

Political Science 116A: Feminist Theory

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Reading Questions, Spring 2008

Friday 4/4 – Foundations of Liberal Feminism

- Sojourner Truth “Ain’t I A Woman?” (*Oxford Book of Women’s Writing in the U.S.* p.441-442)
 1. How does Truth undermine the liberal rhetoric of division between the properly masculine and feminine spheres?
 2. How does Truth contest the prevailing definitions of womanhood?
 3. In what way is Truth making an argument that “equal” does not mean “the same”?
- Mary Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (Everyman Classics edition, “Author’s Introduction” p.3-7, “Chapter XII” p.185-92)
 1. How does Wollstonecraft describe women’s situation, education, status?
 2. What changes does she advocate making in order to improve the condition of women?
 3. What is the role of *reason* in Wollstonecraft’s writing? Of *virtue*?

Week 2: Monday 4/7 – Liberal Theory and Feminist Politics

- Kathy Rudy, “Liberal Theory and Feminist Politics” (*Women & Politics*, v. 20(2) 1999: 33-57)
 1. What is the basis of liberalism’s public/private split? How was that split gendered?
 2. According to the article, why was liberal feminism more attractive to American women than other alternatives?
 3. What kind of subject does liberal theory assume?
 4. How do liberalism’s “posture of tolerance” (43) and “rhetoric of choice and self-determination” (44) complicate liberal feminism’s relation to the racially and economically disenfranchised?
 5. What is the difference between feminism providing *privacy* and feminism providing *meaning*? Which does Rudy believe is more important?
 6. According to Rudy, what is pernicious about the rhetoric of choice employed by so-called “equality feminists”?

Wednesday 4/9 – Marxist and Socialist Feminisms I

- Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, “Communist Manifesto” & “Origins of Family, Private Property and the State” (selections -- *Marx Engels Reader*, p.487-489 & 734-744)
“Communist Manifesto”
 1. What portrait does Marx present of “the family”?
 2. What do you think Marx means when he talks of “do[ing] away with the status of women as mere instruments of production”?
 3. How are “intellectual production” and “material production” related?
 4. What “one fact is common to all past ages,” according to Marx?

“Origins of Family, Private Property and the State”

1. What is the patriarchal family? What is the history of the term “family”?
2. What is monogamy, according to Engels?
3. How is “bourgeois marriage” described?
4. Upon what is the “modern individual family” based?

Friday 4/11 – Marxist and Socialist Feminisms II

- “Combahee River Collective Statement” (B. Smith, ed. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* p.264-74 [2000], p.272-82 [1983])
 1. According to the Combahee River Collective (CRC), what led to the development of a black feminist politics?
 2. What does the CRC find attractive about identity politics?
 3. Why are they socialists? What is entailed by their socialism?

4. What projects and activist work are being considered by or have been done by the members of the CRC?

- Monique Wittig, “One is Not Born a Woman” (*The Straight Mind and Other Essays* p.9-20)
1. What does Wittig mean when she refers to “naturalizing history”? Why does she consider this dangerous?
 2. Why does Wittig advocate a historical materialist approach, and what is it?
 3. What is the difference between ‘woman’ and ‘women’ for Wittig?
 4. What is the importance of constituting oneself as a subject?
 5. Why does Wittig want to destroy the category ‘woman,’ but keep the concept ‘lesbian’?

Week 3: Monday 4/14 – Feminism and the State I

- Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Margaret Coulson, “Transforming Socialist Feminism: The Challenge of Racism” (*Feminist Review* #23, p.81-92)
1. What do Bhavnani and Coulson mean when they say that the state deals with different women differently? How is this related to their analysis of “the concept of gender” (84)?
 2. Why do Bhavnani and Coulson object to the use of the term “ethnocentrism” in the article “Ethnocentrism and Socialist-Feminist Theory”? What term do they prefer, why?
 3. What examples do they cite of how the state (in this case Britain) relates to black people?

Wednesday 4/16 – Feminism and the State II

- Wendy Brown, “Finding the Man in the State” (*Feminist Studies* 18, #1, 1992 p.8-34)
1. How does Brown define the state, particularly the contemporary U.S. state?
 2. What four modalities of contemporary U.S. state power does she identify?
 3. How does she describe a feminist theory of the state?

Friday 4/18 – Feminism and the State III

- Lisa Duggan, “Queering the State” (in *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*, p.179-193; cf. *Social Text* 39, Summer 1994, p.1-14)
1. What is “strategic essentialism” and why does Duggan reject it?
 2. What point is Duggan making when she discusses the hypothetical Oprah panel?
 3. Why does Duggan find the religion analogy helpful for dealing with neutral-state presumptions, and as a basis for politics?

