

FEMINIST THEORY

Proposed Syllabus

Course Description

This course introduces major topics and debates in feminist theory, both historical and contemporary. Classic texts are read together with integrated overviews situating each set of contributions within key traditions. A central focus is on the diversity within feminist thought in terms of theoretical frameworks, epistemological positions, and empirical topics, as well as the degree of attention to differences among women. A core goal is to equip students to interpret the world from a variety of feminist perspectives, exploring tensions that have inspired new ways of theorizing.

Course Requirements

The course seeks to foster learning through active reflection over course materials, both during and outside of class, to explore both common ground and points of divergence among different feminist theories. To this end, grades are calculated based on the following sets of assignments:

- **Class participation** (25%) This is a discussion-based course, and as such, students are expected to come to class prepared and to participate actively in all class discussions.
- **Discussion leader** (10%) Students, either individually or in groups, will be responsible – together with the course instructor – for leading a session after the first month of class.
- **Feminist traditions notes** (25%) Using an outline distributed in class, students will summarize the key features of different feminist theories, based on the readings completed thus far, as a building block for later drafting the feminist perspectives paper. Due in mid-semester.
- **Feminist perspectives paper** (40%) Selecting a topic in consultation with the professor, students will describe and compare three feminist ways of understanding this issue, as well as make a case for one of these approaches over the others. Due at the end of the course.

Course Materials

Readings are taken primarily from the following books, collecting together key texts in feminist thought. Selections are followed by a letter (N, M, S, T) to indicate the volume where the reading can be found. The remaining readings will be available on electronic reserves.

Nicholson, Linda, ed. 1997. *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge. (N)

Schneir, Miriam, ed. 1994 *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*. New York: Vintage. (M)

Schneir, Miriam, ed. 1994. *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present*. New York: Vintage. (S)

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd ed. Boulder: Westview. (T)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Feminism and Feminist Theory

This week provides a brief overview of first and second wave feminism, introducing major currents in feminist theory, as well as efforts to integrate race, class, and sexuality into feminist thought.

Schneir, Miriam. 1994. "Introduction." (M)

Nicholson, Linda. 1997. "Introduction." (N)

hooks, bell. 2000. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 2nd ed. Boston: South End Press, selections.

Week 2: Liberal Feminism: Historical Roots

This week maps the emergence of liberal feminism, focusing on key texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on topics like education, property, and the right to vote.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Liberal Feminism," first half. (T)

Adams, Abigail. 1776. "Familiar Letters of John Adams and his Wife, Abigail Adams." (M)

Wollstonecraft, Mary. 1792. "A Vindication of the Rights of Women." (M)

Seneca Falls Convention. 1848. "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions." (M)

Sojourner Truth. 1848. "Ain't I a Woman?" (M)

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. 1954. "Address to the New York State Legislature." (M)

Week 3: Liberal Feminism: Contemporary Debates

This week considers more recent manifestations of liberal feminism, examining developments in the twentieth century, as well as critiques of the liberal feminist approach.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Liberal Feminism," second half. (T)

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1952. "The Second Sex." (S)

"Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women." 1963. (S)

Friedan, Betty. 1962. "The Feminine Mystique." (S)

National Organization for Women. 1966. "Statement of Purpose." (S)

New York City Commission on Human Rights. 1970. "Hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment." (S)

Combahee River Collective. 1979. "National Black Feminist Organization Statement of Purpose." (S)

Week 4: Marxist and Socialist Feminism

This week explores the importance of Marxism in the history of feminist thought, investigating influences and tensions across class and sex/gender analysis.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Marxist and Socialist Feminism." (T)

Bebel, August. 1879. "Woman and Socialism." (M)

Engels, Friedrich. 1884. "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State." (M)

Rubin, Gayle. 1975. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." (N)

Hartsock, Nancy C.M. 1983. "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism." (N)

Week 5: Radical Feminism

This week surveys a variety of statements of radical feminism, addressing issues of sexual difference and domination/subordination in relation to topics like rape, pornography, and mothering.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Radical Feminism: Libertarian and Cultural Perspectives." (T)

Jones, Beverly. 1968. "Toward a Female Liberation Movement." (S)

"Redstockings Manifesto." 1969. (S)

Greer, Germaine. 1970. "The Female Eunuch." (S)

Firestone, Shulamith. 1970. "The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution." (N)

