This course offers an exploration of feminist theorizing of gender relations in constructing and maintaining the social order. The object of the course is to acquaint students with the strengths and weaknesses of current theories of gender and develop the ability to contribute to analyzing and changing gender relations. It is useful for everyone to note that one clear sign of taking a theory seriously is to critique it.

The following books have been ordered at A Room of One’s Own. The other required readings (with *) are available on electronic and regular course reserve (at College Library) and as part of a course pack to purchase (from Social Science copy center). The case readings (which you choose among) are ONLY on electronic reserve; download and print just the ones you want to do yourself (these are marked #).

- Myers, Anderson and Risman, Feminist Foundations
- Connell, R.W. Gender
- Thorne, Gender Play
- Espiritu, Asian American Women and Men
- White, Dark Continent of Our Bodies

Each week you are expected to read all the assigned texts BEFORE class. There are approximately 100-150 pages per week of reading, some of which is theory (and requires careful attention to the argument), some of which is case material to which we can apply theory. This is a lot; make sure you allow yourself time. The questions offered each week are a starting point to guide you in how you might read and respond to what you read.

For 3 of these weeks (of your choice, but spread through the semester) you should also prepare a written 3-4 page critical analysis of a theoretical article or book. Each such discussion paper should be a serious argument that constructively engages with the author’s theoretical claims about gender (critiques, extends, connects, challenges, etc.). You should always be prepared to actively question and discuss what you have read, and you are expected to post (on WebCT) your brief reflections on what you are reading and what question(s) you want answered from the reading on a weekly basis.

The list of assignments and percentage of grade assigned for each is given on the last page.

I. Feminist theory and the concept of gender

(1) Sept 3 First organizational meeting
    review of syllabus and assignments; how theory and critique (social and theoretical) connect. Deconstructing a “pink and blue” world.
Defining terms: what is feminism? what is gender? What is a role? why gender and not sex roles? To what extent is the critical analogy between “gender roles” and “race roles” valid? How do you understand the distinctions between “sex” and gender, and why do you think they matter? What is the role of power, of social order, of change in your “operational theories” of gender?

By looking back at how workplace inequalities between women and men have been theorized sociologically, we can see both “facts” and “interpretations” of what these data mean about social relationships. The observer (sociologist) doing the data-gathering and theorizing is also socially and historically situated. Because social relations themselves change, the data and the observer are also both in flux. What are some of the implications you would draw from this about our/your theories of social change? What are the specific criticisms of sex role theories leveled here and in the previous week’s reading? From your own perspective, which seem most significant and why?

Connell presents his systematic arguments for understanding gender as a social structure of power and hierarchy, exercised as a process through specific practices that convey meaning, rather than as “sex differences” whether biological or “socialized.” Focus on the relation of gender practices and bodies (does the biological produce the social? Vice versa? Or is there no relation?) Look at the essays that place gender meanings in social products other than people’s bodies: what “is” gender in such cultural practices? Why do people “choose” to consume gender in these ways?

Your first analytical paper MUST be turned in no later than Sept 30.

and also:


and read both cases:

*Cockburn, Cynthia In the Way of Women, ILR Press 1991, Ch 3, “Defined in domesticity” pp 76-104

How should we use history in studying gender relations? In studying class relations? Are we talking about anything real when we use terms like “women” and “men” (as if they were abstract, constant, unracialized and historically homogeneous categories)? How is the historical construction of relations of inequality (capitalism, racism) shaped by gender? How is it evident in specific practices in the home and in the workplace? How are home and work linked? When we say “historically variable” do we mean “always getting better”?

II. Using gender theory at different levels of analysis

   Cases: read this one
   AND ONE of these:
   #Lurie, Alison, The Language of Clothes, ch VI & VII, “Fashion & Opinion” and “Male and female” pp 155-181 and 212-229
   #Bordo, Susan “Beauty (re)discovers the male body” Pp 168-225 in The Male Body

Consider the responses to Martin as models of how to critique a theory; Martin is herself also critiquing and extending W&Z. What do they see as the relation between the “social” and the “natural” in the formation of gender? We obviously have bodies: what uses do we make of them in constructing social relations? How do our “selves” figure into our performances of gender? For men? For women? What uses should sociology make of psychology in constructing a theory of gender as process (involving the making of difference, power/inequality, emotion and intentionality)?

(7) Oct 13-15 -- Micro-level gender - looking at children in terms of interaction processes
   Thorne, Gender Play, chapters 2-5

Lever offers a classic “sex role socialization” account of childhood socialization. Thorne tells a gender interaction story of children’s interactions. How do they differ, particularly in the uses they make of “difference”? What does Thorne’s account simply add to Lever’s story? In what ways does Thorne's account challenge and resist Lever’s version?

Project #1 DUE in class Oct 20. Analysis of gender meanings in objects

(8) Oct 20-22 micro level gender: culture and individual resistance
   Thorne, Gender Play, chapters 6 &7
   *Ferguson, Bad Boys, Ch 6 “Getting in Trouble”
Being “good” boys and girls is not so easy, nor something that all of us want to do. And being a good boy or girl is not the same thing as being a “good” man or woman. How does adding age and sexuality complicate the picture of just learning gender once and for all in childhood? How does conformity and non-conformity vary by race and by class? How do Black boys “get in trouble” by enacting masculinity OR by resisting it? How about Black girls and femininity?

