

**WS 320: Feminist Theories**  
**Monday/Wednesday 3:30-4:45**  
**Aquinas Hall 209**  
**Elizabeth Hoover**  
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“I came to theory because I was hurting . . . I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me.” --bell hooks, “Theory as Liberatory Practice.”

Course Description

Feminism, broadly speaking, is a range of political and social movements to achieve gender equality, including, but not limited to, the equal rights for women, and queer, transgender, and gender-nonconforming individuals. Feminism is an every broadening social movement that intersects with Black Lives Matter, immigrants’ rights movement, prison activism, and the fight for LGBTQ equality among others.

Theory is our way of explaining and making sense of the world. *Feminist theory* is the philosophical and theoretical discourse related to feminist movements. Feminist theory attempts to describe and explain gender inequality, gender roles, and the nature of gender itself. In that way, feminist theory emphasizes, but is not limited to, the lives and experiences of women. Instead, feminist theory seeks to understand how gender constructs act on men and women, how those constructs impact Queer and transgender individuals, and where race and gender intersect. Feminist theory is a lens through which we can better understand literature, politics, pop culture, visual arts, social movements—in other words, we can apply a feminist lens to every and all subjects.

As the above bell hook quote suggests, theory is a tool to help us engage productively with what troubles and confounds us. Therefore, in addition to reading feminist theories, we will also *apply* these theories to a broad range of cultural texts and events. Be prepared to engage with pop culture, current events, art, and film. At some points, the ideas and the theories may seem strange and/or challenge your own beliefs. Please be prepared to engage with the assigned readings and with the ideas of your classmates with an open mind and with respect.

We will read selections from *Feminist Theory: A Reader: A Reader*, edited by Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski that represent a range of approaches feminist thinkers take to their work. Roxane Gay’s *Bad Feminist* is an example of how a writer applies a feminist lens to popular culture and current events.

As you explore the course materials, try both to gain from the readings and also to critique them. First, consider what the theorist is trying to say; what does her theory offer? Then, how helpful do you think the theory is in describing the problems related to gender? What solution, if any, does the theorist suggest, and how effective do you think it might be? Finally, what can we learn from theories of feminists over the years that might be helpful in improving the lives of both women and men today?

## Course Objectives

### **In this course you will**

- Learn the main concepts put forth by representative feminist theorists of the late nineteenth, twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.
- Understand the categories that theories fall into; be able to compare and contrast them.
- Develop critical thinking skills through close reading of feminist texts—both theoretical and literary—and through applying the theories in those texts to popular culture and current events.
- Offer increasingly thoughtful reactions and questions about the readings in your pre-class postings on CelticOnline.
- Discuss the readings with your classmates, making good points and providing supporting evidence for them. Listen to and build on the responses of others in class discussion.
- Keep current with feminism. As the course unfolds, know what is happening in the world around you and how feminists are responding to current events.
- Become more aware of the influence of gender, class and race and sexual orientation on the thoughts and actions of people—both in the books we read and in real life.
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### Components of the course and the responsibilities that go along with them.

1. Reading and responding—the heart of the course!
  - Read the assigned readings. For each class, usually two or three readings will be assigned. Reading theory is not like reading a story—it is more difficult! The theoretical essays discuss ideas, many of which are complex and abstract. Be sure to allow time for this reading, and I suggest marking the text and/or taking notes. Doing that and will enhance your understanding of the material, will give you material to use in your summary, and help you prepare for the exams.
  - Bring the theory textbook and/or *copies* of stories/poems from e-reserve to class. In discussing ideas it is essential to have *texts* at hand to refer to. Respond to two of the course readings on discussion boards on CelticOnline. Your response should consist of the following:
    - summary of the reading (either paragraph or list of 3-5 key points made)
    - statement of an aspect of the reading that you agree with and why
    - statement of an aspect that you disagree with and why
    - question for discussion—please try not to repeat questions
  - Submit your responses on discussion boards, as above, no later than *2 hours before class*, so that I will have time to review them and select the comments/questions that will lead to fruitful class discussion. Your responses and questions will form the basis of our class discussion.

