

Feminist Theory

Columbia University
Spring 2023
Wednesdays, 12:00-2:00
Room: TBA

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Office hours by appointment

This course explores the formation of desire, sexuality, and subjectivity through the frameworks of feminist epistemologies (the question of what we can know) and feminist ethics (the question of how to be responsible within our relationships and local and global communities). We will reflect on the tension between the limits of what we can know about ourselves and others and the imperative to care for each other and remain accountable for our individual and collective actions and inaction. We will investigate how our deepest emotions, intimate encounters, and secret fantasies are formed by larger social and political contexts. In turn, we will also question how these intimate relationships with ourselves and our companions may be seen as feminist acts of resistance, disruption, and creation.

Objective I: to closely engage diverse feminist perspectives in late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, queer theory, critical race theory, and psychoanalysis.

Objective II: to begin to locate your own feminist perspective within the intersection of your unique experiences and the larger historical and social contexts that form you and which you may seek to transform.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Preparation and Participation	25%
In-Class Journaling	25%
Presentation (4.19; 4.26)	25%
Final Essay (5.12)	25%

75% of your grade will be based on in-class discussions of the texts, communal activities, informal journaling, and one larger presentation. If you need to miss more than two classes, please schedule a meeting with me so we can arrange an alternative plan for you to stay engaged with the course material and complete missed credits.

Each class will begin with a 10-15 minute period for informal journaling. You will be offered a prompt that will invite you to reflect on the relevance of a topic highlighted in the weekly reading for your life and our shared contemporary social and political contexts. There will be time to discuss our reflections, however no one will be required to share their writing. Please create a word document or select a notebook where you can store these reflections in one space. I may occasionally ask you to submit a revised or redacted version of your collected reflections.

We will trace themes and threads that emerge from your weekly journaling. One of these threads will become the focus for your final presentation and essay (~3,000 words). When you identify your topic, you may choose to direct your journaling toward this end. Throughout the semester I will hold mini-workshops focusing on different aspects of writing your essay. Some of the themes will include: identifying your audience, developing a writing voice and style to reach that audience, clarifying your central message to yourself and your audience. Your final essay should closely engage multiple authors on this syllabus with an eye toward a topic that you believe has contemporary ethical, social, or political significance.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Ahmed, Sara. 2021. *Complaint!* Durham: Duke University Press.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 2015. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Trans. B. Frechtman. New York: Open Road.

Zupančič, Alenka. 2012. *What is Sex*. Cambridge: MIT.

COURSE SCHEDULE

1.18 Introduction: where the personal and political touch

In-class reading and reflections: Jordan, June. 2021. *The Essential June Jordan*. London: Penguin Random House. Select Poems.

1.25 Acting Ethically (knowing that we don't know how), Part I

Beauvoir, Simone de. 2015. "Ambiguity and Freedom" and "Personal Freedom and Others." *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Open Road, 7-73

2.1 Acting Ethically (knowing that we don't know how), Part II

Beauvoir, Simone de. 2015. "The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity." *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Open Road, 74-157

2.8. Surface and Depth: Self-Pleasure and Knowledge

Musser, Amber Jamilla. 2018. "Surface Play: Flash, Friction, and Self-Reflection" and "Deep Listening, Belonging, and the Pleasures of Brown Jouissance." *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance*. New York: NYU Press, 46-68

2.15 The Erotic Experience of Coming Undone

Lorde, Audre. 2007. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 55-59

Lippard, Lucy R. 1995. Eros Presumptive. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*. ed. Gregory Battcock. Berkeley: University of California Press, 209-221

Plato. 1989, "Aristophanes' Speech," and "Diotima." *Symposium*. trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 189c-193e; 210a-12a

2.22 Navigating Intimacy In-Touch and at a Distance

Irigaray, Luce. 2001. "The Fecundity of the Caress." *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*. ed. Tina Chanter. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 119-144

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1987. *Time and the Other*. trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 84-94

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1979. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. trans. Alphonso Lingis. London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 254-277

3.1 The Queer Politics of Waiting and Acting Out

Muñoz, José Esteban. 2009. "Introduction," "Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism," and "Conclusion." *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: NYU Press. 1-32; 185-189

Dolbear, Sam. 2019. "Apertures of queer prophecy: Alex Baczyński-Jenkins's 'such feeling.'" *Flash Art* 328. <https://flash---art.com/article/queer-prophecy-alex-baczynski-jenkins/>

3.8 Resignation and Resistance

Ahmed, Sara. 2021. *Complaint!* Durham: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, Sara. 2016. "Speaking Out" Feminist Killjoy. <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/06/02/speaking-out/>

3.15 Spring Break

3.22 Overturning Origin Myths

Haraway, Donna. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge.

Genesis. Chapters 2-3. New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha or Norton. tr. R. Alter.

3.29 Feminist Laughter

Cixous, Hélène. 1976. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*, 1(4), Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. 875–893

Baudelaire, Charles. 1956. "The Essence of Laughter." *The Essence of Laughter, and Other Essays, Journals, and Letters*. trans. Gerard Hopkins. New York City: Meridian Books.

4.5 Sex and Psychoanalysis, Part I

Zupančič, Alenka. 2012. "It's Getting Strange in Here," "...and Even Stranger Out There," and "Contradiction that Matter." *What is Sex*. Cambridge: MIT, 1-72

4.12 Sex and Psychoanalysis, Part II

Zupančič, Alenka. 2012. "Object-Disoriented Ontology" and "Conclusion." *What is Sex*. Cambridge: MIT, 73-144

4.19 Presentations

4.26 Presentations