Remember: at least 2 of your analytic papers are due in no later than October 31.

(9) Oct 27-29. Micro to macro-level gender relations: struggles over cultural discourses
Connell, Gender – review ch 6, read chs 7 & 8
*Smith, Dorothy, “The Standard North American Family: SNAF as an ideological code” and “Politically correct as an organizer of public discourse” Pp. 156-194 in Writing the Social
Cases (read one):
#Bartokski “To veil or not to veil: a case study of identity negotiation among Muslim women in Austin Texas” Gender & Society, 2000, 14 (3): 395-416.
#Espiritu, Yen Le “We don’t sleep around like white girls do: family, culture and gender in Filipina American lives” Signs, 2001, 26 (2): 415-440.

What do Smith and Connell say are the important features of cultural “texts,” ideologies, codes and what do they have to do with us -- our personal standpoints, perspectives, projects? How does our “self” interact with cultural discourses and our engagement with them? How do our perceptions of our “authentic” gendered and raced selves interact with our own cultural “traditions” and how do we use both “self” and “tradition” to criticize as well as conform to the gender order? Are collective struggles to change a discourse different from individual struggles to resist it? Do you agree with Collins’ ideas about who struggles and why?

(10) Nov 3-5 - meso level gender - theorizing organizational change and stability
Cases (read any two):
#Quinn, “Sexual harassment and masculinity: the power and meaning of ‘girl watching’” Gender & Society, 2002, 16(3): 386-402

What is a gendered organization? How do gendered organizations change and resist change? How is this similar to/different from individual resistance? How do you see gender in organizations you have known? How do organizations construct “maleness” and allow maleness to construct the organization? How might one “bring men back in” to the study of gender relations on campus?
III. Including the macro level of analysis: gender as a social institution in society as a whole

(11) Nov 10-12 – meso to macro level - work organizations and social structures
Espiritu, Asian American Women and Men

Gendered social organizations exist within society-wide social structures that hierarchically organize gender, class and race relations. How do gender relations involve both intra- and inter- race relations? How do race relations involve both intra- and inter-gender relations? And how do both gender and race relations fit into a changing historical pattern of intra- and inter-national class relations?

(12) Nov 17-19 – meso to macro-level gender - heterosexuality as a social institution

How well does Rich’s analysis of heterosexuality as a structural power relationship stand up 20 years later? How is sexuality a “macro” issue? How does a discourse of repression (and/or of liberation) get used as a vehicle for male power? For heterosexual privilege? For gender conflict? For privileging the “queer”? How does (public) discourse and (private) family interaction relate?


(13) Nov 24 - meso to macro level gender - sexuality and race
White, The Dark Continent of our Bodies

Why and how is sexuality a race and class issue (as well as a gender question)? How is the “politics of respectability” a form of gender work? Would you want to add sexuality to a “list” of structural inequalities (with gender, race and class) or not? Why/why not? How are these structures more than just discourses about them?

Thanksgiving break – have a good turkey!

(14) Dec 1-3 - meso to macro level gender - family structures and changing power relations

Rather than seeing “the family” as the singular locus of gender subordination, gender theories see
class- and race- (and nation and historical period) specific families as part of systems that are economic and political. As such, families are sites of negotiation and are subject to social change. How do these authors relate broad trends of social and historical transformation to the interpersonal experiences of being in families? What does gender equality outside the family contribute to gender equality inside families and vice versa? How is the gender division of labor itself a macro-institution and who is struggling over it today?

(15) Dec 8-10 –micro through macro integration: Gender and social change

What are the politics and standpoints we bring to our own work in gender? Should we think of social research as a political activity? Why/ why not? To what extent and how can gender scholarship be transformative? And what is to be transformed? (you? your discipline? gender relations in society?) Concretely, how do you see your own practices of scholarship relating to these transformations?

Your 3rd analytic paper is due no later than Dec 10.

Take home exam due Dec 17 (5pm, at my office)
ASSIGNMENTS

Grading will be based on the following five assignments:

1. (30%) **Theoretical analysis papers** (800-1,000 words – which is approximately 3-4 double-spaced pages). You are expected to do 3 analytical papers, at least one of which MUST be done before the end of September and at least 2 of which must be handed in before the end of October. Each paper should be a thoughtful and considered comment on a theoretical argument. Consider a theory analysis paper the equivalent of an exam question – where you get to choose or write the question (and stating the question should always be your first paragraph). While you can focus on only one author’s argument, how you address it should bring in at least two other readings and show how they are similar or different theoretically. If you focus on a “case” reading, you must apply at least two contrasting theories to it. One extra theory paper can be done for extra credit.

