times when you will be available to meet over the next week and I will get back to you with a confirmation. If you are absent, it is a particularly good idea to 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, or the class in general.

Academic integrity

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

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.

You will also undoubtedly be exposed to views and beliefs that differ from your own, both in the readings and in discussion. You're neither obliged nor encouraged to agree with, or accept, them; your responsibility is only to engage with them thoughtfully and respectfully.

Accessibility

I am committed to the full inclusion of all students. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the [Office of Disability Services](#) (204.348.4285; TTY 205.348.3081). 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 course instructors. Thereafter, you are invited to contact me by e-mail or schedule an appointment to discuss accommodations based on any kind of disability, whether apparent or non-apparent, learning, emotional, physical, or cognitive (if you wish to do so). If, at any point in the

semester, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, again, you are welcome (and not required) to contact me to discuss your specific needs.

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 - specifically [the Office of Student Care and Wellbeing](#) - for support. Furthermore, if you are comfortable in doing so, feel free to notify me. This will help me 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.