

Course Information

CRN: 202210.10133 WMST-200-001 (Spring 2023)

Instructor: Kylie Musolf, kmusolf@gmu.edu

Meeting Time: 1:30-2:45 pm

Location: Horizon Hall 4008

Office Hours: TBD, schedule appointments via www.calendly.com/kylieee

General Overview

The women's liberation movement finally hit universities in the United States in the early 1970s. While there have long been feminist intellectuals, scientists, activists, and writers in university posts and other spheres of cultural and political significance, the formation of women's studies programs and departments in the United States was an attempt to answer the intellectual frustration of university women and queer people at the overall state of knowledge about women and patriarchy. These programs and courses like this one are the result of a struggle that feminist academics waged against their university bureaucracies to create an interdisciplinary intellectual terrain wherein they (and future scholars like yourselves) could dedicate themselves to the politics and problems of gender, sex, and sexuality.

At first, the project was simply to get women's works on syllabi. To make sure to pass on the contributions of women in the sciences, literature, arts, and so on to the next generation of scholars and professionals. This is still much an important part of the task of women's studies, although the feminist politics of these margins have shifted over time. Beyond populating the archives with figures and icons, women's studies is also dedicated to cultivating and excavating feminist ways of knowing, methods of analysis, and frameworks for thinking about gender, politics, domination, desire, and identity. Women's studies has, of course, evolved a great deal thanks to social movements and paradigm shifts since its founding days but it remains a unique site in the university where women and women's questions take front and center stage.

Historically, women's studies courses have been organized chronologically in terms of what's known as the "[waves of feminism](#)." The story goes that white feminists at the turn of the 20th century organized themselves across the US and the UK to win the right to vote; this is called the "first wave" which effectively dissipated before the start of WWII as a result of nasty internal racial politics. Students might read the "[Declaration of Sentiments](#)" issued from the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 (which usually marks the beginning of the first wave) and watch [Iron Jawed Angels](#) or [Suffragette](#) or visit the local [Lucy Burns Museum](#) to learn about this history and the tradition of liberalism that still undergirds a substantial trajectory of contemporary feminist thought.

Some scholars would pinpoint [Betty Freidan's "The Feminine Mystique"](#) as the catalyst for the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 70s and this was certainly a significant intellectual turning point for many dissatisfied middle-class white housewives. However, at the same time a number of social forces were coalescing—the civil rights movement, the Vietnam war, and student protests—were transforming the political landscape of the United States. The white supremacy problem that permeated the "first wave" shows up again in this "second wave," but feminists begin working together in this period to address the deep-rooted racism of the movement. Consciousness raising groups become prevalent happenstance in this period in which women would come together in their local communities to discuss problems of patriarchy and sexual politics and rather quickly these discourses became mainstreamed (especially the slogan "[the personal is political](#)") as feminists trailblazed in media, congressional politics, and the arts. Students would learn about the "porn wars"

and many impressive but problematic attempts to theorize domination and sexual difference as well as the successes and failures of the movement to secure gender equality in law; they just might watch [the FX series *Ms. America*](#) to learn about the movement's failure to fully ratify the Equal Rights Amendment.

The borderland between the so-called “second” and “third wave” of feminism is blurry and contested, but many scholars use the demarcation to identify a shift in the cultural politics of identity. The second wave was hung up on fighting sexism and homophobia and racism in the American context, but often this was accomplished by way of essentialist concepts of woman, queer, and Blackness. The third wave—if such a thing exists and scholars now are even suggesting that there is a fourth wave and then maybe there is something called postfeminism after that—in its best iterations brings out problems of queerness, [coloniality](#), [technology](#), and intersectionality. Students would likely read the now notorious essay by [Kimberly Crenshaw](#) in which that latter term is coined and learn about the [history of drag](#) and its relationship to the meaning of gender.

