

Sociology 414
Feminist Theorizing:
Critical Reconstructions of The Social
Fall 2016
Dawn Currie

Seminars: Tuesday 4PM – 7PM
Seminar Location: Classroom: AnSo 134

Office: Room 3129 AnSo
Office Hours: Tuesday 2-3PM, or by Appointment
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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 Dorothy Smith's 'conceptual practice 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. All readings are available to be downloaded from Connect at no cost to students. Readings come from feminist anthologies and books, as well as sociology journals (*Gender & Society* is an official journal of the ASA; *Gender & Education*) and the feminist journal, *Signs*.

Also Recommended:

I have included 'Recommended Readings' that amplify my presentations. While these readings are not required, if you miss class they provide a way for you to explore what we covered. Students with a specialized interest in feminist theory may find them useful for their work in other courses.

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 who miss 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. Please note that hard copies should be submitted for all assignments.

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 the instructor 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 the instructor 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 can 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. Seminar presentations 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. You are expected to read the assigned material *before* the seminar, bringing notes to class (hard copy or electronic) that will enable you to participate in the small group activities that have been designed for each session. Recommended readings are not required but accompany my presentations; they are provided for participants who wish to 'deepen' their reading on specific topics.

September 13 – Getting Started

Who am I? Who are you? What will we do in Sociology 414? After introductions to seminar participants and to the course expectations and requirements, we will explore the role of theory in sociology and identify the characteristics of distinctly feminist theory.

Assigned Readings:

Baumgardner, Jennifer and Amy Richards. 2004. 'Feminism and Femininity: Or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong' pp. 59-67 in M. Fine (ed) *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*. New York: Routledge

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.

Background: Emergence of Feminist Sociology

The goal of this section is to explore the 'conditions of possibility' for knowledge seeking and how knowledge operates as a venue for power. Within this context we will ask how feminist sociologists can criticize the tenets of sociological inquiry and yet work within their discipline.

September 20 -- The Conditions of Possibility for Feminist Knowledge

In this session we will explore the context that fostered a feminist movement during the 1960s and 1970s (keeping in mind that it is recognized as a 'second' wave of women's

liberation). Understanding this context enables us to identify, as sociologists, the 'conditions of possibility' for a distinctly feminist sociology. Specifically, we will see how 'gender' became the key 'problematic' for feminist sociology. We will compare this context, and the gender issues that this context fostered, to the socio-political and intellectual context of the 1990s and 2000s. This comparison will enable us to understand the kinds of issues that are unique to a 'Third Wave' of feminist activism and theorizing. In short, we will begin to fill in the Analytical Ladder.

Assigned Readings:

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

Siegel, Debra L. 2007. 'Postfeminist Panache' (Chapter Four) Pp. 97-126 in D. L. Siegel *Sisterhood Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild*. New York: Palgrave

Recommended Reading:

Mann, Susan Archer and Douglas J. Huffman. 2005. 'The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave' *Science & Society* 69(1): 56-91

September 27 -- 'Gender' as a Sociological 'Problematic'

In this session we see why feminists found it necessary to refute the biological essentialism replete in conventional scholarship on the roles of women and men in society. We will see why Second Wave feminists emphasized 'gender' as the lynchpin of women's oppression, in order to understand how 'gender essentialism' became a central problem, theoretically and politically, for feminism..

Assigned Readings:

Sydie, Rosalind. 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

Jackson, Margaret. 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

Recommended Reading:

Smith, Dorothy E. 1987. 'A peculiar eclipsing: Women's exclusion from man's culture' Pp. 17-43 in D. E. Smith *The Everyday World as Problematic: A feminist sociology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Feminist Alternatives: 'The Woman Question' in Sociology

This course emphasizes the contested nature of knowledge, including feminist knowledge. In this section we will explore key positions and debates advanced through

feminist theorizing in order to explore what is distinctive about feminist sociology and what challenges feminist knowledge seeking brings to our discipline. Thematic focus is given to what operates through, but remains unquestioned, in the sociological canon: power as a gendered process.

October 4 -- Feminist Foundations: To be or not to be 'women'

By now the complexity of feminist theorizing should be abundantly clear; there is a wide range of theoretical frameworks that attempt to account for gender inequalities. In this session we will explore how postmodern feminists challenge the 'gender essentialism' encouraged by Second Wave 'women's liberation' and the binary thinking implicit in much modernist gender theory. What does it mean to reject the foundational categories of feminist theory such as '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? While the remainder of the course answers these kinds of questions, in this session we will explore the philosophical grounds for feminist debates.

Assigned Readings:

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

Fraser, Nancy and Linda J. Nicholson. 1990. 'Social criticism without philosophy: An encounter between feminism and postmodernism' Pp. 19-38 in L. J. Nicholson (ed) *Feminism / Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge

October 11 -- Women's Bodies as a Conduit for the Operation of Power

Historically, sociology has made a clear distinction between 'nature' and 'the social', claiming the latter as sociological terrain (while ignoring the former). This distinction not only erased the body from sociological investigation, as seen previously this distinction is gendered. This session will explore feminist 'bio-politics' that situate the body in its socio-cultural context, drawing attention to the body as a site for the operation of power. How does power operate to produce social bodies identifiable as 'women' and 'men'?

