

## Topics in Sex, Gender and Political Theory

POL 394  
Fall 2017  
M/W 2:40-4

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Office Hours: T 2-4

What do we see when we look at politics through the lenses of sex and gender, and sex and gender through the lens of politics? Scholars have produced a vast and rich literature engaging these questions. This research challenges and reconceptualizes not only traditional views of sex, gender and “gender relations” but also fundamental notions of power and politics, public and private, human identity, agency, and subjectivity. In this course we examine some of these developments, their influence on political theory and use in analyzing politics. The course is introductory in the sense that it covers a large number of topics without exploring any in sufficient depth. At the same time, however, the course is advanced in that much of the assigned reading is theoretically sophisticated and demands close attention.

In past iterations of the course, twentieth century, Western feminist scholarship was the anchor, due to its breadth and influence. In recent decades, queer and trans theory have flourished and significantly altered the field. We engage all three (not-entirely-distinct) literatures and their critics. Our inquiry is framed by five “angles” or approaches to understanding politics and the nature, causes, and implications of sex, gender and related categories. We focus on a sampling of their primary philosophical and political concerns and apply the theoretical insights to a range of material: public policy, canonical texts of Western political thought, popular culture and current political activity.

We begin by developing working definitions of our key concepts (sex, gender, political, theory) and then move through brief introductions to representative texts of our five approaches. This overview is but a sample of the forms that the political theory of sex and gender presently assumes; it is not all-inclusive. There is substantial overlap and exchange among the five angles; their boundaries are hardly as neat as my labels suggest. Still they provide a useful framework for our analysis. With these tools in hand, we turn to deeper engagement with key philosophical claims and a sampling of the primary political concerns of each angle. Our inquiry is structured to highlight a (somewhat historically fictitious) political theoretical conversation; we focus more on the back and forth of the content of *ideas* than their actual *historical* relationship, though the latter is relevant and I will keep us attuned to the ways it is.

The goals of this course are a) to familiarize you with key texts and ideas contemporary Western political thought that focuses on sex and gender, b) to tutor you in the scholarly tools of this material, c) to help you think theoretically and critically about the ideas and arguments that populate this conversation and d) to encourage you to explore your own views on these matters in oral and written presentations.

### **POLICIES and EXPECTATIONS**

The requirements for this course are designed to promote serious, collaborative *and* independent scholarly engagement with texts, ideas and each other. There are few formal lectures. I identify key issues or questions with our texts, provide an on-going account of the flow of the course, readings and assignments, and essential background that may not come

through in the readings. Students will play a major role in facilitating many of the classes (more below).

**Late work:** As a rule, I do not accept late assignments except in the case documented medical emergencies or personal crises (e.g. a death in the family). Please don't ask for extensions otherwise. Discipline can be useful. I hope to help you cultivate a certain amount of it.

More importantly, the writing assignments for this course are carefully sequenced and our classroom discussions will often center on students' written work. For this reason, late work is *especially* problematic. Please note that at key points in the semester, I ask you to turn in work in progress. *Neither I nor your classmates expect perfection in works in progress.* It is imperative that you turn in your work on time so that your peer reviewers and I will have time to read and respond to your work.

**Disability accommodation:** Students with disabilities requiring accommodation should be in touch with me and the director of disability support services (Theresa Lowrie, [disability-services@reed.edu](mailto:disability-services@reed.edu)) within the first two weeks of class in order to make arrangements for suitable accommodation.

**Communication:** I will use email (often via Moodle) to post important announcements about the course. Please be sure to check your Reed email at least once a day so that you will see these messages. You can reach me via email for all sorts of questions, but I also *strongly* encourage you to come talk with me during office hours to discuss your work in progress (if you can't make my posted office hours, just email me and suggest a few alternative times for an appointment). Doing political theory well is hard. If you find yourself frustrated or struggling, please don't despair, and *please* don't keep your struggles to yourself. A quick (or long) conversation can often be the best way out of a research quagmire, so please keep me informed of what you're up to. (You are also welcome to drop by if you have made a particularly exciting discovery or lit upon an especially interesting idea that you just have to share with someone.)

