Feminist Political Theory (PS/GWS 933)
Departments of Gender and Women’s Studies and Political Science

Fall 2017
T 3:30-5:25 PM
Van Hise 355

Professor Keisha Lindsay
Room 3311-Sterling Hall
263-2763

Office Hours:
Tuesdays 8:45-9:45 AM
Thursdays 12:30-1:30 PM

Course Description and Objectives:
The aim of this course is to critically examine how various “schools” of feminist political thought understand the relationship between experience and politics. We will pay particular attention to: 1) what feminist theorists mean when they speak of “experience” and 2) the debate among feminist theorists regarding whether experience is the grounds of politics or if politics necessarily precedes experience.

Section one of the course explores radical, standpoint, and other feminist theorists’ presumption that the “personal is political” or that personal experience is the motive force of politics. Section two of the course interrogates how and why many materialist, postmodern, and, other feminist theorists reject the presumption that such experience is the grounds of politics. We will focus our attention on many materialist feminists’ contention that a focus on personal experience diverts attention from the structural dimensions of women’s oppression and on postmodern feminists’ contention that personal experience is always already politicized. The third section of the course explores feminist political theorists’ efforts to strike a “middle ground” between experience and politics. We will examine Young’s notion of “serialty,” Spivak’s argument(s) regarding “strategic essentialism,” and Zerilli’s suggestion that we reconceptualize gendered experience as a political claim. The readings in the final section of the course interrogate the notion of hyperfeminine gender performance to concretize and further illuminate the feminist perils and possibilities of experience-based politics.

Course Readings:
The following books are required for purchase at A Room of One’s Own Bookstore, 315 W Gorham. Tel: 608-257-7888

- Betty Friedan. Feminine Mystique. ISBN-10: 0393322572
- Anna Julia Cooper. A Voice of the South ISBN-10 0486805638

The abovementioned books are also on reserve at the College Library in the Helen C. White Building. Article length texts are available online at the listed URL OR via learn@uw.
Course Requirements:

**Attending class and participating in class discussion (25%)**
This is a **reading intensive seminar** in which close reading of the assigned texts and active participation in class discussion are key to your success. Students who miss more than half of all of the class meetings without a satisfactory explanation will automatically receive a failing grade for course.

**In-Class Presentation (20%)**
Each student is required to make a 10-12 minute in class presentation on specific course readings. Each presenter is required to do the following:

1. Briefly summarize 2-3 **key themes** in the assigned readings (in 5 minutes maximum)
2. Identify 2-3 key **theoretical assumptions** that unite and/or divide the assigned readings
3. Provide 4 specific questions to prompt or facilitate discussion of the assigned readings. At least two of these questions should reflect concerns about the readings’ potential limitations

**Abstract/Proposal (15%)**
You are required to write a typed, double-spaced 3 page abstract of your final research paper. Your abstract is due on, **November 17 at 9:00 AM (via learn@uw)**.

**Research Paper (40%)**
You are required to write a 15-20 page typed, double-spaced research paper on a topic of your choosing. Your research paper (hard copy only) is **due in my office on December 15 at 2:00 PM**.

**Classroom Conduct:** Cell phones, texting, and their accompanying earpieces are NOT allowed during class in order to facilitate a non-distracting and intellectually productive learning environment.

**Grade Related Questions and Appeals:**
*I will only discuss questions about grades during office hours or by appointment - not over email or before/after class. If you would like to challenge your grade, please wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before contacting me.* Final grades will be determined according to the following official UW grading scale: A 93-100; AB 88-92; B 83-87; BC 78-82; C 70-77; D 60-69; F below 60.

**Late Paper Policy:** Papers and exams turned in late will be penalized by **ten (10) percentage points** for each 24-hour period after the due date.

**Academic Misconduct (Plagiarism and Cheating):** By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.
Accessibility: The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with the you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Section I
Conceptualizing Experience as the Grounds of Feminist Politics

Sept 12: Week 1 – Overview
-bell hooks “Theory as Liberatory Practice”
http://www.uwyo.edu/aded5050/5050unit12/theory%20as%20liberatory%20prac.pdf

Sept 19: Week 2 – The “Personal is Political”

-Betty Friedan Feminine Mystique pp. 43-48 AND 57-165

-Shulamith Firestone “The Dialectic of Sex” (chapter 1)
https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/firestone-shulamith/dialectic-sex.htm

-Nancy Hartsock
“The Feminist Standpoint“ (learn@uw)

-Nancy Haraway “Situated Knowledges”

-Uma Narayan “The Project of Feminist Epistemology”

-Iris Young “Throwing Like a Girl”

-Sonia Kruks “Going Beyond Discourse”; “Phenomenology and Difference” (learn@uw)

-Linda Alcoff “Real Identities” (learn@uw)

Oct 10: Week 5 – Experience of What? - Intersectionality
-Patricia Hill-Collins Black Feminist Thought (Part I, Part II, and pp. 291-310)
Section II
Against Experience as the Grounds of Feminist Politics

Oct 17: Week 6 - Postmodern Feminist Critiques
-Judith Butler Gender Trouble (Part 1, Part 2, and pp. 175-204)

Oct 24: Week 7 - Postmodern Feminist Critiques, Continued
- Joan Scott “The Evidence of Experience”
http://pages.akbild.ac.at/kdm/_media/_pdf/Joan%20Scott%20Evidence%20of%20Experience.pdf

- Wendy Brown “Wounded Attachments” (learn@uw)
- Chandra Mohanty “Sisterhood, Coalition, and the Politics of Experience” (learn@uw)

Oct 31: Week 8 - Materialist Feminist Critiques
- Heidi Hartmann “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism”

- Nancy Fraser “Rethinking Recognition”
https://newleftreview.org/ll/3/nancy-fraser-rethinking-recognition

- Rosemary Hennessy “Setting the Terms” (pp. 1-36)

Section III
Middle Ground(s)

Nov 7: Week 9 – Strategic Essentialism, Seriality, and “Creative Political Expression”
-Gayatri Spivak “Subaltern Studies. Deconstructing Historiography” AND “In a Word: Interview with Ellen Rooney Differences” (learn@uw)
- Iris Young "Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective" (learn@uw)
- Diane Perpich “Black Feminism, Poststructuralism, and the Contested Character of Experience” (learn@uw)

Nov 14: Week 10 – Reading Experience as a Political Claim
-Linda Zerilli Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom (exclude chapter 3)

Section IV
Hyperfemininity: Concretizing the Perils and Possibilities of Experience-Based Politics

Nov 21: Week 11 – Ladylike Blackness
- Anna Julia Cooper A Voice from the South

Nov 28: Week 12 – Celebrating the “Feminine” Psyche
Carol Gilligan A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development
Dec 5: Week 13 – Femininity and/as Trans-liberation
Julia Serano *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (pp. 23-52 AND all of Part 2)

Dec 12: Week 14 - Conclusion
-Research Paper Summaries/Discussion
-Course Evaluations