

**GWS 441: Contemporary Feminist Theory  
Fall 2013**

T/Th 1:00-2:15  
Russell Lab 150

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Office: 3312 Sterling Hall  
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 2:30 to 3:30pm or by appointment  
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**Introduction**

This seminar is designed to introduce feminist theories and cultivate the art of critical thinking about gender relations and inequalities. We will cover foundational works and current developments in feminist theory and their application to social science research. We will focus on key issues such as the public/private divide, the sex/gender debate, feminist political economy and queer theory. The seminar centers on social theory and stresses the historical, political and collective context within which theoretical discussions take place. Simultaneously, we will practice theory through writing exercises that seek to extend your engagement with topics of your interest.

The goals for this class are threefold. First of all, this class is about reading theory, which is not an easy task. Theory texts are difficult and often confusing. For this reason, this class aims to guide you through the readings and provide you tips to successfully read and understand these texts independently. On average, we read 40 pages for each class. You need to leave enough time to do the readings and pay careful attention to the argument. Second, this class is also about discussion. The best way to learn theories is by discussing and interrogating them in class. You should always be ready to actively participate in class. Discussion should serve for raising questions or doubts and also to critically examine the readings. We should be aware that feminist theories often bring up sensitive and politically controversial topics. It is my goal that our class is a safe environment where we can all talk about them, with an open mind to respect and learn from each other. Last but not least, this class aims to enhance your skills for critical thinking and writing. By means of discussion and assignments you will learn how to critically review texts and analyze them in relation to each other. Overall, this class will provide the basic knowledge and skills to incorporate feminist thinking in your future projects.

**Class requirements**

Students should have some background on gender studies and social sciences. If some student does have trouble following the class, please come and see me during my office hours.

1. Attendance and participation (15 points)

Attendance will be taken at every meeting. You may miss up to 2 classes without being penalized, however each additional missed section will result in a 1 point deduction from your grade. You may miss additional classes for the observance of religious holidays, but must inform me in advance. In addition to attendance, you are required to actively participate in class.

## 2. Reading reactions (21 points)

You need to do the assigned readings before each class. This will guarantee that our discussions are productive and engaging. Additionally, you will need to hand in reading reactions before class. These should include: (a) one paragraph summary of the reading(s) you interrogate, (b) critical evaluation of the reading or idea (e.g. comment on what you found interesting or useful about a particular idea and reason why) and (c) two discussion questions. The reading reactions are not only summaries, they are meant to get you in the habit of interrogating the readings.

I will grade all reading reactions, each satisfactory assignment will be worth 1.5 points, incomplete assignments will be worth between 0.25 to 1 points. You will need to hand in 14 reading reactions to obtain full points. The reading reactions are DUE by 8am before each class, you should POST them on the corresponding discussion board at learn@UW. Late reading reactions will not be accepted.

## 3. Two short papers (50 points)

Papers should be around 3,000 words and no more than 3,500 (ten double spaced pages with a 12 point font). In this assignment you should demonstrate that you understand and are able to articulate your own thoughts about core concepts, ideas and arguments presented in the readings

First paper: DUE Oct 31

Take one or more readings from the list preceding the due date (one of the readings should be a theory piece). Write an essay engaging with the ideas and arguments presented by the author(s). Papers might include a summary section that cannot take more than 25% of its length.

Second paper: DUE Dec 12

You can write the same kind of essay as for the first paper, this time taking one or more readings from the second half of the course. Alternatively, you can write an applied essay based on one external resource (e.g. book, podcast or a movie, see me to discuss beforehand). This kind of essay should employ concepts and ideas from theoretical readings done in class in relation to the content of the external resource of your choice.

## 4. Collaborative learning (14 points)

Inspired by feminist pedagogy, collaborative learning activities seek to increase students' participation in class content design, foster peer-mentoring and practice feminist theory. I will sort students into small groups based on your preferred interests from a list of topics (see appendix). Students should send me their top 3 choices by Thursday 09/5. The groups will work in two activities.

*Peer-review and peer-mentoring:* A member of your peer group will provide feedback on your first short papers. You will hand in two copies of your first paper. I will keep one and give the other to one of your group members. Comments on the paper will be due one week after. You will hand me a copy of the comments you give to your colleague. Additionally, I encourage you to meet outside class or exchange e-mails and share questions, opinions and thoughts about the content of our class. I will not monitor these interactions but encourage you work with your peers.