## ASSIGNMENTS

I have designed the course assignments to promote serious scholarly engagement with texts, ideas and each other. In addition to facilitating productive in class-discussion, the assignments are designed to help you develop your research and writing skills.

### 1. *Reading and Class Participation*

Your first assignment is to **read** the materials with care. Many of our texts are dense, multi-layered texts. Often you may need to read them more than once. I have tried to limit the amount of reading accordingly but, I'm afraid, have been less successful on this front than I would like to have been. This means you'll have to make (wise) decisions about where to focus your attention. And keeps notes of what you think should be cut, kept and expanded!

#### a) *Class Discussion*

Come to class prepared to discuss the reading imaginatively and critically. **Active, respectful participation** is essential. If speaking in class is a challenge for you, please let me know. We can work together to address the matter.

**Attendance**, of course, is mandatory. If you miss more than three classes, you run the risk of failing the course.

b) *Weekly Response Posts*

Before *one* class each week, **by noon the day of class**, please post to the Class Discussion section of the Moodle a brief (up to one-paragraph) response to the readings. Frequently, but not always, I will offer prompts to initiate discussion. This is a very informal piece, aimed at stimulating class thinking and discussion. Questions for discussion or clarification are welcome as are direct responses to earlier posts.

c) *Class Discussion Facilitation*

In groups of two or three, each of you will play a formal role in facilitating class discussion once during the semester. These classes will take place on (\*) days on the syllabus. **Each group will meet with me on the Friday afternoon of the week preceding your facilitation day.** You must complete all of the assigned reading before we meet. During these sessions, we will discuss the materials and how you will help facilitate the discussion. I will spend up to an hour with you as a group. However, I expect that you will need at least another two hours together to finalize the details of your plan. In other words, I am asking each of you to commit to a total of approximately three hours over and above the regularly scheduled class meeting times.

Precisely how you approach your role in facilitating discussion is up to you. Your basic task is to help generate and guide serious, critical engagement with the materials. To this end, you should be prepared to guide discussion on the following questions:

- 1) *What's the argument?* What is the central argument advanced by each of the texts under consideration? Be prepared to offer clear *interpretations* that your peers can use and/or criticize.
- 2) *How does it relate to other topics or materials we've covered?* How does a consideration of one or more of the readings previously completed for this course inform your understanding of the material presently under consideration? How does the present material complement, supplement, contradict, and/or challenge other texts we've read? How do the essays under consideration fit within one or more of the four "angles" we explored at the beginning of the semester?
- 3) *Is it a compelling argument or analysis? Why/not?* What criticisms might be directed against the readings at hand? Which, if any, do you find most compelling and why? You may not agree with your partner. Great! Use this to deepen discussion in class. In general, the most successful discussion leading draws the class into *debates* about interpretations and/or substance of the arguments.

Concrete tasks:

- 1) **Post 2 or 3 reading questions by 5p the night before class** in the Class Discussion section of the Moodle. These should direct folks to what you take to be key concepts and questions of the pieces.
- 2) Prepare a one-page outline of the key points and questions you hope to touch on in discussion. Get it to me twenty-four hours in advance, and I will give you feedback.
- 3) Prompt class discussion. The most successful discussion leading draws the class into *debates* about interpretations and/or content. I strongly recommend that you come to class prepared to defend (even if only to provoke) particular interpretations and evaluations of the material. Prompting discussion with a controversial position is a great strategy. You might begin by asking whether others have questions or wish to contest points you make in your critical assessment of the material. You may invite the class to help work through specific difficulties in the text, or questions the material raised for you with respect to other readings or, even, the real world. Facilitating a natural and sustained discussion of the assigned readings is the goal. This is a difficult task, one that requires prior development of an interrelated set of questions, along with references to specific textual passages that you think helpful in addressing those questions.

I encourage you to think as imaginatively as possible this assignment. Do not hesitate to experiment with unconventional strategies if you think them appropriate. You might, for instance, want to bring in YouTube clips or music to illustrate points you wish to make about the readings on this topic. Consider cross-dressing or taking class polls. If you have doubts about what you are planning, speak to me. Whatever you do, do it well!

