

POLI 615: Feminist Theories (Winter 2024)

McGill University is on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee Nations and a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst various Indigenous nations.

Instructor: Dr. Kelly Gordon

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Class time: Tuesdays, 2:35-5:25 pm, Leacock 520

Office hours: Mondays, 1:00-2:00 pm in Leacock 529 (or by appointment)

Thematic Description and Course Objectives

This course does not aim to be a comprehensive historical overview or a complete representation of current feminist theory. Instead, it serves as an introduction to the diverse array of feminist theories, concepts, and central thinkers. We explore feminist theory through a lens of political inquiry, addressing questions such as: What defines a woman? What constitutes gender? Who is eligible to formulate feminist theories? What are the crucial issues and debates that have influenced feminist thought and activism throughout history? And how does feminism interact with and responds to its ideological adversaries (namely, conservatism)?

Required Texts

All materials will be made available through myCourses.

Assignments and Grading (detailed discussion below)

- Ad hoc weekly participation 10%
- Tour de table interventions 10%
- Presentation 20%
- Short papers (X2) 30%
- Final paper 30%

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week/Topics	Date	Assignments and/or Readings
	J. 9	NO CLASS
Week 1: Feminisms	J. 16	<p>Sarah Ahmed, "Whose counting?"</p> <p>Kathy Ferguson, "Feminist Theory Today"</p> <p>Wendy Brown, "The impossibility of women's studies"</p> <p>Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"</p> <p>Uma Narayan, "Contesting Cultures: "Westernization," Respect for Cultures, and Third-World Feminists. In <i>Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminisms</i>"</p> <p>Patricia Hill Collins, "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought"</p>
Week 2: The category of woman	J. 23	<p>Simone de Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i>: "Introduction"</p> <p>Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's <i>Second Sex</i>"</p> <p>Sojourner Truth. Ain't I a Woman?</p> <p>Audre Lorde. "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference"</p> <p>Sandra Harding, "The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory"</p> <p>Pascoe, Cheri, <i>Dude You are a Fag</i> - Introduction</p>

<p>Week 3: Feminism, Science, and Epistemology</p>	<p>J. 30</p>	<p>Sandra Harding, "The Woman Question in Science to the Science Question in Feminism"</p> <p>Donna Haraway, "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective"</p> <p>Emily Martin, "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science and Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles"</p> <p>Judith Butler, "Performative acts in gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory"</p>
<p>Week 4: The body</p>	<p>F. 6</p>	<p>Ann Koedt, "The Myth of Vaginal Orgasm"</p> <p>Elizabeth Lloyd, "Pre-theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality"</p> <p>Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity"</p> <p>Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory"</p> <p>Kathy Davis, "Reclaiming Women's Bodies: Colonialist Trope of Critical Epistemology?"</p>
<p>Week 5: Phenomenology to post-structuralism</p>	<p>F. 13</p>	<p>Iris Marion Young, "Throwing like a girl"</p> <p>Dianne Chisholm, "Climbing like a girl"</p> <p>Joan Scott, "Experience"</p> <p>Linda Alcoff, "Phenomenology, post-structuralism, and feminist theory on the concept of experience"</p>
<p>Week 6: Race as a critical category of feminist thought</p>	<p>F. 20</p>	<p>The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement"</p> <p>Angela Davis, "Outcast Mothers and Surrogates: Racism and Reproductive Politics in the Nineties"</p>

		<p>Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics”</p> <p>Ange-Marie Hancock, Empirical Intersectionality: A Tale of Two Approaches</p> <p>Sirma Bilge, The fungibility of intersectionality: An afro-pessimist reading</p>
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II. Contemporary topics in feminist theory

Week 7: Feminist sex wars	F. 27	<p>Lorna Bracewell, <i>Why We Lost the Sex Wars: Sexual Freedom in the #MeToo Era</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction <p>Lorna Bracewell, “Sex wars, SlutWalks, and carceral feminism”</p> <p>Brenda Cossman,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction - Chapter 2 - Chapter 3
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READING BREAK

Week 8: Feminist Stories	M. 12	<p>Clare Hemmings, <i>Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction - Chapter 6 <p>Jennifer Nash <i>Black Feminism Reimagined</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Conclusion
Week 9: Feminist futures	M. 19	<p>Marqui Bey, <i>Black Trans Feminism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Chapter 1 (“Black, Trans Feminism”) <p>Leanne Simpson, <i>As We have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 1 - Chapter 2
III. Feminism at the intersection of conservatism		
Week 10: Is there a conservative feminism?	M. 26	<p>Dworkin, Andrew. 1982. <i>Right Wing Women</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction <p>Klatch, Rebecca. 1987. <i>Women of the New Right</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction <p>Suzanne Venker, and Schlafly Phyllis, <i>The Flipside of Feminism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intro - Chapter 1, 2, Appendix A <p>Posner, Richard. 1989. <i>Conservative Feminism</i></p> <p>Ronne Schreiber, "Is there a conservative feminism?"</p>
Week 11: Is there a conservative feminism?	A. 2	<p>Sara Farris, <i>In the Name of Women's Rights</i></p> <p>Saurette and Gordon, <i>The Changing Voice of the Anti-Abortion Movement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preface and Introduction
Week 12: Living in Trump times	A. 9	<p>Bonnie Honig, <i>Shell-Shocked: Feminist Criticism After Trump</i></p>

Assignments and Grading

I – Ad hoc weekly participation (10%) and “tour de table” (10%)

Active participation is central in ensuring students understand and retain knowledge. Students will therefore be expected to regularly and thoughtfully participate in class – identifying key themes and issues and asking and answering questions from colleagues and the professor.

