

Carolina Flores

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Required Texts

All readings, handouts, assignments, and announcements will be posted on Sakai. Links to videos, podcasts, and newspaper articles are on the syllabus, and will also be posted in weekly announcements.

Course Description

In this course, we will be looking at gender-based oppression from a philosophical perspective. Our central goal is to develop a range of conceptual tools with which to understand how gender shapes the social world, from large scale social structures and political decisions to daily interactions. We will also consider how this tool kit – developed by activists and philosophers – can be applied to a wide range of real-world cases, and critically interrogate its value.

With this goal in mind, we will start by looking at what oppression and privilege are. We will then look at specific mechanisms of oppression feminists have discussed. First, we will talk about what gender is and whether it is oppressive in itself. Second, we will discuss how gender-based oppression intersects with other kinds of oppression – based on race, colonialism, and heteronormativity. Third, we will discuss how language and images can be oppressive. Fourth, we will talk about oppression in the context of knowledge production and transmission, both in ordinary life and in doing science. Throughout, we will have an eye out for resistance strategies.

The concepts we will be focusing on should help you critically examine and respond to a range of experiences you might have had, such as:

- Taking a class with a syllabus packed with white male authors;
- Being puzzled by claims like “gender is socially constructed”;
- Being unable to classify an experience you’ve had because you don’t have a concept for it, and then finding it hard to talk to others about it;
- Finding that some people just sound much more competent than others when saying the same thing;
- Disagreeing with a friend about who counts as being oppressed or as being privileged

- Having your older male relatives dismiss feminism as no longer needed or having gone too far

We will read widely: recent analytic feminism, classics in feminist theory, activist writings, public philosophy, and fiction. The class will be discussion-oriented.

A **content warning**: we will discuss a range of contentious and emotionally fraught topics throughout the course, including sexual violence and self-harm. It is natural to find much of this hard to talk about, disturbing, or hurtful. I want us to learn to live with, and work through, these feelings of discomfort in a way that deepens our understanding. That said, let me know if you need accommodations in weeks where we are covering specific topics. See also the list of Student Wellness services at the bottom of this syllabus.

Course Goals

In this course, you will:

- Critically examine and reevaluate your own personal belief and value system (and the origin of this system), as well as the strengths and shortcomings of different feminist positions;
- Develop a clear grasp of the concepts and theories feminists have developed to help us understand and respond to gender-based oppression;
- Develop the ability to apply concepts and theories feminists have developed to critically assess the broad socio-political context and your own personal conduct and interactions.

In pursuing these course-specific goals, you will also acquire the following general skills:

- Charitably interpret, assess, and respond to contrary views and opinions;
- Effectively and concisely communicate complex ideas in your writing;
- Engage in respectful, reasoned, and passionate debate with peers about complex topics, and to use such debate as a tool in understanding the social world.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

All classes meet at 2:30-4:10pm at SC-120 (CAC). This schedule is subject to revision.

Unit 1. What is gender oppression and why should we think it exists?		
Jan 23	Introduction. What is feminism?	bell hooks, <i>Feminism is for Everybody</i> “Come Closer to Feminism” and “Feminist Politics”

		Pew Research Center, “For Women’s History Month, a look at gender gains – and gaps – in the U.S.”
Jan 28	What is oppression?	Iris Marion Young, “The Five Faces of Oppression” (selections) Marilyn Frye, “Oppression” (selections)
Jan 30	What is privilege?	Alison Bailey, “Privilege: Expanding on Marilyn Frye’s Oppression” Gina Crosley-Corcoran, “Explaining White Privilege to a Broke White Person”
Unit 2. What is gender and is itself oppressive?		
Feb 4	But isn’t gender just sex?	Simone de Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i> (selections) Anne Fausto-Sterling, <i>Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World</i> , chs. 1 (A Genderless Future) and 2 (Of Spirals and Layers)
Feb 6	What is social construction?	Asta, “Social Construction”
Feb 11	Is gender a social position?	Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?”
Feb 13	How do we build a trans-inclusive account of gender?	Talia Mae Bettcher, “Trans Women and the Meaning of ‘Woman’” Contrapoints, TERFs (video)
Feb 18	Is gender something we do?	Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” Robin Dembroff, “Why Be Non-Binary?”
Unit 3. How does gender-based oppression intersect with other kinds of oppression?		
Feb 20	What is intersectionality?	Brittney Cooper, “Intersectionality” Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement”
Feb 25	How do gender and race intersect?	Sojourner Truth, “But Ain’t I a Woman?” bell hooks, “Dig Deep: Beyond <i>Lean In</i>”
Feb 27	How do gender and colonialism intersect?	Serene Khader, “Neoliberalism, Global Justice, and Transnational Feminisms”

