

Sociology 414
Feminist Theorizing:
Critical Reconstructions of The Social
Fall 2014: DRAFT, MAY 2014
Dawn Currie

Seminars: Wednesday, 5PM-8PM
Seminar Location: Classroom: AnSo 203

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(assignments will not be accepted by email)

Course Description

Conventional sociological theory provides formulistic answers, typically about the 'causes' of social phenomena. In contrast, this seminar emphasizes theorizing as an ongoing process of accounting for the social world and how we apprehend it. Such an approach abandons the search for objective 'Truth' in favour of exploring the implications of 'embodied' knowledge that locates knowledge seeking in its socio-political context. In short, theorizing participates in Michel Foucault's configuration of power / knowledge, and Dorothy Smith's 'conceptual practices of ruling'. The result is that feminist theorizing recognizes and accounts for itself as a political project characterized by lively debate not only with the 'masters' of social theory but also within feminist ranks (academic and otherwise). My goal is to help you see how debate continues to be productive for feminism, and to equip you with conceptual tools to engage in ongoing theoretical debate over the nature of specifically feminist sociology and its contributions to not only sociology, but also global movements for social justice.

Sociology 414 is not a lecture-based course; as a seminar it is organized around the principle of the co-construction of knowledge. The instructor's role is to facilitate collaborative learning. Although including instructor commentary and 'mini-lectures', this course has a participatory format requiring student engagement. It thus requires students to keep up with the assigned readings; students who are not willing to take responsibility for their learning in a collaborative setting are advised to seek a different course.

Sociology 414 counts as 3 credits of theory required for a Sociology Major / Minor.

Required Readings

Required readings have been assigned for each session, typically two readings a week (with some recommendations for further reading). Both required and recommended readings are available to be downloaded from Connect at no cost to students. Readings come primarily from sociology journals (*Gender & Society* is an official journal of the ASA) and the feminist journal, *Feminist Theory*.

Pedagogy

Over the years of various mission statements, UBC has promised 'to provide a learning environment that will inspire and enable individuals to grow intellectually, recognize their social responsibilities, [and] be prepared to live and work in a global environment.' This promise emphasizes student-centered, curiosity-based learning that will develop the capacity for critical thinking and equip students to work collaboratively. In keeping with these goals, Sociology 414 employs an antiracist feminist pedagogy designed to enhance the following skills:

- to *think critically*; that is, to recognize how power works through/as knowledge and to think about the implications of this recognition;
- to *assess* scholarship that addresses social issues that can be emotionally and ideologically laden;
- to *work collaboratively* with others from various life experiences, ethnic backgrounds, and levels of academic preparation;
- to *connect academic knowledge to life beyond the university*, particularly to movements for social justice; this skill requires the ability to connect theoretical knowledge and social change.

In order to achieve these learning goals, this course will combine seminar-style class discussion, small group work, instructor commentary, and independent assignments.

Responsibilities and Course Policies

It is the *responsibility of the instructor* to help students develop the above skills as the basis for life-long learning. She will help students maximize their intellectual development by maintaining high standards of academic performance.

Following UBC regulations, **regular attendance** is expected of students. Students who neglect their academic work and assignments may be excluded from final examinations. Students who are unavoidably absent because of illness or disability should report to their instructor on return to classes. It is the *responsibility of students* to complete assigned work (including weekly readings) according to the course schedule, and to conduct themselves in a manner that is respectful of others and conducive to learning as a process that requires continual interrogation, of both received knowledge and our

own understandings. This course is designed on the principle of students as active learners rather than recipients of knowledge; students will play an active role in maintaining a suitable learning environment for this course.

The University accommodates **students with disabilities** who have registered with the Disability Resource Centre. The University accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled assignments. Please let Dawn know in advance, preferably during the first two weeks of class, if you will require any accommodation on these grounds. Absence for varsity athletics, family obligations, or other similar commitments will not be accommodated as a matter of course; students should discuss these commitments with Dawn before the date that allows students to drop courses without penalty. Students missing classes are not entitled to personal 'tutorials' during office hours to catch up on missed lectures.