- You will get 1 point per response you post. No points will be given for postings that come in after the 1:30 deadline
2. Discussion—what makes the course come alive!
    - Talking, like writing, is a tool for understanding, so at each class session we will spend most of our time discussing the assigned readings for the day. Discussion is also a significant part of the course grade.
      - ✓ Speak out, it is not necessary to raise your hand—unless you have trouble getting into the conversation.
      - ✓ Speak loudly and clearly
      - ✓ Listen to and look attentively at the current speaker; let that person finish before you intervene.
      - ✓ Do not engage in side conversations; only one conversation should take place at a time.
      - ✓ Call people by name whenever you can
      - ✓ Be respectful; it's fine to disagree, but not to attack.
      - ✓ Build on your classmates' comments
    - Turn off all cell phones before entering the classroom.
  3. What is going on in the world of feminism and gender?
 

Please keep current with what is going on in the world of feminism and gender. I have provided a list of feminist new sites. Choose one or two to check in with regularly. In class, I will pick two names at random and ask you to bring in a news story for the following class to prompt discussion
  4. Mid-term paper
 

This paper is due February 22 and is 5 pages long. In this paper you will be required to apply a feminist lens from *Feminist Theory* in order to analysis an current event or recent pop cultural product. I will prepare a detailed assignment sheet for you so you understand exactly what is expected of you! *Late policy*: you will lose a third of a letter grade for every day the paper is late.
  5. Final project—a chance to be teacher!
 

Of the 103 theorists in our textbook, we will be reading only one about one third of them. As a culminating exercise and to introduce you to more theorists, you will be asked to choose *one* of the remaining seventy or so theorists and prepare a presentation on him or her. In that presentation, you will teach the class the important concepts offered by that theorist and also provide classmates with a sample text (article, poem, story, advertisement, film clip) that the theory sheds light on in some way. You are required to provide the above materials—on power point or handouts—and also to prepare questions that will stimulate discussion by your classmates.

6. Attendance—Because the course is discussion-based and we operate as a community of learners, your presence in class is essential. You may miss two classes before it affects your grade. After two missed classes, your *final* grade will drop a third of a letter grade. Example: If you earn a B+ in the class and were absent three times, your final grade will be a B. Please see the Temporary Disabilities Policy for the cases of health emergencies. Students are responsible for work missed when they are absent and are expected to consult the syllabus posted on CelticOnline to keep current with the class assignments

**Grading**

I want each of you to succeed in this course. If at anytime, you are uncertain about what is expected of you or how to met those expectations: email me. If we can find a good time to meet in person, we will set of a phone conference.

Grade breakdown

Postings: 20%

Participation: 20%

Mid-term Paper: 20%

Final Presentation: 40%

**Grades will be assigned according to the following percentages:**

A 93% - 100%	A - 90% - 92 %
B + 87% - 89%	B 83% - 86%
B - 80% - 82%	C + 78% - 79%
C 72% - 77%	C - 70 - 71
D 65% - 69%	F - below 65%

**University Policies**

This course adheres to the academic integrity policy detailed in the *Carlow Student Handbook* including plagiarism, cheating, and forgery. Please make sure you are familiar with this policy. Plagiarism cases will be handled according to this policy.

Carlow University expects you to read email sent to **your Carlow email account**. The instructors will not send email to alternate email accounts.

**Academic Support**

The Center for Academic Achievement (CAA), 4<sup>th</sup> floor, University Commons, is a valuable resource for Carlow students and offers in-person tutoring for writing, course content, computer skills and study strategies. There is no charge for CAA services. The CAA is open weekdays, evenings and Saturdays. To make an appointment: call **412-578-6146**, use our online scheduling system at **<http://carlow.mywconline.com>** on your

computer, smart phone or tablet, or choose the big purple FIND A TUTOR button on myPortal. Appointments must be made (or cancelled) at least 48 hours in advance; one paper per

### Students With Disabilities Policy

Carlow University makes every effort to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. This includes individuals with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and mental health disorders who meet the definition of disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students who plan to request accommodations should contact the Disabilities Services Office at the beginning of each semester since accommodations cannot be granted retroactively. To determine whether you qualify for accommodations, or if you have questions about services and procedures for students with disabilities The Disabilities Services Office: [412.578.6257](tel:412.578.6257)