Brownmiller, Susan. 1975. "Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape." (S)

Dworkin, Andrea. 1979. "Pornography: Men Possessing Women." (S)

Week 6: Psychoanalytic Feminism

This week addresses the contours of psychoanalytic feminism, focusing on feminist uses and critiques of Freud, as well as divergent feminist strategies in light of the proposed psycho-sexual origins of gender.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Psychoanalytic Feminism." (T)

Chodorow, Nancy. 1978. "The Psychodynamics of the Family." (N)

Irigaray, Luce. 1977. "This Sex Which Is Not One." (N)

Week 7: Maternal Feminism

This week assesses various versions of maternal feminism and the 'ethics of care,' said to characterize women, emphasizing the importance of relationships over universal standards and impartiality.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Care-Focused Feminism." (T)

Ruddick, Sara. 1980. "Maternal Thinking." *Feminist Studies* 6 (2): 342-367.

Gilligan, Carol. 1982. "In a Different Voice." (S)

Week 8: Lesbian Feminism

This week analyzes the emergence and features of lesbian feminism, questioning frameworks that assume heterosexuality as a biological, psychological, and moral standard.

Phelan, Shane. 1989. *Identity Politics: Lesbian-Feminism and the Limits of Community*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, selections.

Radicalesbians. 1970. "The Woman-Identified Woman." (S)

Rich, Adrienne. 1980. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." (S)

Wittig, Monique. 1981. "One Is Not Born a Woman." (N)

Week 9: Postcolonial and Multicultural Feminisms

This week investigates critiques about the 'Western' nature of many feminist theories and presents a variety of approaches for integrating postcolonial and multicultural critiques into a revised feminism.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Multicultural, Global, and Postcolonial Feminism." (T)

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. "Defining Black Feminist Thought." (N)

Brown, Elsa Barkley. 1992. "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics." (N)

Alarcón, Norma. 1991. "The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism." (N)

Uma Narayan. 1997. "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization,' Respect for Cultures, and Third-World Feminists." (N)

Week 10: Ecofeminism

This week assesses attempts to link environmentalism and feminism through theories connecting men's control of land to the oppression of women and the destruction of the natural environment.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Ecofeminism." (T)

Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva. 1993. *Ecofeminism*. London: Zed, selections.

Week 11: Feminism and Theories of Backlash

This week tackles theories of backlash against feminism, as well as the subsequent emergence of 'lipstick feminism' seeking to reclaim symbols of femininity as empowering, in often unexpected ways.

Faludi, Susan. 1991. "Backlash." (S)

Stillion Southard, Belinda. 2008. "Beyond the Backlash: *Sex and the City* and Three Feminist Struggles." *Communication Quarterly* 56 (2): 149-167.

Levy, Ariel. 2006. *Female Chauvinist Pigs*. New York: Free Press, selections.

Week 12: Postmodern Feminism

This week appraises how feminists have engaged with postmodernism, developing theories of gender performance but also signaling the dangers of pure relativism when theorizing identity.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Postmodern and Third-Wave Feminism," first half. (T)

Butler, Judith. 1991. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." (N)

Alcoff, Linda. 1988. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism." (N)

Week 13: Conservative Feminism

This week explores the complexities of conservative feminism, which draws on many of the concepts and values of feminism but often seeks to undermine many of the traditional goals of feminist activism.

Stacey, Judith. 1983. "The New Conservative Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 9 (3): 559-583.

Schreiber, Ronnee. 2008. *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, selections.

Week 14: Religious Feminisms

This week takes up recent debates and developments related to feminism and religion, exploring the ways in which various discourses about religion are used to serve ostensibly feminist ends.

Alcoff, Linda Martin and John D. Caputo, eds. 2011. *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, selections.

Abdulhadi, Rabab, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber, eds. 2010. *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, selections.

Week 15: Third Wave Feminism

This week considers debates over third wave feminism as they relate to topics in the previous four weeks, as well as the semester as a whole, to interrogate the future of feminist theorizing.

Tong, Rosemarie. 2008. "Postmodern and Third-Wave Feminism," second half. (T)

Baumgardner, Jennifer and Amy Richards. 2000. *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, selections.

Hernandez, Dasy, and S. Bushra Rehman, eds. 2002. *Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*. Berkeley: Seal Press, selections.