March 4	How does hetero-normativity matter?	Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”
March 6	Re-Cap and Writing Skills I.	
Unit 4. What role does violence play in gender-based oppression? (cw: sexual violence, abortion, violence, self-harm)		
March 11	What is misogyny?	Kate Manne, <i>Down Girl: the Logic of Misogyny</i> , ch. 2 (“Ameliorating Misogyny”)
March 13	What is the role of sexual violence?	Robin West, “A Comment on Rape and Consent”
March 18	SPRING BREAK. Op-Ed due March 24.	
March 20		
March 25	Are other aspects of mainstream sexual culture oppressive?	Catharine MacKinnon, “Sex and Violence: a Perspective” Kristen Roupenian, “Cat Person”
March 27	What is the role of masculinity in all this?	George Yancy, “#IAmSexist” Electric Didact, “Chivalry, Masculinity, and Violence” (video)
April 1	How are women’s bodies controlled and regulated in the context of pregnancy?	Rebecca Kukla, “Reproductive Risk” (podcast) New York Times, “A Woman’s Rights”
April 3	How do women internalize violence?	Hanna Pickard, “Self-Harm as Violence” Audre Lorde, “The Uses of the Erotic”
Unit 5. How do the things we do with words and images oppress? (cw: violence)		
April 8	How does pornography oppress women?	Rae Langton, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts”
April 10	How can words themselves oppress?	Ishani Maitra, “Subordinating Speech”
April 15	What is the role of pop culture in the oppression of women?	Liz Camp, “The Socio-Aesthetics of Pink” Videoclips in class.
Unit 6. How do our knowledge-production and transmission practices oppress? (cw: sexual violence)		
April 17	Do women get believed as much as men?	Miranda Fricker, <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> , ch. 1

		Bonnie Mann, “Trump’s New Taunt, Kavanaugh’s Defense and How Misogyny Rules”
April 22	Do we have the concepts to make sense of oppression?	Miranda Fricker, <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> , ch. 7 Emily McWilliams, “#MeToo and Philosophy” (podcast)
April 24	In what other ways are women oppressed as knowers?	Kirstie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing”
April 29	How does gender make a difference to science?	Elizabeth Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology: an Interpretation and Defense”
May 1	How do we build better resources for understanding oppression?	Alison Wylie, “Why Standpoint Matters” Briana Toole, “Identity Matters: Standpoint Epistemology” (podcast)
May 6	Wrap-Up and Writing Skills 2	

Course Requirements

- Attendance and participation – 10%
- Forum posts - 20%
- Two end-of-unit reflections – 15%
- Short paper (op-ed) – 20%
- Final paper – 35%
 - o 1-page outline due 2 weeks before final deadline – 5%
 - o Final paper, incorporating revisions. – 30%

Attendance and participation

Attending every class is compulsory. Please notify me in advance if you expect to miss a class and let me know the reason why.

This course will be a collaborative investigation of gender, sexism, gender-based oppression, and how to resist it. Our goal is to collectively make sense of the way in which gender shapes the social world. This means that the class depends on your active participation and appropriate preparation. You must pay attention in class, be engaged, and ask questions and make points which advance our collective understanding. And you must carefully do the assigned reading before every class and come prepared with questions (which can be clarificatory or substantive), objections, and alternative views.

Forum posts

Once a week, **everyone** will post a comment to the relevant week's Sakai forum. This can be an independent post or a reply to someone else's post. It should be a **short paragraph** engaging with some of the reading for that week. It can be a question: for example, a request for clarification on what view the author is putting forward, a question about how an argument works, or a question on how the view connects to other claims we have discussed in class. It can also be an objection. In each case, you should write enough to explain the reasons for your comment and indicate what passages in the text you are focusing about.

I expect you to work hard at understanding the reading by yourself, and then let me know in your comments what points you found particularly puzzling or are interested in discussing further. We will then collectively address these during the two classes that week.

Comments are due the day of class at 10 am. You can choose to write your comment for either day (Monday or Wednesday). You can **miss or drop two posts** over the course of the entire semester without penalty.

Short End of Unit Reflections

At the end of each unit, we will spend some time in class discussing the central question for that unit and systematizing the progress made in answering it. You will be expected to write two end of unit reflections, each about 1 page long.