*Feminist theory in action:* You will collectively look for a recent event or controversy related to your topic and will explore how feminist activists engage it. This activity has two phases. First, you will agree on a short reading that presents your case (e.g. newspaper article, magazine article, blog post) and post it on Learn@UW at least two days before your topic is assigned (see calendar below, *topics in italics*). You will discuss with your group what is relevant about this case and prepare a short summary to present in class on the date your topic is assigned. Second, you will do a little research about feminist actions that engage with this controversy; identify their critiques and proposals. Discuss with your peers: what do you think about their actions? How do feminist theories inform their arguments/actions? The last week of class you will present your findings and share with us your thoughts about your case of feminist theory in action.

Grades: A 93-100 ; AB 88-92 ; B 83-87 ; BC 78-82 ; C 70-77 ; D 60-69 ; F below 60

Academic misconduct: I will follow the university policies on academic misconduct (including but not limited to: plagiarism, cheating, etc.) Complete information can be found at [www.wisc.edu/students/saja/misconduct/academic\\_misconduct.html](http://www.wisc.edu/students/saja/misconduct/academic_misconduct.html)

## **Reading material**

There's only one required book: C. J. Pascoe (2007) *Dude you're a fag*. UC Press.  
The required book is available for purchase from A Room of One's Own.

Additional readings are posted online on Learn@UW. A course package for purchase is prepared and available at the Social Sciences Building copy center upon students' request

## **Calendar of Readings**

( ^Indicates applied reading. Discussion topics in *italics*. )

### WEEK 1 - Introduction

**09/03**      **Syllabus and course introduction**

**09/05**      **Oppression and resistance (~45)**

Young, I. (1990). *Five faces of oppression*.

Taylor, V., Whittier, N. & Pelak, C. F. (2007). *The women's movement: Persistence through transformation*.

### WEEK 2 – Basic concepts

**09/10**      **Sex and/or gender (~30)**

Oakley, A. (2005). *The difference between sex and gender*.

Delphy, C. (1993). *Rethinking sex and gender*.

Fausto-Sterling, A. (1993). *The five sexes*

- 09/12**            **Intersectionality (~60)**  
Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color.

WEEK 3 – Basic concepts (II)

- 09/17**            **What's a theory? (~40)**  
hooks, b. (1991). Theory as liberatory practice.  
  
Lugones, M. C. & Spelman, E. Y. (1983). Have we got a theory for you!  
  
Scott, J. (2001). Gender as a useful category of analysis. (pp.28-50)

- 09/19**            **Standpoint (~45) – Science and technology**  
Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges  
  
Smith, D. (1974). Women's perspective as a radical critique of sociology.  
  
Harding, S. (1983). Introduction: Is there a feminist method?

WEEK 4 – Women's sphere?

- 09/24**            **Becoming a woman (~30)**  
Wollstonecraft, M. (1792). A vindication of the rights of woman.  
  
Beauvoir, S. d. (1989 [1952]). The second sex  
  
Butler, J. (1990). Conclusion: from parody to politics.  
  
**09/26**            **The public/private spheres (~45) – Government and politicians**  
Mills, J. S. (1869). The subjection of women.  
  
Pateman, C. (1983). Feminist critiques of the public/private dichotomy.  
  
^Thai, H. C. (2002). Clashing dreams: Highly educated overseas brides and low-wage U.S. Husbands.

WEEK 5 – Political economy

- 10/1**             **Capitalism and women's oppression (~45)**  
Engels, F. (1884). The origin of the family, private property and the state.  
  
Brenner, J. & Ramas, M.(1984).Rethinking women's oppression. (pp. 47-71)  
  
^Mink, G. (1990). The lady and the tramp (ii)

- 10/3**            **Capitalism and women's oppression (~50) – Labor market**  
Hartmann, H. (1976). Capitalism, patriarchy, and job segregation by sex.  
  
^Collins, J. L. (2008). The specter of slavery.

WEEK 6 – Political economy (II)

- 10/8**            **Housework and care work oppression (~45)**  
Costa, M. D. & James, S. (1975). The power of women and the subversion of the community.  
  
Folbre, N. (2008). Reforming care.