2. (15%) **Cultural analysis**. Selecting a specific cultural symbolic system (spaces or objects, advertising for a particular type of product, the packaging for it, articles of clothing as worn, hair or other body decoration, etc) critically analyze the gender (and race, class, age, sexuality etc) codes that are being used to convey difference and status for the user. Discuss how difference and status are marked, how they are related, what makes them gendered codes and how you relate their gender-political meaning to theories of gender discussed in the readings and/or in class. Be sure to CITE your readings (at least 3 readings should be considered) and apply them specifically showing how the theory they offer is useful in your analysis. Ideal is 1000-1200 words, maximum is 5 double spaced pages. **DUE in class on Oct 20.**

3. (15%) **Observational analysis**. Using a social setting that you already are familiar with, such as your workplace, classroom, dorm, poker group, political group, church or whatever, take one or more of the concepts covered to date and apply it/them to analyze some specific aspect of gendered interaction (e.g. gender polarization, accountability, resistance, border work, re-segregation etc.) discussed in a reading and/or in class. Be explicit about how theory helps you see what you see and how you connect your interpretation of the meanings of the interaction to the specific, concrete behavior you actually observe. Make sure that your introductory paragraph sets out the theoretical concept(s) that you are applying to the case you observed and that your analysis CITES the ideas you are applying (drawn from and citing at least 3 class sources). (Note: Only behaviors that are publicly observable can be observed without ethically violating the right to privacy of those being observed.). Ideal is 1000-1200 words, maximum is 5 double-spaced pages, **DUE in class Nov 24.**

4. (10%) **Class participation and discussion**. You are expected to be in class and actively take part in analyzing the reading. In addition, you should contribute to framing the discussion by posting a serious question or idea that arose for you in doing the reading **no later than 10 am on Monday morning of the week in which we will be discussing this particular reading.** You are “counted” for 10 such participations, so you have some slack in which weeks you might not be prepared (no additional excuses, and no need for an excuse for 4 late/missed weeks). Weekly participation is graded high pass/pass/no pass.

5. (30%) **Take home exam.** You have a week from the last day of class to work on two significant theory questions about gender. I will give you some choice of just what questions you write on. You are required to use at (and specifically cite) at least 3 of the non-case-study authors we have discussed but you are also encouraged to bring in other material (from our cases, from other classes, from reading up on the issue). Ideal is 2000 words (total), **10 typed pages maximum, due in my office at 5 pm on December 17.**
General advice re theory papers, exam questions and course performance

The papers and exams are graded NOT on the basis of the position you take, but on how well you show you (1) understand what the authors you read are saying and can express their main points in your own words, (2) can compare and contrast their arguments and approaches, and (3) develop your own reasoning to consider the implications and assumptions of their arguments, that is, you relate their ideas to unstated but implicit considerations that you consider important and to the empirical world that their theoretical work is supposed to help explain. Good theory is coherent, applicable and helps to generate new insight. This is what you should look for in what you are reading and what you should try to demonstrate in what you are writing.

Your own position should always be expressed in terms of this reasoning process, not be just an isolated statement of your previous ideas or sentiments. It should be clear not only if you agree or disagree with a specific point, but why and how you formed your judgment. You need not discuss every author you read (indeed, this would be impossible), but you should use the opportunity to show (1) that you have read the assigned material and can choose the most relevant to the points you want to make, (2) that you have thought long and hard enough about the readings to have a point that you want to make, and (3) that you are able to muster evidence for supporting your point (and deal with evidence that doesn’t) in a fair and thoughtful way. Your argument must be your own; plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind is grounds for a failing grade in the course.

These same criteria are used in evaluating your response to the open-book exam questions that I write and the essays you write -- where you also get to pose the question you want to answer. The main difference is that in the essays you have to begin by stating the question clearly, while in the exam you just have to say which question you chose. Use the questions I give you to think about each week to help formulate good questions to answer for yourself, but don’t tie yourself slavishly to them.

Clarity and organization count. Be sure that your essays (and final exam) begin with a clear statement of what you want to argue and end with a conclusion about the readings in relation to this argument. Incoherent or ungrammatical sentences, paragraphs without topic sentences, and other forms of sloppy writing make it impossible to present a clear argument. Nearly everyone can benefit from reviewing their writing with the Writing Center – it is a wonderful resource that is available to help you improve your writing (and hence your grade). But they can’t help you if you wait until the very last minute. You can and should plan ahead and (gasp!) get the essays done early; you can have them checked over and turned in anytime before the cutoff dates. They will be graded and returned to you asap, not at the cutoff dates.

Late papers will be penalized by a grade per day, except in those rare cases where an unforeseeable, extensive and documentable problem crops up (e.g. illnesses of more than a week). You should be planning ahead and turning in your theoretical analysis papers well before the cut-off dates. This gives you latitude to accommodate the ordinary crises and illnesses that turn up, to use the Writing Center to best advantage, and to decide if you want to or need to do a fourth paper (either to replace one of them, or to add on and raise the average grade and weight given for all of them to 40%).

If you need accommodation to meet these requirements, please consult the McBurney Center early in the semester and speak with me about it right away. In general, my door is open not only during office hours but at other times (make an appointment with me by email and then you don’t queue at office hours; I can often find a non-regular time to meet). Come talk to me earlier rather than later about understanding the substantive issues in the course and/or meeting the requirements. Never let problems build up!