

**Feminist Political Theory (PS/GWS931)**  
Departments of Political Science & Gender and Women's Studies

Fall 2019  
W 3:30-5:25 PM  
**Ingraham 216**

Professor Keisha Lindsay  
Room 3311-Sterling Hall  
263-2763

**Office Hours:**  
Tuesdays 8:25-9:25 AM  
Thursdays 12:15-1:15 PM

**Course Description and Objectives:**

The aim of this course is to critically examine how various “schools” of feminist political thought understand the relationship between experiencing oppression and embracing a particular politics. We pay particular attention to: 1) what feminist theorists mean when they speak of “experience” as well as 2) feminist debates about whether experiencing oppression is the motive force of progressive politics or if the opposite is true – that racist, patriarchal, and other kinds of harmful politics often shape our very understanding of what it means to experience oppression.

Section one of the course explores radical, standpoint, intersectional and other feminist theorists’ presumption that the “personal is political” or that women’s personal experience of oppression leads them to embrace anti-racist, feminist, and otherwise progressive politics. Section two complicates this understanding of the “personal is political.” We begin by exploring materialist feminists’ contention that focusing on personal or individual experience mistakenly diverts attention from how women’s *structural* experience of oppression shapes their political thoughts and actions. We conclude this section of the course by interrogating postmodern feminist theorists’ claim that experience, however defined, is not the motive force of progressive politics. Instead, how we define women’s, or any other group’s experience of oppression, is always already politicized in ways that are far from liberatory. The third section of the course explores feminist political theorists’ efforts to strike a “middle ground” regarding the relationship between experience and politics. The texts we will examine include Young’s notion of “seriality” as well as Spivak’s argument(s) regarding “strategic essentialism.” The readings in the fourth and final section of the course explore the feminist literature on traditional feminine gender performance. Our aim is to both concretize and further illuminate the feminist perils and possibilities of experience-based politics.

**Course Readings:**

The following books are **required** for purchase at A Room of One’s Own Bookstore, 315 W Gorham St. Tel: 608-257-7888

- Betty Friedan. *Feminine Mystique*. ISBN-10: 0393322572
- Patricia Hill-Collins. *Black Feminist Thought*. ISBN-10: 0415964725
- Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*. ISBN-10: 0415389550
- Anna Julia Cooper. *A Voice of the South*. ISBN-10: 0486805638
- Joan Tronto. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. ISBN-10: 0415906423
- Julia Serano. *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* ISBN-10: 1580056229

The abovementioned books are also on reserve at the College Library in the Helen C. White Building. Article length texts are available online at the listed URL **OR** via Canvas.

**Course Requirements:**

*Participating in class discussion (20%)*

This is a reading and discussion intensive seminar in which close reading of the assigned texts and

active participation in class discussion are key to your success. Students who miss more than half of all of the class meetings without a satisfactory explanation will automatically receive a failing grade for course.

Each student will complete a mid-term and final self-evaluation form regarding their participation. These forms, combined with the instructor's own written evaluation of your participation during the semester, are designed to: 1) help improve the quantity and the quality of your classroom participation and 2) provide a systematic, transparent means of assessing your participation grade.

#### *In-Class Presentation (25%)*

Each student is required to make a 10-12 minute in class presentation on specific course readings. Each presenter is required to do the following:

- 1) Briefly summarize 2-3 **key themes** in the assigned readings (in 5 minutes maximum)
- 2) Identify 2-3 key **theoretical assumptions** that unite and/or divide the assigned readings
- 3) Provide 4 specific questions to prompt or facilitate discussion of the assigned readings. At **least** two of these questions should reflect concerns about the readings' potential limitations.

#### *Abstract/Proposal (15%)*

You are required to write a typed, double-spaced 3-page abstract of your final research paper. Your abstract is due (**via Canvas**) on **Nov 15 at 5:00 PM**.

#### *Research Paper (40%)*

You are required to write a 15-20 page typed, double-spaced research paper on a topic of your choosing. Your research paper (**hard copy only**) is due on **December 11 at 3:30 PM**.

**Classroom Conduct:** Please use smart phones, laptops, and their accompanying earpieces responsibly during class in order to facilitate a non-distracting and intellectually productive learning environment.

