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.


**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.*


**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)


National Organization for Women. 1966. “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)


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.


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

“Redstockings Manifesto.” 1969. (S)


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)


Irigary, 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)


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.*


**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.*


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


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.


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)


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.


**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.*


**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)