### Temporary Disability Policy

Carlow University values each student and is invested in encouraging his or her academic success in line with the Mercy mission “to respond reverently to God and others; and to embrace an ethic of service for a just and merciful world.” In keeping with the mission, the University has chosen to offer assistance to those with temporary conditions such as short-term illnesses, injuries, or other temporary medical conditions. While the University is not required to provide such support under the Americans with Disabilities Act, some assistance may be arranged via the Disability Services Office (DSO). Each situation will be reviewed; however, the office cannot guarantee that services will be provided. In order to determine if a student with a temporary condition may receive some assistance via the DSO, he/she should contact the office at 412 578-6257.

WEEK No.	DATES	THEME	Mon.	Wed.
1	Jan 9 & 11	<b>Methodology</b>	Introductions	- Gay: “Feminism (n.) Plural,” “Bad Feminist: Take One,” Bad Feminist, Take Two.”
2	Jan 18	<b>Methodology (cont.)</b>	MLK Day	-bell hooks: “Theory as Liberatory Practice” -Audre Lorde “The Master’s Tools will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.”
3	Jan 23 & 25	<b>Early Feminisms</b>	-Elizabeth Stanton “Declaration of Sentiments” -Sonjourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?” - Emma Goldman, “The	-Karen Horney, “The Dread of Woman.” -Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction.”

			Traffic in Women	
4	Jan 30 & Feb 1	<b>Capitalism</b>	-Betty Friedan, "The Problem That Has No Name" -Fatima Mernissi "Conclusion: Women's Liberation in Muslim Countries"	-Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History" -Redstockings Manifesto
5	Feb 6 & 8	<b>Film theory</b>	-Carol Vance "Pleasure and Danger" -Gay "The Trouble with Prince Charming..."	-Laura Mulvey "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" -Rémy Bennett " <a href="#">Horror Films and Feminism</a> "
6	Feb 13 & 15	<b>Applying a lens (Prep week for paper)</b>	-Judith Butler, <i>Gender Trouble</i> --Gay, "Garish, Glorious Spectacles"	Conferences
7	Feb 20 & 22		Conferences	<b>***midterm papers due!</b>
8	Feb 27 & Mar 1	A Musical Interlude	-Gay: "Blurred Lines, Indeed," "Dear Young Ladies Who Love Chris Brown," -Kimberlé Crenshaw "Intersectionality and Identity Politics"	- <a href="#">bell hooks: Moving Beyond Pain</a> - <a href="#">A Black Feminist Roundtable on bell hooks, Beyoncé, and "Moving Beyond Pain"</a> --Bikini Kill "Riot Grrrrl Philosophy"
9	Mar 6 & 8	SPRING BREAK!		
10	Mar 13 & 15	Language	-Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which is Not One" - Gay, "The Careless Language of Sexual Violence"	-Hélén Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" -Desnise Riley, "Does a Sex Have a History." -Gay, "Some Jokes are Funnier Than Others"
11	Mar 20 & 22	Feminism and its Failures	-Mitsuye Yamada "Asian Pacific Women and Feminism" - Combahee River Collective "A Black Feminist Statement"	-Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory" - Andrea Smith "Native American Feminism"
12	Mar 27 & 29	Against the Binary	-Donna Haraway "A Cyborg Manifesto" -Judith Butler "Beside"	-Gay: "How We All Lose" -Julia Serano "A Trans Woman Manifesto"

			Oneself"	- Anna Fausto Sterling "Should there be only two sexes?"
13	Apr 3 & 5	The Family	-Andrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" -Angela Davis "Outcast Mothers"	-Gay, "The Alienable Rights of Women" - <a href="#">Dorothy Roberts, "Reproductive Justice, Not Just Rights"</a> - <a href="#">Solidarity, "From Abortion Rights to Reproductive Justice"</a>
14	Apr 10 & 12	Moving Forward	- <a href="#">Ask a Feminist: A Conversation with Cathy Cohen</a> -Rebecca Solnit, " <a href="#">Men Explain Things to Me</a> "	Let's get ready for presentations! Bring your questions to class.
15	Apr 19		NO CLASS	Presentations
16	Apr 24 & 26		Presentations	Presentations