Late Assignments

When exceptional circumstances will prevent you from completing an assignment on time, you may request an extension; where possible and appropriate an extension will be permitted. In the absence of an approved extension, a 1% reduction of grade will be assigned for each day an assignment is late beyond the required due date (excluding weekends when the AnSo building is closed).

Plagiarism is a serious offense; in this course it will result in a failing grade.

Course Format

The instructor will elaborate key issues / concepts addressed in assigned readings and introduce theoretical approaches employed by feminist sociologists in the study of gender/gender relations. These 'tools' for theorizing will be discussed within their social and political context, so that feminist theorizing will be characterized as a reflexive endeavor, continually changing in the face of feminist politics as a globalizing movement for social justice. The pace and depth of material covered will be determined, in part, by students' learning needs.

Instructor-led materials are meant as a supplement to seminar presentations and class discussion. Students will be organized into small groups for class exercises and to co-facilitate discussion of assigned readings. Seminars are not a substitute for independent reading but rather offer the opportunity for you to deepen your understanding of the assigned texts. The purpose of seminar discussion is to engage classmates in 'interrogation' of the readings. Interrogation takes reading beyond a summary of content by asking what the article accomplishes, how, what is potentially problematic or missing, and so on.

Seminar Schedule

The following schedule has been drafted for this class. Learning for this class will not follow a set 'recipe' however; adjustments to this schedule may be necessary to meet the needs of learners. It is your responsibility to keep yourself updated on any changes, which will be well publicized during class meetings.

September 3: Introductions

Who am I? Who are you? After introductions to seminar participants and to the course expectations and requirements, we will lay some common ground for the seminar. Specifically, we will ask: 'What is feminism, anti-feminism, and post-feminism?'

Required Reading:

Kamen, P. 1991. 'Connections to the "F" word' Pp. 23-53 in P. Kamen *Feminist Fatale: Voices from the "twentysomething" generation explore the future of the "women's movement"*. New York: Donald J. Fine, Inc.

Gill, Rosalind. 2007. 'Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10(2): 147-66

September 10: What makes Sociological Theory 'Feminist'?

We will begin with a discussion of the nature and role of theory in sociology as the context for exploring what makes social theory/theorizing distinctly *feminist*. Who is our audience and to whom are we accountable?

Quinn, Beth A. 2002. 'Sexual Harassment and Masculinity: The Power and Meaning of "Girl Watching"' *Gender & Society* 16(3): 386-402

Guntram, Lisa. 2013. 'Creating, maintaining and questioning (hetero)relational normality in narratives about vaginal reconstruction' *Feminist Theory* 14(1): 105-25

September 17: Why do we Need Feminist Theory in Sociology?

In this session we will explore the intellectual context that fostered the (re)emergence of distinctly feminist sociology during the 1960s and 1970s. This context includes, but is not limited to, work by those generally received as the 'founding fathers' of sociology. What did feminists argue is missing from sociology? What did feminists identify as the conceptual 'errors' of androcentric thought? Answering these kinds of questions is important because, as we shall see, these questions help us interrogate feminist thought.

Sydie, R. 2004. 'Sex and the sociological fathers' Pp. 36-53 in B. L. Marshall and A. Witz (eds) *Engendering the Social: Feminist Encounters with Sociological Theory*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press

Jay, Nancy. 1991. 'Gender and Dichotomy' Pp 89-105 in S. Gunew (ed) *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge*. London: Routledge

Recommended Further Reading:

Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. 'The Ideological Practice of Sociology' Pp. 20-47 in D. Smith *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press

September 24: The Emergence of Feminist Sociology

In the previous unit we explored the *need* for feminist sociology; in this session we will explore the work of women sociologist during the early years of sociology (as early as the nineteenth century). While these women did not identify as 'feminists', their sociology is characterized by many of the hallmarks of what we may now claim as 'feminist sociology'. We will ask how this work was erased from the history of our discipline and explore how the 1960s/70s shaped the *content* of feminist sociology.