This is a fine history to tell, but as with any history, it is partial, fragmented, and biased. We will deal in time with some of this history but importantly it will be as a conceptual, rather than social, history. Our history is the history of ideological struggle waged by feminists over the right and the means to explain and understand the situation of gender and domination that comprises our living world today. We won’t dwell on the waves for long, nor will we waste time reproducing a body of racist, homophobic, or transphobic thought. Students in this class will work towards developing an analytic tool kit, cultivating and sharpening feminist perspectives, and awakening ourselves to the hard questions and problems of gender and patriarchy.

We are headed in this direction not least of all because to speak of the current “wave,” one runs the risk of equating Cheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In* and pronoun wars with something that looks like a contemporary iteration of feminism. In 1990, Mary Daly lamented that “patriarchy has stolen our cosmos and returned it in the form of Cosmopolitan magazines and cosmetics” and in the age of Amy Coney Barret, OnlyFans, and #gaslightgatekeepgirlboss, it’s only getting worse. There is still much work to be done to develop a feminism adequate to our times—to the changing landscapes of neoliberalism, rampant consumerism, and techno-globalization—and this course aims to provide if not a scaffolding, then at least a blueprint of ideas, arguments, and perspectives that will stand up to these challenging times.

Mason Course Catalogue Description

“Interdisciplinary introduction to women’s, gender and sexuality studies, encompassing key concepts in the field, history of women’s movements and women’s studies in America, cross-cultural constructions of gender, and a thematic emphasis on the diversity of women’s experience across class, race, and cultural lines. Limited to three attempts.”

Student Learning Objectives

- Learn the basic vocabulary of feminist theories to add nuance to difficult conversations around contemporary issues.
- Practice listening and observation skills (i.e. critical analysis) using feminist lenses through dialogue, research, and reflection.
- Reflect deeply on our own social positions and the ways that political, biological, and cultural concepts and structures make sense of our lives.

Warning

My training is in philosophy, which means that in this course we are focused on asking smart questions and seeking rigorously reasoned answers. Other approaches to this course may privilege anthropological reflection on women's behaviors or sociological analysis of gendered social practices. Instead, we will focus on thinking through the conceptual foundations that make these and other kinds of inquiries into our gendered world possible. Perhaps surprisingly, this course is not particularly reading heavy, but it is undoubtedly thinking heavy. Almost every week we will focus on one canonical feminist thinker, deliberately and carefully unpacking her ideas and arguments. Rarely will you be asked to read more than 30 pages per class meeting; nonetheless, our readings are immensely dense and will take significant time each week to understand. In other words, be advised but not afraid that this course is theory heavy.

Course Materials

All materials will be provided on Blackboard.

Grading

Attendance and Participation: 25 points

Reading Responses: 20 points

Projects: 40 points

Final Essay: 15 points

Total: 100 points

Attendance and Participation (25%):

- Attendance is mandatory for this course. Tardiness is not tolerated and may count as an absence at my discretion. To earn credit for attendance, you will need to have your camera on for the duration of the course period. Talk to me early on if this is to be a problem for you.
- The readings will vary weekly in length and density. Plan to spend about two hours per class meeting ruminating on the assigned texts, regardless of length.
- Importantly, in class participation will not look the same for everyone. Some folks will need to learn to listen as a form of participation; some folks will need to practice speaking up. Take some time to think about what kind of participation goals you have for yourself in this course and we will discuss what productive participation looks like in class together.
- There may be up to three quizzes in the semester if I notice students are in need of motivation to prepare for class discussions.
- Individual meetings are required for every student at least once per semester, conducted in person or over zoom. In these 10–15-minute meetings, we will be able to discuss your work and any of your concerns in depth.

Projects (40%)

Students will produce four mini-projects over the course of the semester. Some will be short formal essays; others will be creative.

Project 1: Histories of Feminism (5%)

There is no one history (herstory?) of feminism. We will read several important and underappreciated figures in the history of American women's liberation, but there are many others that are interesting and worthy of attention. Your task for this assignment is to create a short "zine,"

podcast, or tiktok that sheds light on an historical figure who made an important contribution to feminism before the 20th century. This should include creative description or imagery, historical information, and should answer two questions: 1) why did you choose this person? And 2) why should we care about this person? Research bibliography of at least 3 sources is a must.