These will include:

1. A brief answer to the central question for the unit (e.g. for unit 1, What is gender oppression?), with justification and noting potential problems for your answer or aspects that need further reflection. Your answer can reflect uncertainty: the world is complicated and there aren't clear answers. The important thing is that you articulate considerations that support your view.
2. A practical application of what you have learned from the unit. This will consist in an example – from your life, current news, history, or pop culture – that illustrates one of the mechanisms of oppression discussed in that unit, with a brief explanation of why that is an example of that mechanism of oppression. You should also make sure that your answer shows how the concepts studied in class help us make sense of that example.

These are due a week after the relevant unit is done. If you need more time, e-mail me before that deadline to let me know.

Papers

Papers should be blinded and submitted as .pdfs (with the last four digits of your RUID as the title) through Sakai by the due date. Except in extreme conditions, extensions must be granted well before the due date; late papers will be downgraded 1/3 grade per day.

The first paper will be a short (2-3 page) philosophy op-ed. The aim is to write an accessible article that applies some of the conceptual tools studied in class to current affairs, an historical event, pop culture, or lived experience. Your paper should meet the usual standards for a philosophy paper – i.e. it should be a reasoned defense of a view – but be written in an accessible style.

The final paper will be a substantive philosophy paper (7-8 pages) on a topic relevant to the class. You will be expected to send me a 1-page outline of your paper two weeks before the paper deadline, and then incorporate my feedback into the final paper. The paper should be a reasoned defense of a view, addressing some of the topics and literature discussed in the class.

Other Expectations

I expect you to be familiar with and to abide by RU's policy on academic and intellectual integrity: academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy. Violations of this policy include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

I also expect you to abide by the department's norms for discourse (philosophy.rutgers.edu/about-us/discourse). In particular, I expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other's views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way.

If you need special accommodations because of a learning disability or any other reason, please have the Office of Disability Services (ods.rutgers.edu) get in touch with me.

Grading Rubric

Below is roughly what each letter grade means. Note that '+' grades will be assigned for fine-tuning.

A

Papers: Fully answers the question in a concise and convincing manner. Provides a strong argument, with a clearly stated, relevant thesis, a transparent argument structure, and compelling premises. Considers objections and makes a persuasive effort to address them. Writes clearly, in plain language, and uses terminology in a precise manner. Shows insight by going beyond views or objections discussed in class.

Weekly posts: Misses or drops at most two posts. The large majority of the posts are relevant to the topic, concise, clearly written, and specific. They articulate a question or objection which reveals engagement with the text and which contributes to class discussion.

Short end-of-unit reflections. Gives a clear and concise answer to the central question for the unit and provides a compelling example, both of which come with full justification. Writes clearly, in plain language, and uses terminology in a precise manner. Shows independent insight and critical thinking about the topic of the unit.

Attendance and participation: At most one unexcused absence. Comes to class fully prepared, with relevant questions or insightful comments on the reading. Regularly participates in in-class discussion in ways that contribute to others' understanding and are relevant. Is always respectful and considerate of others, and does not take up excessive time.

B

Papers: Answers most of the question. Provides a solid argument, with a clear thesis, mostly transparent argument structure, and relevant premises, though the argument may have some significant gaps. Displays understanding of the topic by considering other views, though perhaps without articulating points independently or while showing confusion about some significant interpretative point. Writes mostly in a clear manner, though there might be inaccuracies that compromise the points made.

Weekly posts: Misses or drops three or four posts. Or: Almost all posts are more-or-less relevant to the topic, but some may be poorly articulated or fail to engage with a specific point in the text. Only a minority of the posts meet the criteria for an A.

Short end-of-unit reflections: Answers most of the prompt. Provides justification for the answer, though it may be insufficient or not clearly articulated. Shows understanding of the topic, but either with some inaccuracies or without a clear grasp of the application of the topic discussed.

Attendance and participation: Two or three unexcused absences. Or: Shows evidence of having done the reading each session, but in many cases in an uncritical manner. Participates in in-class discussion in more-or-less relevant ways. Is respectful of others.

C

Papers: More-or-less off-topic and unclear. Fails to provide an argument and shows significant confusion about major interpretative points.

Weekly posts: Misses or drops five to seven posts. Or: more than a third of posts are irrelevant or off-topic.

Short end-of-unit reflections: More-or-less off-topic and unclear. Fails to give a clear answer to the question and a relevant example, or shows serious confusion about the topic discussed.

Attendance and participation: Three to five unexcused absences. Or: In many classes, does not appear to have read the material. Fails to participate in relevant ways. The tone of participation is sometimes not fully respectful of others.

D and below: scarce evidence of effort or understanding along all dimensions.

F: dishonest work.

Student-Wellness Services

Just In Case Web App

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 / www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 / www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff

and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Scarlet Listeners

(732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/>

Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.