Friedan, B. 1963. 'The problem that has no name' Pp. 13-29 in B. Friedan *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Penguin

Mitchell, Juliet. 1971. 'The background of the sixties' Pp. 19-39 in J. Mitchell *Woman's Estate*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin

Recommended Further Reading:

Rich, Adrienne. 1976. 'The "sacred calling"' Pp. 23-38 in A. Rich *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Toronto: Bantam Books

October 1: 'Doing Gender' as an Everyday Social Accomplishment

While commonly claimed as a uniquely postmodern approach, during the 1970s onward feminist sociology, although offering a diverse range of theoretical approaches, can be described as advancing a 'social constructionist' approach to 'woman'. As we will have seen in the preceding sessions, feminists found it necessary to refute the biological essentialism replete in conventional scholarship on the roles of women and men in society. Second Wave feminists thus began to explore how not only 'gender' (in the cultural sense) but also 'sex' (in the biological sense) are sociological phenomena; something that arises through social interaction, as what people 'do' rather than 'have'. This session will help us understand how feminism politicizes sociology by showing how 'the personal is political'. This session will include group presentations on Simone de Beauvoir and Adrienne Rich.

Jackson, M. 1987. "'Facts of Life" or the erotization of women's oppression? Sexology and the social construction of heterosexuality' Pp. 52-81 in P. Caplan (ed) *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*. London: Tavistock

West, C. and D. Zimmerman. 1987. 'Doing Gender' *Gender & Society* 1: 125-51

October 8: Doing Feminist Theory as the Social Construction of Knowledge

By accepting the tenets of social constructionism, the unavoidable fact that the sociologist mediates the construction (rather than discovery) of knowledge comes to light. While responses to this challenge are varied – and the topic of future sessions – in this session we will explore what Michel Foucault meant by his now famous association of 'power/knowledge' and Dorothy Smith by 'the conceptual practices of power'. The assigned readings provide an opportunity to discuss the implications for 'truth-making' practices that are accountable to those about whom they speak. This session will include group presentations on R. W. Connell and Dorothy Smith.

Jurik, Nancy C. and Cynthia Siesen. 2009. "'Doing Gender" as Canon or Agenda: A Symposium on West and Zimmerman' *Gender & Society* 23(1): 72-111 – individual groups will be assigned one reading from the symposium for class presentation

Mohanty, Chandra T. 1984. 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' *Boundary 2* 12(3) – 13(1): 333-58

Recommended Further Reading:

Deutsch, Francine M. 2007. 'Undoing Gender' *Gender & Society* 21(1): 106-127

October 15: What makes Feminist Knowledge 'Better'?

In light of both feminist critiques of male-authored sociology and the specter that knowledge production, itself, is a social construction and therefore accountable for its claims, we will ask whether and how 'gender' of the knower makes a difference in what can be known. Can sociology produced through a feminist 'lens' produce 'better' knowledge, as some proponents claim? What is the basis for this claim? What does it mean to practice a sociology that is 'embodied'? What is at stake by claiming a distinctly feminist epistemology. This session will include group presentations on Sandra Harding and Nancy Hartsock.

Smith, D. 1974. 'Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology' *Sociological Inquiry* 44: 7-13

Sandoval, Chela. 1991. 'US Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World' *Genders* 10: 1-23

Recommended Further Reading:

Narayan, Uma. 1989. 'The project of feminist epistemology: Perspectives from a nonwestern feminist' Pp. 256-72 in A. M. Jaggar and S. R. Bordo (eds) *Gender / Body / Knowledge: Feminist reconstructions of being and knowing*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press

October 22: Women's Experience as Feminist Knowledge: Standpoint

Based on the assumption that women's experience offers a starting point for a 'fuller' understanding of the social world than 'disembodied' sociological theory, standpoint has become a 'hallmark' of feminist sociology. At the same time as being widely adopted, however, it remains a highly contested approach to knowledge seeking. In this session we will explore the origins and central premises of standpoint, variously presented as a theory, an epistemology, and a way of doing sociology. We will also discuss controversies surrounding 'experience' as the basis for sociological knowledge. This session will include group presentations on Donna Haraway and Patricia Hill Collins.

