

Feminist Philosophy

(sample syllabus aimed at an upper-level undergraduate audience)

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(will respond within 48 hours,
except on weekends)

Lecture: NA
Section 1: NA
Section 2: NA
Office Hours: NA,
and by appointment (just email me!)

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

Description. What is gender-based oppression? What are its concrete manifestations? How can we resist it? This course is dedicated to investigating these three questions through a philosophical lens. We’ll start by getting clear on some core concepts: (trans)feminism, intersectionality, (gender-based) oppression, and gender. The rest of the course will be split into units centered around different domains in which gender-based oppression manifests: marriage and the family; bodies and space; sex; and knowledge and communication. Throughout each unit, we’ll discuss diverse forms of resistance to such oppression.

Learning Goals. By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Describe the following core concepts within feminist philosophy: (trans)feminism; intersectionality; (gender-based) oppression; gender
- Apply these concepts in analyzing real-world issues
- Describe different domains in which gender-based oppression manifests in our world
- Articulate and evaluate different forms of resistance to gender-based oppression
- Uncover and evaluate the argumentative structure for a claim, whether it is your own or another’s
- Deliberately and critically reflect on your own views and conduct
- Closely and charitably read difficult texts
- Improve the clarity, argumentative structure, and originality of your writing
- Respectfully discuss challenging topics with a diverse group of classmates

WHY LEARN IT?

Motivation. Gender-based oppression affects all of us daily. This class will give you the tools to notice, understand, and resist it. Moreover, skills in philosophical thinking, reading, writing, and discussion will be directly useful in your academic and non-academic pursuits.

Wider Context. That said, this course is not the end-all, be-all of life. Please stay attentive to your overall wellness; don’t hesitate to reach out to me to talk through any issues you’re facing or to use the Canvas ‘Wellbeing’ tab to find wellness-related resources.

HOW WILL YOU LEARN IT?

Course components. All the course components will further the ‘content’-focused and ‘skills’-focused learning goals outlined above. The course readings will enable you to critically read and think about gender-based oppression, its manifestations, and resistances to it. The one-and-a-half-hour class-time aims to bring out the key points of those readings – which are to be done in advance – with ample time for reflection and discussion. Finally, the course assignments will enable you not only to become more familiar with the various topics we will cover, but also to practice philosophical skills.

WHAT ASSIGNMENTS WILL ADVANCE AND DEMONSTRATE YOUR LEARNING?

Assignments:

1. Course Readings. Do readings before class. They influence quality of work in every other part of class.
2. Guided Reading Quizzes (30%). An assignment that will simultaneously guide you to understand the key ideas in each day’s reading and demonstrate that you have understood those ideas. There will be one quiz due on Canvas once per week, excluding the first and last weeks. There will be no restriction on how much time you have to complete the quiz before that deadline. Your lowest four quiz grades will be dropped, and the remaining ten will be worth three percent each, totaling to 30% of your grade. If you do the reading carefully and work on the quiz while doing so or soon afterwards, the quizzes should be straightforward. On the days that a quiz is not assigned, I will circulate ungraded guided reading questions.
3. Attendance and Participation (10%). You are expected to attend each meeting of the class. That said, you may miss two days, no questions asked, with no penalty. You may make up one day, no questions asked, and you may make up even more days in the event of long-term emergencies. For more details about participation expectations and make-up procedures, see the participation rubric on Canvas.
4. Argument Reconstruction and Objection Assignment (10%). An assignment to practice reconstructing an author’s argument and objecting to it.
5. Objection and Response Assignment (15%). An assignment to practice objecting to an author’s argument and responding to your own objection.
6. Journal Reflection (10%). A less formal ‘journal’ reflection applying concepts from the course to analyze a work of art or real-life interaction or experience of yours.
7. Final Paper First Draft (5%). An outline of the final paper.
8. Final Paper (20%). A paper related to the topics of the course that need not draw directly on the course readings. The paper may follow the structure of ‘original argument, objection, response.’ You may also structure the paper in a different way if you talk to me in advance.