To facilitate participation, each seminar discussion will begin with a “tour de table” where every student is expected to contribute and reflect on what struck them with the week’s readings (in 2-4 minutes). You can prepare these comments beforehand and/or respond to the insights raised by others. The tour de table counts towards 10% of your final participation grade; the remaining 10% will be based on your ad hoc participation in the remainder of seminar time.

Grades will be determined based on the following criteria:

- ◇ The student has consistently attended and voluntarily participated in class discussion
- ◇ The student has enhanced the learning environment by participating respectfully in discussions with her/his colleagues
- ◇ The student has demonstrated significant preparation for the class (able to consistently answer directed questions about the readings)

Each student had one “freebie” excused absence (in other words, you can be absent for one week with no consequences and no questions asked). In the unideal case that you miss more than one seminar, you can submit a written reaction to the recorded class discussion to make up for your missed participation. This response should be 300-500 words and emailed to the professor within seven days following the session.

II. Presentation (20%)

Every student will start one of the classes with a teaching presentation. Student presentations should be no more than 15 minutes (cut off at 20 minutes) and should elaborate on one central aspect of the day’s readings. Your presentation should identify and highlight key themes, arguments, and tensions within the readings. Do not try to be comprehensive, but rather present a coherent, focused analysis of what interests or compels you about the readings. Additionally, students should offer a few detailed questions (not more than 3) to spark discussions for the rest of the class.

III. Critical analysis papers (30%)

Students will submit two 2500-to-3500-word paper based on two out of the three modules covered in class. Everyone must complete the paper for module 1. You have a choice for the second paper between module 2 and 3.

A list of potential questions will be posted on myCourses at least two weeks before the deadline. Students may select the question of their choice and answer that question drawing on **at least three readings** assigned in the module. Your short essay will be graded to the degree to which **you directly and actively engage with the course materials**. Your answer should avoid summarizing (i.e., it should not simply review course material); present a clear and coherent argument (in other words, your response needs to answer the question being asked). No outside research is required.

Deadlines:

Module 1	March 12 (mandatory)
Module 2	March 30
Module 3	April 19

Formatting, Style, and Content Requirements for Short Papers:

- Please submit as a Word document

- Place your name, date, course title, word count, and pagination at the top left-hand corner.
- Do not include a separate title page.
- Use font Times New Roman, size 12.
- Double-space your work.
- Use 1-inch margins all around.
- Aim for concision and clarity in your writing.
- Avoid using long quotations. Instead, summarize the author's point in your own words.
- A high quality of writing is expected. This includes grammar, sentence structure, paragraph organization, clarity and concision.
- Proof-read your work carefully. Editing your work several times is good writing practice and is the best way to improve your writing skills. Excessive spelling and grammatical errors will lower your grade.
- Your paper must demonstrate honest and serious engagement with course readings, concepts and discussions.
- You are welcome to make informed critical comments but note that this is different from opinion. Do justice to the author and make the best case you can for them before prematurely criticizing them.

Evaluation Criteria:

The reading responses will be evaluated by four criteria:

1. Whether your response presents and defends a clear and coherent argument,
2. The quality and accuracy of your interpretations of the course readings,
3. The quality of writing,
4. The degree of insight, creativity, and critical engagement with the material.

To achieve an A- or above, your response must be very good to excellent on all measures.

IV. Research Paper (30%)

The term paper answers a question related to course themes and readings (maximum 7,000 words, references/footnotes included). Students should meet with me to formulate their own paper topics prior to **March 15th**. The final draft of the research paper is due on **April 19th by 4 pm** (if you are TAing this semester you have an extra week). Papers will lose 1/3 of a letter grade per day late.

Other things to note:

A Note on Triggers:

In this course we will be reading materials and having ongoing, detailed, and in-depth discussions about gender, feminism, and gendered violence in its myriad forms. As an instructor, I seek to create a space where we can work through these issues and the way they touch our lives in an open, supportive, and respectful environment.

Triggers are insidious, unpredictable, amorphous and vary in intensity. I both urge and support strategies of self-care that emerge in the moment (e.g. checking out, taking breaks) and that you cultivate, or have already cultivated, over time (e.g. after a tough reading you might go for a walk, call your mom, make a nourishing meal, snuggle with your pets or loved one(s), watch Netflix). If you are concerned that one of the weekly topics or readings will be particularly destabilizing to you, or if you want me to flag particular topics for you, please come talk to me so we can make alternative arrangements. Do not hesitate to email me to further discuss this with me.

Copyright of Lectures Statement

All slides, video recordings, lecture notes, etc. remain the instructor's intellectual property. As such, you may use these only for your own learning (and research, with proper referencing/citation) ends. You are not permitted to disseminate or share these materials; doing so may violate the instructor's intellectual property rights and could be cause for disciplinary action.

Extraordinary Circumstances Statement

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Language of Submission:

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.

Academic Integrity:

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures" (see McGill's guide to academic honesty for more information).