Smith, Dorothy E. 1997. 'From the Margins: Women's Standpoint as a Method of Inquiry in the Social Sciences' *Gender, Technology and Development* 1(1): 113-35

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1986. 'Learning from the Outsider Within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought' *Social Problems* 33(6): 514-32

Recommended Further Reading:

Haraway, Donna. 1988. 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575-99

October 29: Destabilizing Feminist Thought: Feminist Challenges to Feminist Thought

By now, the challenges and complexities of feminist theorizing will be abundantly clear. We will explore the emergence of 'gender skepticism' among feminist theorists as a response, in part, to postmodern critiques of binary thinking. What does it mean to reject the foundational categories of feminist theory, such as the category 'gender' or, as Butler argues, even the category 'woman' itself? Does this rejection lead to the demise of distinctly feminist theory? What about a distinctly feminist politics? This session will include group presentations on bell hooks and Judith Butler.

Butler, Judith. 1992. 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"' Pp. 35-57 in J. Butler and J. Scott (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge

Bordo, Susan. 1990. 'Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Skepticism' Pp. 133-56 in L. J. Nicholson (ed) *Feminism / Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge

Recommended Further Reading:

Bannerji, Himani. (1995) 'But who speaks for us? Experience and agency in conventional feminist paradigms' Pp. 55-95 in H. Bannerji *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-racism*. Toronto: Women's Press

November 5: Accounting for Difference: Intersectionality

Similar to standpoint, intersectional theorizing has had a significant impact for sociological thinking. In fact, commentators refer to 'intersectionality studies' as a distinct field. Originating in the writing of Black womanist writers in the USA, intersectionality responds to the racism of much dominant feminist work, as well as the kinds of criticisms raised by postmodernists about the inability of the category 'women' – despite its recognition of the plurality of womanhood – to account for diversity among women. In this session we will explore the tenets of intersectional thinking. Does intersectionality remedy the problems that gave rise to 'gender skepticism'? Why or why not? This session will include a group presentation on Himani Bannerji.

Denis, Ann. 2008. 'Review Essay: Intersectional Analysis: A Contribution of Feminism to Sociology' *International Sociology* 23(5): 677-94

West, Candice and Sarah Fenstermaker. 1995. 'Doing Difference' *Gender & Society* 9(1): 8-37 and Hill Collins, Patricia et al. 1995. 'Symposium On West and Fenstermaker's "Doing Difference"' *Gender & Society* 9(4): 491-513 – individual groups will be assigned one reading from the symposium for class presentation

Recommended Further Reading:

Davis, K. 2008. 'Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful' *Feminist Theory* 9(1): 67-85

November 12: Accounting for Heterosexuality: Queering Feminist Theory

Despite the emergence of lesbian feminist during the 1970s, heterosexuality remains the unacknowledged identity of most sociological subjects. This tendency is encouraged when sociology departments offer courses in 'sociology of gender' as distinct from 'sociology of sexuality'. In this session we will interrogate this practice through a discussion of Butler's 'heterosexual matrix'. What does it mean to 'queer' feminist theorizing in sociology? Is it possible to engage in a politics without an underlying agenda of 'normalization'? This session will include a group presentation on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

Butler, J. 1990. 'Subjects of Sex / Gender / Desire' Pp. 1-34 in J. Butler *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge

Bunch, Mary. 2013. 'The unbecoming subject of sex: performativity, interpellation, and the politics of queer theory' *Feminist Theory* 14(1): 39-55

Recommended Further Reading:

Ingraham, Chrys. 1994. 'The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender' *Sociological Theory* 12(2): 203-19

November 19: Accounting for Ethnocentrism

Second Wave feminism, particularly in the USA, championed itself as the 'leader' of a global movement for 'women's liberation'. This positioning was made possible through a history of western domination on the world stage. Second Wave western feminists advanced the notion of 'international feminism' through the notion of 'sisterhood' among women (with western feminists assuming the role of 'big sister'). In this session we will explore how non-western women have challenged the hegemony of western, anglo-feminism and ask whether a global movement of women possible within current processes of neo-liberal globalization. If so, what might it look like? What are the implications for feminist sociologists, many of who desire take up careers as 'Third World development experts'. This session will include group presentations on Maria Mies and Chandra Mohanty.