You should think of yourselves as leading discussion with my help. I will raise questions, clarify unresolved issues and advance criticisms. In general, I will assume a more active role when and if I sense that you, as a group, are having difficulty making sense of the assigned readings, are struggling to convey your points to the rest of the class, and/or are having a hard time getting discussion moving. Hopefully, most of these problems will have been eliminated via your preparatory session(s). I will also use the last ten minutes of class to summarize what we've discussed and prepare us for the next class.

## 2. *Writing Assignments*

### a) *Comparison of Approaches* (1500-1750 words)

A central goal of the course is for you to develop a comfortable but critical grasp of the five major approaches we engage. To this end, you will write a critical analysis comparing two of the approaches. Your job here is both to explain the key moves, assumptions, commitments of each theory and then, with the help of the comparison, offering your own view – a thesis – about their strengths, weaknesses, etc. The questions I offer above for your preparation as a class discussion facilitator are good guides to what you might consider in this piece. **Due by Saturday, September 30 at 5pm.**

b) *Discussion Leading paper* (1500-1750 words)

**By noon one week following your presentation**, please submit a critical analysis of some aspect of the material for which you led discussion.

Broadly, a critical analysis in the discipline of political theory looks at one or both of two big questions. First, we ask about coherence. Does the logic of the argument hang together? Are there unstated assumptions that weaken the argument? Or, that are more important or have broader implications than the author states?

Second, if it is coherent, is the text compelling? By this I mean, does it hold up to reality? An argument can be logically coherent but not hold up in face of the real world. E.g. It is logically coherent to say if all apples are red then that green thing is not an apple. But it is not compelling, since lots of apples are green. To fully address this question, you need to explain why it is/n't compelling? To this end, you might consider what it illuminates? How might it be extended in ways that the author does not address? How/is it related to other texts or ideas we've encountered? How does reading these together enhance our understanding of sex, gender and politics?

As these two concerns imply, concretely, there are two especially good strategies for analyzing texts: one is to analyze them in light of the real world; the other is to analyze them in light of another theory. E.g. How/does Butler's notion of gender as performance illuminate Donald Trump's success as a presidential candidate? The answer might help you unpack Butler's idea of gender. It might shed light on Trump. It might also reveal limitations or shortcomings in her theory of gender. Alternatively, you might consider one theory in light of another to get at its underlying assumptions, not-obvious implications, logical in/coherence, and utility or lack thereof. For example, you might ask: in light of Preciado's account of gender in the pharmaco-pornographic era, what do we see about the limits of Butler's account of gender?

This said, please note that while you may reference other assigned readings and the real world, this paper should be rather narrowly focused on the thinker(s) you engaged. The primary goal is to deepen your understanding of one or two thinkers. I find that a particularly solid grasp of one thinker often enhances understanding of others. I encourage you to discuss your paper with me and/or with your partner during the week between presentation and submission.

c) *Final paper* (3,000-3,500 words)

For your final paper, I want you to synthesize the materials we have considered over the course of the semester. You will devise your own question. The question should be broad enough to enable you to make reference to a significant portion of the materials we have looked at this semester. However, that question should not be so abstract as to be vacuous. (For examples of good questions, see under Syllabus, Assignments and Other Course Material on the Moodle.) Note: your question should not emerge directly out of the readings you considered for your discussion leading.

To foster a successful writing process, I have broken this assignment into three steps. For the first, on **Saturday, November 25th at 5p** will submit to me and two assigned peer-readers, via email, a one-paragraph précis. The précis should begin with a clear articulation of your guiding question. In the one paragraph that follows, you should briefly explain: a) why this is an important question; b) what general issues you are trying to get at; c) which texts you will engage and why; and d) how exactly your angle enables you to draw together some of the central themes of the course.

The second step: in class on **Wednesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>**, you will meet in your small groups and exchange feedback on your précis. I will also offer written and verbal feedback at this time.

The third step: **your final paper is due as a PDF on Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup> at 5p**. Your final paper should expand and improve on (or totally replace, if necessary) the project outlined in the précis and demonstrate what you have learned over the course of the semester. Thus, it should begin with an express statement of the question you intend to explore. In the process of working through that exploration, you should make clear: a) why the question is important; b) what texts you use and why; and d) how you touch on central themes of the course

This final paper should show me what you have learned over the course of the semester. Specifically, it should demonstrate that you have a good grasp of the basic angles we use to explore our subject. It should critically engage key themes and core concepts we encounter (e.g., sameness/difference, power, essentialism, rights, standpoint theory, compulsory heterosexuality, etc.). And, finally, the essay should demonstrate that you can formulate specific examples to illustrate your understanding of these more general concepts.