Assigned Readings:

West, Candice and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. 'Doing Gender' *Gender and Society* 1(2): 125-51

Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1988. 'Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power' Pp. 61-86 in Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (eds) *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*. Boston: Northeastern University Press

Recommended Reading:

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

October 18 -- Standpoint: Women's Experience as a Source of Knowledge

In this session we will explore why 'experience' is given primacy in feminist sociology, helping us understand how feminism politicizes sociology by claiming 'the personal is political'. Based on the assumption that women's experiences offer 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 by commentators as a theory, an epistemology, and a way of doing sociology.

Assigned Readings:

Hartsock, Nancy. 1983. 'The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism' Pp. 231-51 in Nancy Hartsock *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*. New York: Longman

hooks, bell. 1984. 'Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory' Pp. 1 – 15 in bell hooks *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press

Recommended Reading:

Smith, Dorothy E. 2005. 'Women's Standpoint: Embodied Knowing versus the Ruling Relations' Pp. 7-26 in D. E. Smith *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. London and Toronto: AltaMira Press

October 25 -- Sociology for Women: Institutional Ethnography

This seminar emphasizes the contradictory nature of sociological knowledge. As we have seen, complications arise because we are, unavoidably, part of what we are trying to understand. While conventional sociologists advance the claim that we can separate ourselves from the social world in order to study it as 'scientists', feminists challenge this claim. Where does this position leave us in terms of advancing a feminist sociology that avoids the kinds of problems we have identified so far? One answer is Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography as sociology *for* people rather than *about* people.

Required Readings:

Smith, Dorothy E. 2005. 'Knowing the Social: An Alternative Design' Pp. 27-45 in Dorothy E. Smith *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Toronto: Altamira Press

Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. 'Femininity as discourse' Pp. 159-208 in D. E. Smith *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*. London and New York: Routledge

November 1 -- Challenging the Primacy of Whiteness: 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 emerged as a response 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 postmodern 'gender skepticism'?

Assigned Readings:

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

Choo, Hae Yeon and Myra Marx Ferree. 2010. 'Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities' *Sociological Theory* 28(2): 129-49

November 8 -- Queering Feminist Theory

Despite the emergence of lesbian feminist during the 1970s, heterosexuality remains the unacknowledged identity of much sociological work on gender. 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 how Butler's 'heterosexual matrix' contributes to the conflation of 'sex' and 'gender'. We will explore 'queer theory' as a challenge to processes that contribute to the normalization of heterosexuality. Can we live without categories to signify social identities? What it might mean to 'queer' feminist theorizing in sociology? Is it possible to theorize the social world without an underlying agenda of 'normalization'?

Assigned Readings:

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

Namaste, Viviane. 2009. 'Undoing Theory: The "Transgender Question" and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Thought' *Hypatia* 24(3): 11-32

November 15 -- Challenging Western 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 what a global movement of women within current processes of neo-liberal globalization looks like. What does western feminism look like from the 'outside'? What are the implications for feminist sociologists, many of who desire take up careers as 'Third World development experts'?

Assigned Readings:

Mohanty, Chandra. Talpade. 1984. 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' *Boundary 2* 12(3) – 13(1): 333-58

Mohanty, Chandra. Talpade. 2003. "'Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28(2): 499-535

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

November 22 -- What about men? Critical Studies in Masculinity

Feminist theorists have transformed sociology by asking 'what about women?' In the context of 'women's studies' as a vibrant and rapidly expanding field, scholars began to ask what 'gender studies' means for the study of men and masculinity. Answers include the emergence of 'Men's Studies' (a product of primarily US-based work) and 'Critical Masculinity Studies' (a product of primarily Australian and European scholars). In this session we will explore the relationship of these new fields to feminist studies in order to critically assess the implications of putting 'masculinity' (and men) back into the sociological agenda. This assessment will also enable us to revisit the notion of 'standpoint' and critically reconsider how power works through knowledge seeking.

Required Readings:

Hearn, Jeff. 1998. 'Theorizing men and men's theorizing: Varieties of discursive practices in men's theorizing of men' *Theory and Society* 27: 781-816

Connell, R. W. and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept' *Gender & Society* 19(6): 829-59

November 29 -- Liberation from Gender? Transcending Biology

As we saw in earlier sessions, feminists have argued that material bodies as well as their signification through identity categories are cultural constructs. Such a position encourages the view that we can shape our material as well as subjective selfhood. In this session we will explore the implications for such a view. Do technologies that range from birth control to IVF, surgical transformations that range from facial surgery to vaginoplasty, liberate us? As we will see, there are contentious debates among feminists on this question that challenge us to assess 'choice' as a path to women's autonomy and empowerment. Does the 'freedom' for a woman to choose her embodiment represent women's liberation? Why are western women, in particular, preoccupied with individual choice and self-transformation?