Mohanty, Chandra. T. 2003. "'Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28(2): 499-535

Patil, Vrushali. 2011. 'Transnational Feminism in Sociology: Articulations, Agendas, Debates' *Sociology Compass* 5(7): 540-50

Recommended Further Reading:

Mohanty, Chandra. T. 2013. 'Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberalism and Radical Critique' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38(4): 967-91

November 26: Truth telling and the Feminist Enterprise

In this wrap-up session we will explore the implications of what we have covered in the seminar. Once theory as knowledge seeking is recognized as a politically interested undertaking, and the knowledge claims advanced by theorists as socially constructed, what is the role of sociology, generally, and feminist sociology, specifically?

Ramazanoglu, C. and J. Holland. 2000. 'Still telling it like it is? Problems of feminist truth claims' Pp. 207-20 in S. Ahmed, J. Kelly, C. Lury, M. McNeil and B. Skeggs (eds) *Transformations: Thinking through feminism*. London: Routledge

Group Work and Individual Assessment of Students

Participation (Homework Notes):	20%
Group Presentation:	15%
Essay:	20%
Final Examination:	45%

Students will be graded on independent work, although preparation for much of this work will be carried out collaboratively. Four required assignments enable students to be assessed on work carried out throughout the Term as well as at the end of the course. These assignments will be discussed in more detail in class.

In keeping with this seminar as the co-construction of knowledge, your first assignment is a group presentation on one of the feminist theorists listed below. This feminist will be the subject of your second assignment -- a 10-page paper discussed below. This assignment gives you the opportunity to collaborate with classmates on the research for Assignment Two and to share your findings with seminar participants. 'Googling' your theorist gives you a good start, but not sufficient. Standard textbooks on feminist theory will be helpful. Your group will have (a maximum of) 30 minutes (including questions and discussion) for a class presentation, so focus your presentation on the theorist's theoretical and political agendas, what their approach has contributed to feminist debates at the time, and how their work helps sociologists think about gender inequality. As well as learning about important contributors to feminist theory, think about this assignment as an opportunity to develop your presentation skills. **Your Group Presentation is worth 15% of your final grade.** Group members will begin with the identical grade adjusted on the basis of a one-page description of: 1) your contribution to the group work and 2) what you learned (about feminist theory but also about your ability to work collaboratively and your public speaking skills). Given the size of the class, your theorist will be chosen by 'lottery draw' but you can negotiate a trade with others if you like. Theorists in the draw include: Adrienne Rich, Simone de Beauvoir, R. W. Connell, Dorothy Smith, Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Maria Mies, Himani Bannerji, and Chandra T. Mohanty.

Your second assignment is a 10-page paper on a feminist theorist. You may like to benefit from the group work on your class presentation by writing about the same theorist, but you are not required to do so. If you choose a name I have not listed above, you need to chat with me about your choice. Your paper must go further than your group presentation. Introduce your theorist by describing the social and political context of feminist debate at the time; identify the intellectual influences of their approach; describe the primary goal of both their theoretical and political agenda; describe how their work has been used by sociologists (what does it 'look like' in sociological inquiry); and conclude by outlining 'weaknesses' or limitations that have been identified by other theorists. In short, your paper must engage with the theorist's work in order to go beyond a simple summary of what they have written. **Your Paper is worth 20% of your final grade. It is due on the last day of class.**

Your third graded assignment is based on 'homework' that will be assigned on readings. Each week I will assign a question (or specific task) that will help you focus your reading. The purpose of this homework is to ensure that you are adequately prepared for class

discussion and group presentations; a recurring complaint about collaborative learning is the failure of classmates to come to the session prepared to participate in small group work. Assigned homework thus maximizes the time for collaborative work. In order to fulfill this goal, you will hand in your homework notes at the beginning of each appropriate session; I will not accept notes after the session (for obvious reasons, they would not fulfill their intended purpose). Because this assignment is in lieu of a grade for participation, you will receive 1 (full) point for completing your homework and a maximum of 1 point based on your level of engagement. I will use your best 10 homework assignments to calculate your final grade. **Your Homework is worth 20% of your final grade.**

Your final assignment is a take home examination. This exam will be discussed during the seminar. It will entail a review of all material – readings, discussions, lectures -- covered during the seminar. **The Take Home Examination is worth 45% of your final grade. It is due two weeks after our final session.**

THE END