## **TEXTS**

All reading material for this course is accessible via the syllabus on the Moodle.

Note: materials indented in the lists below are *strongly recommended* but not required.

## **SYLLABUS**

### **I. Introductions**

#### Introduction I: Topics

Monday, August 28

- Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I A Woman?”
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/08/technology/google-engineer-fired-gender-memo.html>

#### Introduction II: Terms and Concepts

Wednesday, August 30

- Susan Stryker, “An Introduction to Transgender Terms and Concepts,” *Transgender History*, (2008), 1-29.
- Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, “Have We Got a Theory for You!” *Women’s Studies Forum Int.*, 6:6, (1983) 573-581.
- John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, Anne Phillips, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, (2006), 3-11.

Labor Day, no class  
Monday, September 4

## II. Angles: Theories and History

Angles I: Liberal Humanist Feminism  
Wednesday, September 6

- [Declaration of Independence](#)
- [Seneca Falls Declaration](#)
- John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, (1869), Chapter one.
  - <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-liberal/>

Angles II: Materials: “Nature,” Bodies and Economies  
Monday, September 11

- Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, (1970), Chapter one.
- Iris Marion Young, “Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: a Critique of Dual Systems Theory.” *Women and Revolution: a Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Feminism and Marxism*. (1981) 43-70.
  - <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-power/#SocFemApp>

Angles II: Intersectionality  
Wednesday, September 13

- Kimberle Crenshaw “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43:6 (July, 1991): 1241-1299.
- Mary Hawkesworth, *Embodied Politics*, chapter 4, “From Race and Sex, to Racialization, Gendering and Sexualization,” 72-10.
  - <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-power/#IntApp>

Angles IV: “Postmodern”/Queer  
Monday, September 18

- Judith Butler, ““Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” *Theatre Journal* 49 (1989): 519-31.
- bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness”, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990): 23-31.

- Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, “Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism,” *Social Text*, 21 (1989), 83-104.

### Angles V: Trans

Wednesday, September 21

- Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” *The Transgender Studies Reader* [hereafter *TSR*], Susan Stryker, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006): 1-18.
  - Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, “Introduction: Transgender Studies 2.0,” *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* [hereafter *TSR 2.0*], Stryker and Aizura, eds. (2013), 1-12.
- Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” *TSR*, 221-234.
- C. Riley Snorton, “A New Hope’,” *Hypatia*, 24:3, (Summer 2009), 77-92.

### Sex, Gender and Sexuality Symposium Lecture

5pm, Friday, September 23

C. Riley Snorton, Cornell University, “DeVine’s Cut.”

### III. Topics

#### (\*) Law and Rights I

Monday, September 25

- Christine A. Littleton, “Reconstructing Sexual Equality,” 75 *California Law Review* (1987): 1291-1314, 1323-1335.
- Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, chapter 2, “Difference and Dominance, 1984,” 32-45.

#### (\*) Rights and Law II

Wednesday, September 27

- Dean Spade, *Normal Life*, (2011/15), Introduction, chapters 1-2.
- Heath Fogg Davis, “An Argument for Reviving the Pragmatism of Early Critical Race Feminist Theory,” *Contemporary Political Theory*, 15:1 (2016), 98-105.

#### (\*) Family Work

Monday, October 2

- Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, (1989): chapter seven (edited, per Engster and Metz, 2013).
- Roberts, Dorothy E., “Race, gender and the value of mother's work,” *Social Politics*, (1995): 195-207.
- Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Antigone’s Daughters,” *Feminism and Politics*, Anne Phillips, ed., (1998): 363-377.

