

ENG 500 Introduction to Feminist Theory

Spring 2018

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Description of the Course

The aim of this course is to offer students the basic theoretical background required for the comprehension and analysis of issues relating to Gender Studies. Given the multiplicity of methodologies and perspectives, the course is not designed to be comprehensive and will not cover systematically the history of women's movements. It will focus, instead, on key issues and debates in Feminist and Gender Theory. Through the study of selected texts (both classic and more recent contributions to feminist thought), the students will have the opportunity to discuss the major concerns and intellectual developments in Feminist Theory. They will also be encouraged to compare and evaluate different theoretical approaches by bringing them into dialogue and by considering each in light of specific literary texts or films.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge & Understanding (Theory Component)

- Develop familiarity with the history of women's movements and an understanding of the major traditions of feminist theory;
- Appreciate the benefits of interdisciplinary research in the comprehension and analysis of issues relating to Gender Studies;
- Investigate the social and psychic complexity of gender issues, their inextricability from concerns that relate to class, race, sexuality, physical or mental ability, criminality and legality;
- Examine the key concerns and debates in feminist theory; develop the ability to comparatively discuss and evaluate different positions in these debates.

Key Skills (Practical Component)

- Apply the required skills in scholarly research to evaluate the bibliography studied and to put forward a theoretically-informed argument in a well-written academic essay;
- Debate the validity of different arguments and compose informed responses to the competing theoretical perspectives examined in the course;
- Develop effective presentation skills.

Assessment

The final grade for this course will be based on:

- short interventions/presentations on one or more of the texts discussed in class;
- a position paper (approx. 1.500 words) on a particular theorist or question debated in the field of Gender Studies;
- an essay (approx. 2.500 words) to be submitted on the day of the final exam;
- a one-page outline of the main argument of your essay plus working bibliography sheet (due by Week 12);
- the completion of assigned reading *before* each meeting;
- *active* participation in class-discussions; and
- *regular* attendance.

Please note that academic honesty is absolutely required: plagiarism is unacceptable in any form and will automatically lead to your failure in the course.

Required Texts

Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2009).

Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls* (London: Methuen, 1982).

Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. David Le Vay (Urbana and Chicago : University of Illinois Press, 2007).

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, London: Vintage Books, 2008.

Julia Kristeva, *Possessions*, trans. Barbara Bray, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998.

All other primary texts are included in your course packet.

Texts for Further Reading (books marked * are on short loan)

Battersby, Christine. *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity*

(Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

- *Benhabib, Seyla, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell and Nancy Fraser. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).
- Blyth, Ian and Susan Sellers. *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2004).
- *Brennan, Teresa, ed. *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- *Butler, Judith and Joan W. Scott, eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).
- *Crowley, Helen and Susan Himmelweit, eds. *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).
- Deutscher, Penelope. *A Politics of Impossible Difference: The Later Work of Luce Irigaray* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2002).
- *Firestone, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1979).
- *Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality*, Vol. I (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1990).
- *Fraser, Nancy, ed. *Revaluing French Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- *Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963).
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).
- *Harding, Sandra. *Sciences from Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialisms and Modernities* (Durham: Duke, 2008).
- *Hartsock, Nancy C. M. *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York & London: Longman, 1983).
- Kirby, Vicki. *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006).
- *Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970).
- *Minsky, Rosalind, *Psychoanalysis and Gender: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996).

*Mitchell, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis*
(Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1974).

Mitchell, Juliet and Jacqueline Rose, ed. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*
(New York: W. W. Norton, 1982).

*Nye, Andrea. *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989).

*Price, Janet and Margrit Shildrick, eds. *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh
University Press, 1999).

Salih, Sara. *Judith Butler* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Sellers, Susan, ed. *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (London: Routledge, 1994).

*Stone, Alison. *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

*Weedon, Chris. *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

Whitford, Margaret. *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991).

Outline of the course

Week 1: Introduction to the course.

Liberal Feminism: Women and “The Rights of Man”

Rosemarie Tong, “Liberal Feminism,” in *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2009). 11-16.

Mary Wollstonecraft, from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams, Vol. II (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1979). 108-116, 130-137.

Week 2: Rosemarie Tong, “Liberal Feminism” (16-23).

John Stuart Mill, from *The Subjection of Women*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams, Vol. II (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1979). 1073-1082.

Rosemarie Tong, “Liberal Feminism” (23-27, 34-37).

Week 3: Rosemarie Tong, “Critiques of Liberal Feminism” (37-47).

Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls* (London: Methuen, 1982).

Week 4: **Materialist Feminism: The Gendered Division of Labour**

Rosemarie Tong, “Marxist and Socialist Feminism: Classical and Contemporary,” (96-106).

Friedrich Engels, "The Origin of the Oppression of Women," in *History of Ideas on Woman*, ed. Rosemary Agonito (Berkeley, CA: The Berkeley Publishing Company, 1977). 273-288.

Week 5: Rosemarie Tong, "Marxist and Socialist Feminism," (106-111, 115, 118-125).

Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York & London: Longman, 1983). 231-251.

Rosemarie Tong, "Critiques of Marxist and Socialist Feminism," (125-127).

Week 6: Radical Perspectives on Sexuality and Reproduction

Rosemarie Tong, "Radical Feminism: Libertarian and Cultural Perspectives" (48-51, 65-74, 82-89).

Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. David Le Vay (Urbana and Chicago : University of Illinois Press, 2007).

Week 7: Monique Wittig (cont.)

Rosemarie Tong, "Critiques of Radical-Libertarian and Radical-Cultural Feminism" (90-95).

Week 8: Psychoanalytic Feminism: Desire, Language and the Production of

Femininity

Rosemarie Tong, "Psychoanalytic Feminism" (128-133).

Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*,
trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991). 145-169.

Week 9: Rosemarie Tong, "Psychoanalytic Feminism" (152-158).

Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic
Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition
(Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998). 1466-1471.

Week 10: Rosemarie Tong, "Psychoanalytic Feminism" (158-162)

Julia Kristeva, *Possessions*, trans. Barbara Bray, New York: Columbia University
Press, 1998.

Week 11: Multicultural, Global and Postcolonial Feminism

Rosemarie Tong, "Multicultural, Global, and Postcolonial Feminism" (200-215).

Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in
Literary Theory: An Anthology, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan
(Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). 630-636.

Week 12: Rosemarie Tong, "Multicultural, Global, and Postcolonial Feminism" (215-236).

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, London: Vintage Books, 2008.

Week 13: Postmodern Feminism: Performativity and Irony

Rosemarie Tong, "Postmodern and Third-Wave Feminism" (270-274, 277-284)

Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," in *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, ed. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts (London: Routledge, 1996): 120-134.

Jennie Livingston, *Paris is Burning* (1990; film).