Standards:

97-100 = A+
 94-96 = A
 90-93 = A-

87-89 = B+
 84-86 = B
 80-83 = B-

77-79 = C+
 74-76 = C
 70-73 = C-

67-69 = D+
 64-66 = D
 60-63 = D-

Policies:

1. Rubrics: I will share grading rubrics for assignments (when their due dates come nearer) and for participation. Rubrics help to ensure consistent grading.
2. Anonymity: I will grade assignments anonymously, to ensure fair grading. Please do not put your name in the assignments or file names; use only your UMID number.
3. Group work: The course will involve substantial in-class group discussions and exercises, but all of the graded assignments are to be done on your own; working in groups on graded assignments is not permitted.
4. Misconduct: Plagiarism and other academic misconduct take the intellectual property of others and/or produce unfair academic advantages. That's why I ask students to follow LSA's academic integrity standards (<https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity.html>). Instances of academic misconduct will be referred to the Office of the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education.
5. Extensions and Late Work: There will be no extension granted for the final paper and it will not be accepted late, given the extremely short time period within which I must grade all of the papers. There will also be no extension granted for the guided reading quizzes and they will not be accepted late, given that I will go over the answers in class right after the deadline. For the other writing assignments (Reconstruction and Objection; Objection and Response; Journal Reflection), everyone has a 'grace period' automatic extension of two calendar days. After these two calendar days, your assignment grade will be lowered three percent per day. The assignment won't be accepted once four total days after the original deadline have passed. That's because accepting work after that point would make it very difficult for me to grade everyone's assignments swiftly. In the case of longer-term emergencies, please don't hesitate to email me and we can talk about whether a longer-than-two-day extension is possible.
6. Extra Credit: Extra credit will not be granted, as this can create the opportunity for unfair, ad hoc grade adjustments.
7. Grading Appeals: If you believe an assignment you submitted deserves a different grade than it received, please come talk to me in office hours or an appointment to explain why. After we talk, you may ask in writing for reconsideration. Your request must be submitted within one week, but no sooner than three days after the assignment is returned. Your written request must explain why you believe the assignment deserves a different grade. The opportunity to appeal is important to ensure that students have a voice; the procedure for appeal ensures thoughtfulness in a decision to appeal and consistency across appeals.
8. General Grading Questions: If you have any questions about grading, just ask!

HOW CAN YOU *SUCCEED* IN YOUR LEARNING?

1. You can succeed through ~~brilliance~~ hard work and ownership over the course.

Hard work, not some innate spark, will be the first key to success. That's why we will primarily be *learning by doing*. We will use individual and group exercises to examine feminist questions, theories, and issues.

The second key to success will be *making this course yours*. That's why I'll ask you to wrestle with your own views; to select a movie or stand-alone TV episode for the class to collectively analyze through a feminist lens; to select the topic for the last unit of the course; and to write papers that require original thought.

2. You can succeed by ~~never~~ seeking support when you need it.

Seeking support is not shameful; it's smart! I recommend the following process:

- First, see if the syllabus and other course documents can answer your question.
- Second, ask your peers. They will be an educational resource just as much as me!

- Third, come to my office hours or email me, with a question, confusion, insight, or inkling! I'll respond to emails within 48 hours, except on weekends.
- At any stage, consult me if you'd like more resources about thinking/arguing/reading/writing philosophically!

Accommodations. Additionally, please talk to or email me if we can make accommodations that will make class more accessible for you. I also encourage you to talk with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (ssd.umich.edu; 734-763-3000), who can help secure accommodations without disclosing medical information to course instructors.

Sexual misconduct. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. I understand that sexual violence can undermine students' academic success and I encourage anyone dealing with sexual misconduct to talk to someone about your experience, so that you can get the support you need. Confidential support and academic advocacy can be found with the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) on their 24-hour crisis line, 734.936.3333 and at sapac.umich.edu.

3. You can succeed by doing the hard work alone with others.

Working by yourself not only traps you into your own worldviews, but also eliminates your ability to shape the worldviews of others. That's why we will strive to learn *from and with each other*.

To do so, we will follow norms of respectful and engaged participation. I've started us off with a few, but please do feel free to propose additional norms as the course continues. I expect us — including myself! — to do the following:

- Create an accessible and inclusive environment, by ensuring our words, actions, and body language include, respect, and affirm others.
- Stay focused and engaged.
- Be on time and ready to participate when class begins.
- Make an effort to get to know each other. Refer to everyone by name in discussion, whenever we can.
- Make space for and hear from all voices — step up if we're shy; step back if we're talkative.
- Be courteous. No interruptions, no sidebars.
- Understand that we're all coming from different places and have different experiences.
- Listen carefully, especially if we disagree.
- Respond in a way that shows we've carefully listened to each other, e.g. give credit to others for their ideas.
- Criticize ideas, not people.
- Support our claims with evidence and reasoning, to ensure productive discussion.
- Don't tokenize people or inappropriately generalize about groups of people (even if we belong to that group).
- Take group-work seriously.
- Recognize we're still learning — that's why we're here! Let us all grow from mistakes.
- Not record or distribute any class activity without written permission from me, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations. Any approved recordings may only be used for your own private use.

