

**Political Science/Women's Studies 477:**  
**Advanced Feminist Political Theory**  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Department of Political Science  
Professor Hollie Sue Mann



Sharing feminist thought and practice sustains feminist movement. Feminist knowledge is for everybody.

—bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*

In this course, we will examine contemporary issues and problems in feminist theory in a way that builds on the work you did in POLI/WMNS 265. I have many things in mind for this course, but some general goals that I'd like to lay out for you include: gaining a deeper substantive understanding of debates within feminist theory; developing theoretical sophistication in employing gender as a critical lens through which to analyze politics and society; continuing to cultivate the capacity for clear analytic writing and speaking about complex political phenomena; deepening the practice of self-discovery and reflection on the practices of gender and sexuality that you take up and enact every day; refining, or maybe broadening, your understanding of feminist action.

My vision for this course also includes *you* taking responsibility for articulating and accomplishing our shared learning goals. One way to put it is this: I want you to have the experience of *self-consciously* exercising power in this course. As the political theorist Sheldon Wolin says, “experience with, and access to, power is essential to the development of the capacities of ordinary persons because power is crucial to human dignity and realization. Power is not merely something to be shared, but something to be used collaboratively in order to initiate, to invent, to bring about” (*The Presence of the Past*, page 154). I'm drawn to this claim, although I cannot say for certain what this will mean for you as individuals in this course, or for us as a group. But I am eager to see what we can invent and initiate together. Disclaimer: This means that I am treating this class, and our work together, in a unique way. This involves risk on both of our parts, and perhaps more work for us both. But it is my hope that the rewards will be worth it. Let me highlight a few aspects of the course as I have designed it that follow from this commitment to shared power:

1. Some parts of the syllabus are negotiable. The schedule of readings that I have included reflects my vision of the course, but it is an open-ended vision, and one that can and should be altered by the group, should we decide that there are reasons to go off course. I had intended to leave the last two weeks of the semester for readings on topics that we choose as a group. I am still open to that idea, and we can talk more about how to make that happen. We may also decide to adjust readings as we go along, if we discover questions we need to investigate or major gaps in our analysis.
2. We will organize the class as a seminar, in which we all have roughly equal responsibility for participating. Think of our time together as an important intellectual resource and come with questions and ideas to try out. If this is not something you think you can commit to, and if you find that you prefer to hang back in classes and not participate, consider that this may not be the course for you.
3. The major writing project for the course is a portfolio (more on this below). This means you will be involved in deciding what pieces of writing you want to be evaluated on. You will also be involved in determining some of the standards by which you will be evaluated. I do have some specific writing assignments that I want you to do over the course of the semester (the reading abstracts and letter exchanges, more on this below), on which you will be graded, but you can decide whether or not you want them to be part of your portfolio.

### ***Reading abstracts***

Writing is intimately connected to thinking, and that practicing analytic writing is one of the best ways to absorb an argument and clarify your thinking about it. One useful form in which to practice this is a reading abstract. Reading abstracts are 1 ½ page (one-inch margins, single spaced, with an

extra line between paragraphs) analytical reviews which explain and respond to the day's readings.

Reading abstracts should be in the following format:

- 1) in a few sentences, state **one** of the principal questions or problems the author(s) poses.
- 2) in the next paragraphs, explicate a significant line of argument in the work by explaining the author's arguments about, or answer to, the problem she poses – in other words, lay out the major steps she takes to get you from beginning to end. This is a good place to formulate questions about parts of the reading you don't understand, and want to put to the class.
- 3) in a paragraph or so, explain what intrigued, informed, or troubled you about this argument. You might consider briefly comparing/contrasting this author with others we've read
- 4) your abstract must end with a succinct discussion question in the final sentence or two.

I will collect abstracts at the end of class and return them with brief comments at our next meeting. Those who write abstracts for a particular day are expected to initiate class discussion on the readings through a brief oral presentation of their paper/discussion question. We will decide on the first day of class what method to use to determine when you do reading abstracts. You'll do four over the course of the semester, two before spring break and two after.