- 10/10**          **Wage labor oppression (~40) – Care work**  
Glenn, E. N. (1992). From servitude to service work

WEEK 7 – Sexuality and patriarchy

- 10/15**          **Sexuality and radical feminism (~55)**  
Firestone, S. (1970). The dialectic of sex.  
  
Millett, K. (1970). Sexual politics. (pp. 17-25; 43-59)  
  
^Bernstein, E. (2010). Temporarily yours: Intimacy, authenticity and the commerce of sex.

- 10/17**          **Sexuality and radical feminism (~40) - Sexuality**  
MacKinnon, C. A. (1982). Feminism, marxism, method, and the state.  
  
Segal, L. (1992). Introduction to Sex Exposed.

WEEK 8 – Sexuality and patriarchy (II)

- 10/22**          **Heteronormativity and separatism (~70) - Homophobia**  
Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence.  
  
Frye, M. (1978). Some reflections on separatism and power.  
  
Pascoe, C. J. (2007). Dude, you're a fag. (pp. 84-114)

- 10/24**          **Violence against women (~40) - Violence**  
Brownmiller, S. (1975). Against our will: Men, women and rape.  
  
MacKinnon, C. (1987). Feminism unmodified: Discourses on life and law.  
  
^Bumiller, K. (2008). In an abusive state: How neoliberalism appropriated the feminist movement against sexual violence.

WEEK 9 – Women's psyche and ethics?

**10/29 Psychoanalytic feminism (~30)**

Freud, S. (1962). Female Sexuality.

Chodorow, N. J. (1999). Psychoanalysis and Sociological Inquiry. In The reproduction of mothering.

**10/31 Care centered feminism (~45) \*\*FIRST PAPER DUE\*\***

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice.

Ruddick, S. (1989). Maternal thinking: Toward a politics of peace.

^ Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. & Avila, E. (1997). "I'm here, but i'm there": The meanings of latina transnational motherhood.

WEEK 10 – Multicultural and postcolonial feminism

**11/5 Feminist theory across borders (~50)**

Mohanty, C. T. (2003). Feminism without borders. Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity.

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). Borderlands. La frontera.

^Brennan, D. (2002). Selling sex for visas

**11/7 Black feminist thought (~33) - Racism**

Collins, P. H. (1991) Black feminist thought

Collins, P. H. (2005). Black sexual politics. (Pp. 53-86)

WEEK 10 – Towards postmodern feminism

**11/12 Nation and reproduction (~30)**

Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). Women reproducing the nation.

^Beisel, N. & Kay, T. (2004). Abortion, race and gender in nineteenth-century america.

**11/14 Postmodern feminism (~70)**

Butler, J. (1993). Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex.

Pascoe, C. J. (2007). Dude, you're a fag. (Pp. 1-51)

WEEK 12 – Postmodern feminist theory

**11/19**            **Postmodern feminist theory (~90) - Masculinities**  
Butler, J. (1993). Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex.

Pascoe, C. J. (2007). Dude, you're a fag. (Pp. 52-81; 115-155)

**11/21**            **Queer theory (~35) – Queer identities**  
Namaste, K. (1994). The politics of inside/out: Queer theory, poststructuralism, and a sociological approach to sexuality

^Schilt, K. & Westbrook, L. (2009). Doing gender, doing heteronormativity

WEEK 13 – Postmodern feminist theory

**11/26**            **Bodies and technology (~40)– Body and health**  
Foucault, M. (1975). The Body of the Condemned.

Butler, J. (2004). Bodies and power revisited.

^Roberts, D. E. (2009). Race, gender and genetic technologies

WEEK 14 – Global divides

**12/3**             **Subaltern studies (~40)**  
Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak?

(2009). The women's crusade. in The New York Times.

**12/5**             **Global forces and social change (~35)**  
Fraser, N (2009) Feminism, Capitalism and the cunning of history.

Peterson, V. S. (2010). Global householding

WEEK 14 – Feminist theory in practice

**12/10**            Students' presentations

**12/12**            Students' presentations

## **Appendix. Collaborative learning topics**

Science and technology  
Government and politics  
Labor market  
Care work (paid and unpaid)  
Violence  
Body health  
Homophobia  
Racism  
Queer identities  
Masculinity  
Sexuality