Project 2: Like a Girl? (10%)

After reading Iris Marion Young's essay, you are invited to take a walk and see for yourself how much gender is socialized into your own body. You will write a proper reflection essay that explains Young's argument and discusses the extent to which your own experiences confirm her theory. No bibliography is needed. 3-4 pages, double-spaced.

Project 3: Compulsory Culture (10%)

One of the key components of gender theory is the role of compulsory norms; in other words, gender and sexuality are often built into the architecture of our everyday lives in ways that appear to make certain identities appear natural and normal and certain behaviors seemingly inevitable and unavoidable. We will investigate how visual culture plays a distinctive role in the reproduction of normative gender and sexual ideologies and your task is to make a vision board or collage of visible gender and sexual norms that have shaped your own identities.

Project 4: Matrix of Domination (15%)

This is a two-part project; one part will focus on defining and clarifying Patricia Hill Collins' framework and the second part will constitute an application essay. You will not need to conduct outside research for this project; we will be using the readings from class as the basis of the application. More details to come.

Final Essay (15%)

The final essay for this course is an argumentative essay responding to Linda Nochlin's position established in her seminal essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" You will summarize her argument and then clarify your own stance. This essay should be 5-6 pages, double spaced.

Reading Responses (20%):

For each reading I have posed two response questions that will help you think through the key ideas of the text. Your task is to select 10 questions sets to answer in approximately 500 words. This means you answer both questions and write about 250 words for each answer. Each submission is worth two points toward the 20-point category. Your answers are to be submitted prior to the start time of the class period for which the reading is assigned. No late submissions will be accepted under any circumstances. A good rule of thumb is that each answer should include one quote from the reading as evidence to support your discussion.

Policies and Requirements

Reasonable Accommodations- Please be in contact with me directly, as well as Disability Services, should you require any accommodations for the course. For more info:

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://dsgmu.wpengine.com/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved

WMST-200: Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies

accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474

Trigger/Content Warnings- I have chosen not to place trigger warnings on specific pieces in the syllabus because triggers are unique and highly personal. It's not possible for me to discern in advance what content has the potential to be upsetting and/or triggering to every one of my students, and I do not want to inadvertently create a hierarchy of what material is "intense" or "real" enough to warrant a warning.

Academic Integrity- If you aren't familiar with GMU's Academic Integrity policy, read up here:

"To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal and/or lie in matters related to academic work." More information about the Honor Code, including definitions of cheating, lying, and plagiarism, can be found at the Office of Academic Integrity website at <http://oai.gmu.edu>

Late Work- Neither you nor I have time to get behind in our work for the semester. If you have a medical or family emergency, it's your job to contact me and propose a timeline for your late submission. Otherwise...there's two essays that have firm due dates. Talk to me if it's a problem but try not to make it a problem. I don't accept late submission for final essays.

Assignment Submission- All assignments are to be submitted on paper at the start of the class period for which they are due unless otherwise indicated.

Technology Policy- I prefer that you do not use computers during class time, however I permit them for instructional purposes only. Notwithstanding disability accommodations, phones and recording devices are not permitted in class for the sake of instructor and student privacy. I highly recommend that you print your readings and mark them up as you are reading and that you practice taking notes by hand—these are proven effective methods for reading comprehension and learning retention.

Course Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change.

Monday, January 23 –

Syllabus, course introductions

Wednesday, January 25 – (Lecture)

bell hooks, “Feminist Politicization- A Comment”

We will begin anachronistically with bell hooks, one of the great feminist teachers and writers of all time to help us clarify the project of doing women’s studies that we are embarking upon. In this essay, hooks resists the idea of “the personal is political”; a slogan reproduced to the point of absurdity and senselessness. Instead of treating one’s own life and experience as the starting point for feminist politics, the task will be, as hooks argues, to bring politics to the self rather than to bring the self into politics. The difference is who and what kind of politics we aim to center and enact in our work together.