### Feminism's Illicit (?) Unions I: Capitalism

Wednesday, October 4

- Ivanka Trump, <https://ivankatrump.com/womenwhowork/>
- Anne Marie Slaughter, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/10/anne-marie-slaughter-evolution/410812/>
- Suzanne Venker and Phyllis Schlafly, *The Flipside of Feminism*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6t0O-iV8KBI>
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/womens-strike-march-8-march-protest-trump/>
- Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, chapter four, "Hours for What We Will": Work, Family and the Demand for Shorter Hours."
- Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," *The New Left Review*, 56, March/April 2009.

### (\*) Feminism's Illicit (?) Unions II: Carceral State

Monday, October 9

- Bernstein, E. "Carceral Politics as Gender Justice? The 'Traffic in Women' and Neoliberal Circuits of Crime, Sex, and Rights," *Theory and Society*, 41:3 (2012), 233-259.
- Priscilla Ocen, "Unshackling Intersectionality," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 10:2 (2013).

### (\*) Feminism's Illicit (?) Unions III: Colonialism and Feminism

Wednesday, October 11

- Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, "Under Western Eyes' Revisited," (Durham and London: Duke, 2003): 221-251.
- Uma Narayan, "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization,' Respect for Cultures, and Third-World Feminists." *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (1997).

### **FALL BREAK: October 14-22**

#### Bodies I

Monday, October 23

- Sandra Lee Barkty, "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," Irene Diamond and Lee Quimby (eds), *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, (1988).
- Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Women and the Knife" *Hypatia* 6 (1991): 25-53.

#### (\*) Bodies II

Wednesday, October 25

- Bobby Jean Noble, “Our Bodies Are Not Ourselves,” *TGSR 2.0*, 248-257.
- Beatriz Preciado, “The Pharmaco-Pornographic Regime,” *TGSR 2.0*, 266-276.

(\*) Sexuality

Monday, October 30

- Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5:4 (1980): 631–660.
- Hoagland, Sara Lucia, “Heterosexuality and White Supremacy,” *Hypatia* 22:1 (2007): 166-185.

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Sex II

Wednesday, November 1

- Catherine A. Mackinnon, “Sexuality,” *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. (1997).
- Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry*, 24:2 (Winter, 1998): 547-566.

(\*) Performing Masculinity? I

Monday, November 6

- Paul Kivel, “Act-Like-A-Man-Box,” *Men’s Lives* (1989).
- Gayle Rubin, “Of Catamies and Kings,” *TSR*, 471-481.
- Pat Califia, “Manliness” *TSR*, 434-438.

Performing Masculinity? II

Wednesday, November 8

- Harvey Mansfield, *Manliness* (2006): ix-xiii, 190-244.

“Nature” and Science

Monday, November 13

- Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991): 149-181.

(\*) Eco-Feminism in the Anthropocene

Wednesday, November 15

- Richard Grusin, “Introduction,” *Anthropocene Feminism*, (2017), vii-xix.
- Claire Colebrook, “We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene,” *Anthropocene Feminism*, (2017), 1-20.

- Rosi Braidotti, “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism,” *Anthropocene Feminism*, (2017), 21-49.

(\*) Power/Knowledge

Monday, November 20

- Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, (2000), chapter eleven, “Black Feminist Epistemology.”
- Susan Hekman, “Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited,” *Signs*, 22:2 (Winter, 1997), 341-365.
- Jane Flax, “The End of Innocence,” *Feminists Theorize the Political*, Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds. (1992): 445-63
- Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools”
- <https://www.micahmwhite.com/on-the-masters-tools/>

Wiggle

Wednesday, November 22

**Precis for Final Paper due, Saturday, November 25 at 5p**

What Next, in Theory and Practice I?

Monday, November 27

- Susan Moller Okin, “Toward a Humanist Justice,” *Justice, Gender and The Family*, (1989): 170-186.
- Lisa Duggan, “Queering the State,” *Social Text*, No. 39 (Summer, 1994): 1-14.
- Joan Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, (2012): chapter seven.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/06/women-strike-trump-resistance-power>

Precis Workshop

Wednesday, November 29

What Next, in Theory and Practice I?

Monday, December 4

- <http://www.deanspade.net/2013/08/13/new-video-and-slideshow/>
- Judith Butler, “The Question of Social Transformation,” *Undoing Gender*, (2004): 204-230.
- Cressida Heyes, “Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory,” *TSR 2.0*, 201-12.