Required Readings:

Braun, Virginia. 2009. 'The women are doing it for themselves' *Australian Feminist Studies* 24(60): 233-49

Connell, Raewyn. 2012. 'Transsexual women and feminist thought: Toward new understanding and new politics' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37(4): 857-81

Recommended Reading:

McNay, Lois. 2000. 'Gender, Subjectification and Agency: Introductory Remarks' pp. 1-30 in Lois MacNay *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* Cambridge: Polity Press

Day Thirteen -- The Challenges of Feminist Sociology

In the closing session we will revisit the Analytical Ladder, introduced during our first session. This session will enable us to reflexively assess how power is implicated in knowledge seeking, including that by feminists. Who benefits from feminist knowledge? What are the challenges of institutionalizing feminist knowledge within the academy? What happens when the notion of scientific 'truth' comes under suspicion? Has feminist sociology avoided operating as ideological practice? If so, how? If not, why not? Answers to these kinds of questions will be open to class debate.

Recommended Reading:

Smith, Dorothy E. 1996. 'Telling the Truth after Postmodernism' *Symbolic Interaction* 19(3): 171-202

Required Work and Assessment of Students

Participation (Home Work Notes):	20%
QRIs (two)	20%
Essay (on an assigned theorist)	20%
Final Examination:	40%

Students will be graded on independent work, although much of the learning for this course will be collaborative. 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.

Participation: I will not keep attendance. You will receive a grade for participation based on handing in reading notes assigned each week as homework. The purpose of this assignment is to ensure that students are prepared for small group discussion. I will accept homework only on the day it is taken up in class. To make this activity more meaningful than recorded attendance, you will receive points for evidence of engagement as well as simply completion of homework; I will use homework papers to assess learning as the course unfolds, but I will not return individual comments.

QRI's: Required readings will be the subject of class discussion during seminar meetings. In preparation for weekly discussions and activities, you should keep a reading journal that does more than simply record the 'content' of reading but interrogates the author's claims. We will discuss 'interrogation' during our first session and I will provide examples of the kinds of questions you might use. This assignment builds on this way of reading in the form of QRIs (my term). Choose a **Quote** from one of the assigned readings that interests you and that contains ideas that you find relevant to your learning. Write a **Response** that captures key ideas being presented by the author and discusses what you find provocative, interesting, or relevant. This is where you interrogate the text. Connect this discussion to feminist theorizing in sociology (**Implications**). What contributions does the article make to ongoing debates in sociology? What might you question or challenge? Why? And so on. This is where you assess the text.

Hand in two QRIs by October 11. Each QRI should be about 5 double-spaced pages. Criteria for my assessment includes: relevance of your chosen quote, demonstration that you read the article in full, engagement with the quote in the context of the full article, and your ability to connect your essay to course materials. Your QRIs are worth 20% of your final grade (the equivalent of 10 points each).

Essay: Your third assignment is a 10-page essay on a feminist theorist. In keeping with the collaborative nature of this seminar, students will carry out research on a theorist assigned by the instructor in small groups. Each group will share what they learned through a class presentation. I will provide instructions on the format for presentations. While presentations will not be graded, each group will receive constructive feedback from classmates. Essays must be individually authored and go further than the group

presentation. The purpose of your essay is to: describe the social, political, and intellectual context within which the theorist is/was writing as a 'condition of possibility' for their approach and arguments; identify key contributions and the impact of their work on feminist sociology; and outline the challenges raised by their work for sociology more generally. Your essay must engage with the theorist's work as well as secondary sources in order to go beyond a simple summary of what they have written. Your Essay is worth 20% of your final grade. It is due on the last day of class.

Final Examination: Your final assignment is a take home examination consisting of three (short) essays. 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 40% of your final grade. It is due two weeks after our final session.

I do not grade on a 'curve'. Your assignments are assessed according to demonstration of both *comprehension* (understanding) of key concepts and theoretical debates and *competence* in materials covered by the course. Your work will be assessed according to the following expectations:

Fail – A failing grade results when assignments do not demonstrate comprehension of course content or mastery of conceptual skills this course is designed to promote. Failure can also be the result of missed assignments or excessive absence from class.

Pass (50-60%) – A Pass is granted to students who have attended all classes and completed all assignments, but demonstrate limited comprehension of course material and/or competence in the conceptual skills this course is designed to promote.

Adequate (61-70%) – Adequate performance reflects comprehension of key elements of the course content and competence in some (but not all) of the conceptual skills this course is designed to promote.

Good Work (71-80%) – Good Work entails comprehension of course content and competence in most of the skills this course is designed to promote. It signals a solid grasp of the foundations of feminist theorizing.

Very Good Work (81-90%) – Very Good Work demonstrates both comprehension of course content and competence in the conceptual skills this course is designed to promote. Completed assignments also demonstrate reflexivity and creativity. A grade above 80% signals that you are ready to undertake graduate level study. A grade above 90% indicates that completed assignments exceed expectations for work at this level.

I do not give individual tutorials to students who miss class meetings. If you are unable to attend class, you should contact a classmate who is willing to share their notes.

The End