Course Schedule		
<i>All readings (many of them excerpts) are on Canvas unless otherwise noted and are subject to change.</i>		
<u>Week</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Motivating Questions and Readings</u>
1	Day 1	Introduction to Course <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reading
<i>Unit 1: Core Concepts</i>		
2	Day 2	What is feminism? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bell hooks, "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression"
	Day 3	What is intersectionality? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brittney Cooper, "Intersectionality"
3	Day 4	What is (gender-based) oppression? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression"
	Day 5	What is gender? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?"
4	Day 6	What is gender? (continued) What is transfeminism? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emi Koyama, "The Transfeminist Manifesto" • Robin Dembroff, "Why Be Nonbinary?"
<i>Unit 2: Marriage and the Family</i>		
	Day 7	How does gender-based oppression manifest in heterosexual marriage and the division of domestic labor? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Susan Moller Okin, "Vulnerability by Marriage"
5	Day 8	How do religion, colonialism, and racism interact with gender-based oppression in structuring heterosexual marriage? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tarabai Shinde, "Stri Purush Tulana" (A Comparison Between Women and Men)
	Day 9	How do different conceptions of 'empowerment' hinder or facilitate women's empowerment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serene Khader, "Passive Empowerment: How Women's Agency Became Women Doing It All"

6	Day 10	What does it mean to conceptualize domestic labor as 'labor'? How does this inform how we conceptualize feminist 'labor struggle'? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework" • Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "A General Strike"
	Day 11	Should we abolish state-recognized marriage? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clare Chambers, "The Marriage-Free State"
7	Day 12	<i>Feminist analysis of movie or stand-alone TV episode of class choice</i>
<i>Unit 3: Bodies and Space</i>		
	Day 13	How does gender-based oppression manifest in the body? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandra Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power"
8	Day 14	How can feminine beautification be feminist? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ann J. Cahill, "Feminist Pleasure and Feminine Beautification"
	Day 15	University Break
9	Day 16	How does gender-based oppression manifest in physical space? How can inclusive design resist such manifestations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heath Fogg Davis, "Why the "transgender" bathroom controversy should make us rethink sex-segregated public bathrooms"
	Day 17	How should we conceptualize the relationship between prevailing distaste for fat bodies and fat oppression? Could we change this distaste through Aristotelian counter-habitation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A.W. Eaton, "Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression"
<i>Unit 4: Sex</i>		
10	Day 18	What are the relationships between different forms of oppression, sexual desirability, and sexual entitlement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jia Tolentino, "The Rage of the Incels"
	Day 19	How can consensual sex be harmful? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robin West, "The Harms of Consensual Sex"
11	Day 20	How does gender-based oppression manifest in the form of sexual violence? How should we understand 'consent'? How does the law further or resist gender-based oppression? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catharine A. MacKinnon, "A Rally Against Rape" • Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination"

	Day 21	How should feminists think about violence and self-defense as modes of resistance? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veena Cabrerros-Sud, "Kicking Ass" • Audrey Yap, "Self Defense and Sexual Assault"
12	Day 22	Should we publicly 'name and shame' people for sexual misconduct? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linda Radzik, "Practicing Social Punishment"
<i>Unit 5: Knowledge and Communication</i>		
	Day 23	How does gender-based oppression manifest through, and become reinforced by, science? How might we articulate and defend a 'feminist epistemology'? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elisabeth A. Lloyd, "Pre-Theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality" • Elizabeth Anderson, "How Not to Criticize Feminist Epistemology: A Review of <i>Scrutinizing Feminist Epistemology</i>"
13	Day 24	How do race, gender, and class affect how we credit and use people's contributions to collective knowledge? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emmalon Davis, "On epistemic appropriation"
	Day 25	How does gender-based oppression manifest in how we communicate? How can we use our voices to resist gender-based oppression? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liana M. Silva, "As Loud As I Want To Be: Gender, Loudness, and Respectability Politics" • Art Blake, "Finding My Voice While Listening to John Cage"
14	Day 26	University Break
	Day 27	Can and should we ever speak for others? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linda Martín Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others"
<i>Unit 6: Unit of Class Choice</i>		
15	Day 28	<i>Topic of Class Choice, Readings TBD</i>
	Day 29	<i>Topic of Class Choice, Readings TBD</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>		
16	Day 30	What is feminist wonder? What is feminist hope? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Attachments"