#### **Grade Related Questions and Appeals:**

*I will only discuss questions about grades during office hours or by appointment - not over email or before/after class. If you would like to challenge your grade, please wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before contacting me.* Final grades will be determined according to the following official UW grading scale: A 93-100; AB 88-92; B 83-87; BC 78-82; C 70-77; D 60-69; F below 60.

**Late Paper Policy:** Papers and exams turned in late will be penalized by **ten (10) percentage points** for each 24-hour period after the due date.

**Academic Misconduct (Plagiarism and Cheating):** By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to [studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/](http://studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/).

**Accessibility:** The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with the you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

## **Section I**

### **Personal Experience as the Grounds of Feminist Politics**

#### **Sept 4: Week 1 – Overview**

- Syllabus Review
- Meet and Greet
- (In-Class Reading) -bell hooks “Theory as Liberatory Practice” (C)

#### **Sept 11: Week 2 – The “Personal is Political”**

- Betty Friedan *The Feminine Mystique* pp. 43-48 AND 57-165
- Carole Hanisch “The Personal Is Political” (C)
- Paula Moya. “Identity in the Academy and Beyond” (C)

#### **Sept. 18: Week 3 – Personal Experience of What? – Feminist Standpoint Theory**

- Nancy Hartsock “The Feminist Standpoint” (C)
- Nancy Haraway “Situated Knowledges” (C)
- Uma Narayan “The Project of Feminist Epistemology” (C)

#### **Sept 25: Week 4 – Personal Experience of What? - Feminist Phenomenology**

- Iris Young “Throwing Like a Girl” (C)
- Sonia Kruks “Going Beyond Discourse” AND “Phenomenology and Difference” (C)
- Linda Alcoff “Real Identities” (C)

#### **Oct 2: Week 5 – Personal Experience of What? - Intersectionality**

- Patricia Hill-Collins *Black Feminist Thought* (Part I, Part II, and pp. 291-310)

## **Section II**

### **Against Personal Experience as the Grounds of Feminist Politics**

#### **Oct 9: Week 6 – Postmodern Feminist Critiques**

- Judith Butler *Gender Trouble* (Part 1, Part 2, and pp. 175-204)

#### **Oct 16: Week 7 - Postmodern Feminist Critiques, Continued**

- Joan Scott “The Evidence of Experience” (C)
- Wendy Brown “Wounded Attachments” (C)
- Chandra Mohanty “Sisterhood, Coalition, and the Politics of Experience” (C)

**Oct 23: Week 8 – Materialist Feminist Critiques**

- Heidi Hartmann “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism” (C)
- Nancy Fraser “Rethinking Recognition” (C)
- Rosemary Hennessy “Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture” (C)

**Section III  
Middle Ground(s)**

**Oct 30: Week 9 – Embracing Personal Experience as a *Political Claim***

- Iris Young "Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective" (C)
- Gayatri Spivak “Subaltern Studies. Deconstructing Historiography” AND “In a Word: Interview with Ellen Rooney Differences” (C)

**Nov 6: Week 10 – Embracing Personal Experience as a *Political Claim, Continued***

- Linda Zerilli “Introduction – Why Feminism and Freedom Both begin with the Letter *F*” (???)
- Johanna Oksala. “In Defense of Experience” (C)
- Diane Perpich “Black Feminism, Poststructuralism, and the Contested Character of Experience” (C)

**Section IV**

**Femininity Revisited: Concretizing the Perils and Promise of Experience-Based Politics**

**Nov 13: Week 11 – Ladyhood as Resistance**

- Elke Zobl “Revolution grrrl and lady style, now” (C)
- Elizabeth Reid-Boyd “Lady: Still a Feminist Four-Letter Word?” (C)
- Janni Aragon “The ‘Lady’ Revolution in the Age of Technology” (C)

**Nov 20: Week 12 - Ladyhood as Resistance, Continued**

- Anna Julia Cooper *A Voice from the South*
- Brittney Cooper “A’n’t I A Lady?: On Race Women, Michelle Obama, and the Ever-Expanding Democratic Imaginary” (C)

**Nov 27: Week 13 – Celebrating the “Feminine” Psyche**

- Joan Tronto. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*

**Dec 4: Week 14 – Femininity and/as Trans-liberation**

- Julia Serano *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (pp. 23-52 AND all of Part 2)

**Dec 11: Week 15 -**

- Presentation/Discussion of Research Findings
- Course Evaluation