### ***Letter Exchanges***

Three times over the course of the semester, on a week in which you are not doing a reading abstract, you will write a letter to another member of the class. These letters should be 2 pages or so, informal, and will give you the opportunity to reflect upon our readings, react to our discussions, connect ideas from one part of the course to another, and raise questions and issues not covered during class time. I envision the letters as a place for you to engage in a written dialogue with the course material, the discussions, and most importantly with each other. You should attempt to think creatively and critically, but it is really up to you what you put in your letter. Your thoughts about class discussion? Attempts to put in your own words what an author is arguing? Further questions we should think about? Contemporary examples of something we discussed (commercials, music, campus life examples, work examples, your family's experiences, etc.)? How a reading applies to your life, or to someone you know?

I will pair you with someone for each of the exchanges. At least once you will begin the exchange (letter due Tuesday) and at least once you will be the respondent (letter due Thursday). I will collect both letters on the Tuesday *after* the first letter is due. Obviously, this means that the person who wrote the initial letter is responsible—quite responsible—for bringing both back to class the following week. Please be mindful about this.

### ***Feminism on the Web Project***

I'd like us in some way to investigate feminist resources and/or feminist groups on the Web. Let's talk about how we might incorporate this. One thing I am thinking about is showing short videos of feminist work online once a week in class, work which you find and send to me. You will also see that I have linked to some popular feminist and gender-related sites on Sakai, as well as included some links on our syllabus for specific reading days.

### ***Feminism and Film Project***

Since we only have roughly 16 weeks to cover such an expansive subject, I'd like to give you the opportunity both to examine a topic not covered on the syllabus AND to do a critical analysis of feminist work in the form of film, specifically a documentary. On your own, you will view one of the following films and offer an analytic reading of the film and the way in which it explored its subject.

The same requirements for the reading abstracts apply here, but with three exceptions: 1) The response should be 2 full pages, 2) Include a brief one-paragraph summary at the start of your response, and 3) You will upload your response on Sakai and make it available for your classmates to review. Think of this as a review that might be published for readers of a popular feminist publication (so, a sophisticated readership but NOT a purely academic one).

Documentaries: !Women Art Revolution; The Punk Singer; Dark Women; A Place of Rage; Live, Nude Girls Unite; The Naked Feminist; Missrepresentation; Killing Us Softly; It's a Girl

### *Picture of the Self Portrait*

For Thursday, January 15, write two pages (one-inch margins, single-spaced with one line between paragraphs) on the following. Identify aspects of your identity—your self—that you believe constitute your subjecthood. Which pieces of you go some way to making you who you feel who you are, not so much as others see you, but as you see yourself. Feel free to work with this concept of self as broadly or narrowly as you like—it could include desires, beliefs, practices, habits, geography, appearance, relationships, etc. Describe your “self” in detail, and analyze those pieces of your identity that best capture something that you would call your authentic self. In other words, do not approach this as a mere biographical piece, where you say things like “I go to UNC, I am a women’s studies major, I like to dance, etc.,” but rather as a deeper reflection on your own subjectivity. So, instead, you might say something like, “I am a seeker of knowledge, where this means [...]”. Or, “I am a feminist, where this means [...]”. “Mindful movement is important to me for the following reasons [...]”. Then notice the things that you’ve chosen to focus on. Do they share some overarching characteristic? Are they things for which you have been rewarded in the past, or maybe rejected? Are these validated or dismissed, or both, depending on the context, by society? Are they internal or external (i.e. physical) qualities? Feel free to ask and maybe answer your own questions.

### *Portfolio Assignment*

During the semester you’ll be writing and compiling a portfolio of your work. Your feminist theory portfolio will be a collection of your writing, similar to an artist’s collection of her best work compiled to demonstrate the development of her talents over time and across various projects. Your goal is a finished portfolio of **15-20 pages**, which includes at least one sustained piece (about seven pages) and a reflective cover letter (see below).