Week 4: Monday 4/21 – Feminism and U.S. Institutions

- Mary Hawkesworth, “Congressional Enactments of Race–Gender: Toward a Theory of Raced–Gendered Institutions” (*American Political Science Review* v.97, #4, Nov 2003, p. 529-550)

Wednesday 4/23 – Feminism and Race I

- Patricia Hill Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought” (*Signs* 14:4, 1989, p.745-773)
1. What is the difference between a Black women’s standpoint and Black feminist thought?
 2. What is Collins’ critique of positivism?
 3. What are the elements of the Afrocentric feminist epistemology Collins presents?

Friday 4/25 – Feminism and Race II

- Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics” in Weisberg, ed., *Feminist Legal Theory: Foundations*, p.383-395)
1. Why does Crenshaw take Black women as the starting point for her article?
 2. What is intersectionality?

3. How have “[c]ontemporary white feminists inherit[ed]... Truth’s challenge to their forbearers” (388)?
4. How was criticism of the Moynihan report and the Moyers television report similar? What was missing?

Week 5: Monday 4/28 – Feminism and Race III

- Gloria Anzaldua, ch. 7 of *Borderlands: La Frontera* (p.77-91, notes p.97-98)
 1. Who/What is *la mestiza*? What is a mestiza consciousness?
 2. How is a counterstance a limited position from which to act?
 3. What does Anzaldua mean: “Men, even more than women, are fettered to gender roles”?
 4. What is significant about ignorance? About awareness?
- Patricia Williams, “Hate Radio: Why we need to tune in to Limbaugh and Stern,” (*Ms.* March/April 1994, p.25-29)
 1. Why is Williams concerned with history in this piece?
 2. What is the role of fantasy in the radio shows she’s discussing, and why is its presence on the radio menacing?
 3. How are the shows she’s discussing selling a *false* individualism?

Wednesday 4/30 – Feminism and Race IV

- Ien Ang, “I’m a feminist but... ‘Other’ women and postnational feminism” (excerpted in *Feminism and Race*, ed. Kum-Kum Bhavnani, p.394-409)
 1. What alternative to the ‘nation’ model of feminism does Ang call for? Why?
 2. Why does Ang want to focus on the difficulties, the failure of communication between mainstream feminism and ‘other’ women?
 3. How is the Madonna example representative of the difficulty/failure of communication?
 4. What is the relation of Whiteness and Westernness?
 5. What is at stake in seeing whiteness as a political category?
 6. Why does Ang end up advocating a “politics of partiality”? How is this representative of a structural problem?

Week 6: Monday 5/5 – Post-Colonial Feminisms

- Trinh T. Minh-Ha “Not you/like you: postcolonial women and the interlocking questions of identity and difference” (*Inscriptions* 3/4: 71-77)
 1. What types of difference does Trinh describe? What are their characteristics?
 2. What three examples of the “apartheid type of difference” does she give? What alternatives to this form of difference does she describe for each example?
 3. What is the “inappropriate other”? How does this concept relate to what is at stake in thinking about subjectivity in one way versus another?
- Aihwa Ong, “Colonialism and Modernity” (*Inscriptions* 3/4: 79-93)
 1. What two ironies of feminism does Ong point to?
 2. How has feminist research presented/regarded non-Western women?
 3. What are Ong’s examples of the “fluid nature of power relations”? How do they reveal the shortcomings of the either/or, traditional/modern approaches to analyzing the lives of non-Western women?
 4. What is missing or missed when Western feminists use a (Western) individualist perspective in uncomplicated ways to analyze the situation of non-Western women?
 5. What recommendations does Ong offer at the end of the article? How does her example regarding Malay factory women reinforce her suggestions?

Wednesday 5/7 – Psychoanalytic Feminism I

- Freud, “On Femininity” (Lecture XXXIII, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol.XXII, p.112-135)
1. Freud says that “psychology too is unable to solve the riddle of femininity.” What does he say psychoanalysis does do?
 2. What two additional tasks do women end up doing in the course of their normal psycho-sexual development?
 3. What is the “castration complex”? What is “penis envy”?
 4. According to Freud, what three options for development follow the girl’s castration complex?
 5. What is the role of ‘convention’ and the expectation of their ‘fulfillment of invaluable social tasks’ in women’s psycho-sexual development? What social tasks do you imagine Freud is thinking of, or has mentioned?

Week 7: Monday 5/12 – Psychoanalytic Feminism II

- Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” (*diacritics* 17, #2, Summer 1987, p.65-81)
1. How does Spillers define ethics?
 2. What does the “captive body” have to say about *naming*, and the impact of the past upon the present?
 3. How are “gendering” and domesticity related?
 4. What is the relation of kinship and property in slavery?
 5. What is the relation of family to the dominant symbolic order?
 6. What meaning and relation do “femininity” and “motherhood” have in slavery?
 7. What commonality does Spillers point out between African-American and Anglo-American women’s communities?
 8. What do the laws regarding slavery attempt to codify?
 9. How are “mother” and “enslavement” synonymous?
 10. What is the difference between “gendered femaleness” and a “female social subject”?
 11. Why does Spillers call this “An American Grammar Book”?