Possible contributions to your portfolio might include:

- reading abstracts
- short pieces that respond to and extend classroom discussion of an issue or theorist
- pages from a reading journal you choose to keep during the semester, along with a brief commentary on these journal entries
- reading a cultural product (film, painting, music, novel) through the lens of a particular theorist
- locating, reading, and analyzing an additional essay by a theorist on our syllabus, or an essay cited in our readings
- a research paper on a particular issue that incorporates three feminist theorists and discusses how their theoretical projects help in making sense of an issue
- an analytic essay, on the model of the ones you wrote for POLI/WMNS 265
- letter exchanges

- feminism on the web projects
- feminism and film (or art) project
- an action project, about which I will say more on the first day of class

Some of these possibilities will help you recognize and articulate how theory is already a part of your life, or in what ways you are already a theorist. Some will help you identify the presence of theory and cultural products. Some will help you learn more about specific theories, theorists, or theoretical perspectives. All of the contributions to your portfolio should demonstrate something about your understanding of feminist theory and your position as a theorist.

The portfolio requires a 1-2 page reflective cover letter in which you introduce or explain your portfolio to me and reflect on its content, as well as on your development as a theorist. What you say about your work in this reflective introduction will serve as an important frame for my reading of your portfolio. What's in your portfolio and why is it there? Have you chosen to revise drafts? Why or why not? Have you chosen to submit pieces "in progress"? Why? How have you grown, changed, and/or developed as a theorist, and how do your portfolio contributions and choices reflect that process? What choices did you make and why? We'll talk more about the reflective cover letter later in the semester.

You may work on one of your portfolio pieces collaboratively, if you choose, either in pairs or small groups. This means each member of the collaborative group would turn in the same piece of writing. If you choose to collaborate, please include a note in your portfolio about how the collaboration was organized. You might choose to include this information in your reflective cover letter or as an introductory note to the piece itself.

You may turn in drafts of anything to me at any time for comments. We will need to decide on standards for some of these pieces. We can also decide whether you want to have any deadlines for turning in drafts, if you want me to provide essay questions, and so on.

\*\*You may wish to purchase or check out these books, as they will not be available on Sakai:

Cressida Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies*

J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Post-Capitalist Politics*

Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Culture*

Joan Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice*

Schedule of discussions:

Th Jan 8      Introduction

## **I. Two Beginnings**

### 1. WOMEN AND POLITICS

Both "women" and "politics" are concepts that feminist theorists have been concerned to analyze. As you know, redefining and expanding what counts as "political" has been a significant contribution of feminist theory and practice. But feminist theorists are also concerned with mainstream conceptions of the political ("Women and Politics" is in fact the name of a subfield of the academic study of politics). So let's begin by turning to two theorists who analyze traditional political concepts—citizenship and identity—in light of feminist concerns.

- Tu Jan 13 Mary G. Dietz, “Context Is All: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship” (378-400)  
 Michele Ferguson, “Sharing Without Knowing: Collective Identity in Feminist and Democratic Theory” (30-45)

## 2. THE POLITICS OF WOMAN

The concept of woman and womanhood has been a highly controversial one in feminist theory. Is there a common identity called “woman” around which it makes sense to organize, or does the very category itself serve to further oppress those it seeks to liberate by diminishing important differences and degrees of privilege and oppression within that category? When is “woman” a source of empowerment, if ever, and when is it potentially harmful or threatening to those who either are identified as women or who choose this label for themselves? These questions and debates have largely orbited deeper questions about postmodernism as a tradition of inquiry and its usefulness to liberatory theory. We will look at the intersection of feminism and postmodernism as a way to get at the question of whether “woman” supports feminist aims, undoes them, or perhaps both.

- Th Jan 15 Seyla Benhabib, “Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance” \*This text can be found in the book *Feminist Contentions*, or you can access it for free online, here: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/benhabib-seyla/uneasy-alliance.htm>  
 \*Picture of the Self Portrait Due
- Tu Jan 20 Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism’” (35-57)
- Th Jan 22 Catharine MacKinnon, “Are Women Human?” (41-43)  
 Catharine MacKinnon, “Postmodernism and Human Rights” (44-63)

## **II. Feminism in a Global Context**

This section engages questions of identity, culture, and power in the international context by reading feminist postcolonial theorists. How should feminists theorize power relations and political interaction in an international context no longer characterized by directly colonial relations, but with profound structural inequalities? How can first world feminists make common cause with third world women, and what challenges does this pose for our scholarship and our political activism? What would an anti-imperialist transnational feminism look like?

- Tu Jan 27 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (17-42)  
 Mohanty, “A Place on the Map Is Also a Place in History” (excerpt, 109-117)
- Th Jan 29 Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, chapter 2
- Tu Feb 3 Narayan, chapter 3 [and 1-13 and 32-39 of chapter 1]
- Th Feb 5 Narayan, chapter 4

### III. Gender Trouble and Queer Theory

A particularly important debate in feminist theory of the last few decades has been about the value of poststructuralist political thought for feminism. Feminists influenced by postmodernism and poststructuralism (we will discuss relevant differences in class) argue that both identity and experience are produced through relations of power, and thus do not provide any simple kind of grounding for feminist theory or politics. We will begin by looking at a feminist historian's articulation of these arguments (Scott). Foucault has been a particularly influential poststructuralist theorist for both feminist and non-feminists alike, so we will also look at a feminist philosopher's critique of his work (Fraser), and an excerpt from Foucault's own description of his conception of power. (You might also find it useful to review the Bartky and Alcoff readings from last semester.) Then we will delve into Judith Butler's influential work Gender Trouble. Finally, we will look at the way in which the radical critique of identity has been taken up in queer theory and politics.

#### 1. EXPERIENCE AND POWER

- Tu Feb 10 Joan W. Scott, "Experience" in Feminists Theorize the Political, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (Routledge, 1992)  
Michel Foucault, "Method," from The History of Sexuality, Volume 1 (Vintage Books, 1980)  
Nancy Fraser, From "Foucault on Power" in Unruly Practices (University of Minnesota Press, 1989)  
\*\*also start Butler by reading pages vii-xxiv from the 1999 preface to Gender Trouble

#### **Interlude One: Cyber Feminist Babylon (or, feminists babbling on...)**

- Th Feb 12 Kitty Stryker, "The 80's Called and They Want Their Sex Wars Back" from The Soapbox  
Meagan Murphy, "The Divide Isn't Between 'Sex Negative' and 'Sex Positive' Feminists" from The Feminist Current

#### 2. "THE COMPULSORY ORDER OF SEX/GENDER/DESIRE" AND THE RADICAL CRITIQUE OF IDENTITY

\*\*Somewhere around here, it might be useful and amusing for you to read, "What the Fuck is Queer Theory?" from Critical-Theory.com.

- Tu Feb 17 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, chapter 1 (3-44)  
Th Feb 19 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, 91-100, 117-147

#### 3. QUEER THEORY AND POLITICS

- Tu Feb 24 Annamarie Jagose, "Queer" (72-100)  
Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality" (193-229)  
Th Feb 26 Biddy Martin, "Sexual Practice and Changing Lesbian Identities" (93-119)  
Judith Halberstam, "What's that Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives"

(142-187)

Tu Mar 3      Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”  
(143-178)

Th Mar 5      Elisa Glick, “Sex Positive: Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Politics of  
Transgression” (19-45)

**\*\*Spring Break\*\***

#### **IV. Engendering race, Race-ing feminism**

Although much of what we have read this far orbits questions of race and racialized theory, we will now turn to some of the most important thinkers in the history of feminist political thought—those who have thrown into sharp relief its often racist (worse still, explicitly white supremacist) and exclusive character. These theorists have developed a whole tradition of feminist thought which explores the degree to which certain non-white voices and voices that do not conform to traditional feminist notions of what it means to be a woman have been left out. They engage a multiplicity of voices and demonstrate the way in which race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation and other markers of identity interact in different ways and bring about different ends, with the hope of expanding our construction of “woman” and oppression.