Wednesday 5/14 – Troubling Femininity I

- Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction” to *The Second Sex* (p.xix-xxxvi)
1. In what ways are the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ not symmetrical?
 2. What does Beauvoir mean when she says, “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other” (xxii)? How and why does she claim this mechanism of “othering” operates?
 3. Why haven’t women broken out of their subordinate position in society?
 4. Why are women complicit with women’s oppression?
 5. Beauvoir says that men profit from women’s subordination in what ways?

Friday 5/16 – Troubling Femininity II

- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.1-34 and 142-149
1. What critiques of feminism’s reliance on representational politics does Butler present? Should feminism therefore give up on representational politics?
 2. On what basis does Butler posit that perhaps “...the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (7)?
 3. What kind of coalition politics does Butler seem to find attractive, and why?
 4. How does the relation of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ to ‘the subject’ differ for Beauvoir (and Wittig) versus Irigaray, according to Butler?
 5. What does Butler mean when she says, “Thus, gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” (31)?
 6. What does the “embarrassed ‘etc.’” (143) reveal about subjectivity?
 7. According to Butler, where is agency to be found in this performative gender system?

Week 8: Monday 5/19 – Troubling Femininity III

- Rosi Braidotti, “The Politics of Ontological Difference” (*Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. T. Brennan, p.89-105)
1. According to Braidotti, what distinguishes *feminist* theories of sexual difference?
 2. What three premises inform Braidotti’s defense of essentialism?
 3. To what does *difference* refer?
 4. How is the question of sexual difference political in both explicit and implicit ways?
 5. What is feminist theory? What does it do?
 6. What insights do feminism and psychoanalysis share? In what ways do feminism and psychoanalysis differ?
 7. How does Braidotti describe ‘the body’?
 8. What is the “feminist cogito”?

Wednesday 5/21 – Troubling Masculinity

- In-class Film: *Tough Guise*

Friday 5/23 – Feminism and Transgender Theory

- Bernice L. Hausman, “Recent Transgender Theory” (*Feminist Studies*, V.27, #2, Summer 2001, p.465-490)

Wednesday 5/28 – Feminism in Postmodernity I

- Judith Butler “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism’” (*Praxis International*, v.11, #2, July 1991, p.150-165)
1. What formulation of the subject is Butler arguing against?
 2. What alternative way of thinking about subjectivity does Butler propose? Why?
 3. What reason does Butler give for putting “violence” and “sex” in quotation marks?

Friday 5/30 – Feminism in Postmodernity II

- bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness” (*Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, 1990 p.23-31)
1. Why does hooks approach writing on postmodernism “cautiously and with suspicion”?
 2. Why is hooks concerned with identity politics?
 3. What does hooks say “empathy” might provide? How is this alternative politics fostered by postmodernism?
 4. What kind of yearning does hooks recognize? How is this a question of subjectivity? How is this a question of cultural production?

Week 10: Monday 6/2 – Postfeminism?

- M. Hawkesworth, “The Semiotics of Premature Burial: Feminism in a Postfeminist Age” (*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*; Summer 2004, v. 29 # 4, p.961-986)
1. How is “postfeminism” defined?
 2. How is “ideology” defined?
 3. How is “feminism” defined?
 4. What is Hawkesworth’s reading of the Antigone story?
 5. What does Hawkesworth’s reading of *Antigone* reveal about “the death of feminism”?

Wednesday 6/4 – Activism and Engagement I

- Chela Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World” (*Genders* #10, U of Texas P, 1991, p.1-23)
1. What are the four phases of “hegemonic U.S. feminism”? How does Sandoval characterize them? and What is limiting about this “four-category structure of consciousness” (10)?
 2. What are the five modes of oppositional consciousness in Sandoval’s topography? How does she see the fifth mode as “like the clutch of an automobile”(14)?

3. How is U.S. third world feminism, as represented by Sandoval's topography, different from U.S. hegemonic feminism?

Friday 6/6 – Activism and Engagement II

- Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, "Introduction" (*Sexual Difference* p.25-34)
1. What is this book about, according to its authors, the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective (MWBC)?
 2. What does the concept 'genealogy' mean to the MWBC?
 3. What is 'entrustment'?
 4. What is sexual difference, according to the MWBC? How is it related to "authoritative female interlocutors"?
 5. What is important about the examples the MWBC uses in this "Introduction"?

Friday 6/13 – Final Essay Due: Submit via GoogleDocs by 3pm