More than this, however, feminist theorists of race and racialized theory have given us alternative frameworks for doing theory, frameworks that begin not with a priori assumptions about women’s experience but rather with questions of power, framing of issues, and voice.

##### 1. CRITICAL RACE FEMINISM

Tu Mar 17      Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black  
Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and  
Antiracist Politics” 314-343  
Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati, “The Fifth Black Woman” 318-327  
Dorothy E. Roberts, “Punishing Drug Addict Who Have Babies: Women of Color,  
Equality, and the Right of Privacy” 445-456

##### 2. BLACK SEXUAL POLITICS

Th Mar 19      Patricia Hill Collins, Black Sexual Politics (excerpt)  
\**Feminism and Film* Project Due

#### **Interlude 2: Art, Race, and Sexuality through the Eyes and Hands of Kara Walker**

Tu Mar 24      Please read and watch the materials in the Kara Walker file on Sakai

#### **V. Feminist Theories of the State**

To talk about feminist theories of the state is to imply an alternative to other kinds of theories about the state, and I think it's fair to say that most feminist state theories involve a profound critique of both liberal theories of the state that assume a neutral and noninterventionist

state, and crude Marxist theories of the state in which the state operates as a tool of capitalism and class domination.

Most feminists understand the state as decidedly non-neutral, and implicated in relations of domination beyond those of class. How does the state generate, sustain, and reproduce gender domination, as well as other forms of domination? What kind of creature is the state: a unified actor with a coherent set of interests, or an indeterminate and contradictory terrain? What specifically does it mean to say that the state is “male”? How should feminists engage the state?

Th Mar 26 Wendy Brown, "Finding the Man in the State" (166-196)  
Davina Cooper, "Multiple identities: Sexuality and the state in struggle" (58-79)

## VI. Postcapitalist Politics

Feminist theorists have long recognized the harmful qualities of capitalist modes of production and consumption, capitalist economies, and free market ideologies. The debate (one cannot seriously call it a dialogue, I'm afraid) between Fraser and Young reveals the extent to which certain perceived needs—like the redistribution of material goods—gets privileged over others—like the need for recognition and meaningful cultural exchange in an increasingly marketized society. How do we achieve equality without being coopted by capitalism?

Others have demonstrated the degree to which the market has insidious effects for women by creeping into traditionally private and personal aspects of our lives, like care. Tronto explores the relationship between care, the market economy, and democracy. Finally, Gibson-Graham use contemporary approaches to sexuality and gender (anti-essentialism, a concern with difference) to rethink capitalism, which has been curiously immune from this kind of analysis. They take seriously the effectiveness of discourse: how we talk about capitalism, and how we represent it in our work, has an effect on our world. How so? What is their aim in theorizing “economic difference”?

### 1. RECOGNITION AND REDISTRIBUTION

Tu Mar 31 Nancy Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age” (11-39)  
Iris Young, “Unruly Categories: A Critique of Nancy Fraser’s Dual Systems Theory” (147-160)  
Nancy Fraser, “A Rejoinder to Iris Young” (126-129)

### 2. CARE, CAPITALISM, AND DEMOCRACY

Th April 2 Joan Tronto, Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice

Tu April 7 Joan Tronto, Caring Democracy

### 3. THEORIZING DIVERSE ECONOMIES

Th April 9 J. K. Gibson-Graham, introduction (xix-xxxvii), “Constructing a Language of Economic Diversity” (53-78), from A Postcapitalist Politics

Tu April 14 “Cultivating Subjects for a Community Economy” (127-163), “Building Community Economies” (165-196), from A Postcapitalist Politics

#### 4. SELF-TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE AGE OF NORMAL

- Th April 16 Cressida Heyes, Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics and Normalized Bodies,  
Preface, Introduction and Chapter 1
- Tu April 21 Heyes, Self-Transformations, Chapters 2 - 3
- Th April 23 Heyes, Self-Transformations, Chapters, 3 - 4

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

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Office hours: Mon 11 – 3, by appointment Tues - Thurs

Class Meeting Location: Hanes 0112

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