Adrienne Rich, “What A Woman Needs to Know”

This short commencement speech given in 1971 by radical lesbian feminist poet Adrienne Rich speaks directly to the problems of knowledge and perspective that promulgate from a male-centered education (such as is offered virtually everywhere, even at women’s colleges). She explains the concept of a “token” and explains the difference between being woman and being feminist in terms of retaining an “outsider” perspective even and especially when we attain positions of power and influence in life. Rich’s work speaks directly to the kind of politicization hooks has in mind, so the two works work well together to establish the motivations of the course.

Early Feminisms

All throughout history women have been goddesses, scientists, poets, monarchs and philosophers. Their writings have mostly been lost to time, but there are fragments that remain from around the world which prove absolutely that feminism is not an invention of the American 19th century. Feminist writings date at least as far back as 500 BCE in India where Buddhist nuns wrote in verse to rejoice in their freedom from domestic servitude and husbandry. In the first century of the Common Era, Ban Zhao—a Chinese scholar and women’s teacher of the time—wrote to defend the education of girls. It’s not easy or straightforward to say when feminism began, or what early writings of women ought to count as feminist; a fact which the wave metaphor conveniently oversimplifies. We won’t and can’t begin at the beginning, but there are nonetheless two important women whose work predates the “waves” where we will make our start. We will also read two Black womanist whose legacy reverberates through everything else we’ll study this semester.

Monday, January 30 – (Discussion)

Sor Juana, “Reply to Sor Filotea”

Sor Juana, a nun who lived in Spanish-ruled Mexico in the 17th century, added many dazzling contributions to this lineage of feminist writing. Her most famous work among feminists is undoubtedly her poem entitled, “Arguing that there are inconsistencies between men’s tastes and their censure when they accuse women of what they themselves do cause” (catchy,

right?) but we will read another of her works, a letter written amidst great controversy. The letter is addressed to “Sor Filotea” a pseudonym for an Archbishop who published her private works (which criticized a sermon on grounds of anti-imperialism) and chastised her unfeminine commitment to learning and scholarship. This letter is her answer. For us, it is a shining example of how to learn and think like a feminist.

1. How does Sor Juana make use of history in her argument for a woman’s right to intellectual activity?
2. Why does she spend so much time narrating her life experiences? What effect does this narrative have for the reader?

Wednesday, February 1 – (Lecture)

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (excerpt)

Both Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott credit Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* as the catalyst of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. Readers will see an undeniable family resemblance between the two documents, both of which outline a programmatic agenda for the recognition of women as legal and moral subjects. Wollstonecraft was writing at the end of the 18th century, in the age of Enlightenment, in which she saw powerful resistance to the tyrannical rule of monarchy as a model for the overthrow of the tyranny of husbands. She goes beyond Abigail Adams’s famous appeal to “remember the ladies” to describe just how and why a democratic doctrine of rights should regard women.

1. What specific rights (there are 5 or so) does Mary Wollstonecraft assert that women should have and how does she justify that women should have these rights?
2. Based on the reading, what is the relationship between freedom and virtue? Why is this relationship relevant to her argument?

Monday, February 6 – (Discussion)

Sojourner Truth, “On Women’s Rights” (“Ain’t I A Woman?”)

Reading Wollstonecraft and her followers leaves many readers with a bitter taste of white supremacy. Sojourner Truth—an educated but illiterate formerly enslaved Black woman from New York—was similarly dissatisfied with the erasure of Black women from the agendas of both white women’s suffrage and Black men’s emancipation and so at an 1851 convention on Women’s Rights offered some remarks to the crowd. Truth was not the first or only Black woman in the 19th century to speak on the condition of Black women’s multiple oppression, but her words have been most distorted. After all, she never once asked “Ain’t I A Woman?” Reading the original text, or better still, listening to women who speak in Dutch-inflected dialects like she would have in life, gives us a better sense of her powerful rejoinder to exclusionary white feminists.

1. What differences do you note between the 1851 Marius Robinson transcription and the 1863 Frances Gage adaptation? What do these differences amount to?

Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman’s Cause is One and Universal”

Only the fourth African American woman to ever earn a PhD, Anna Julia Cooper is often credited as the mother of Black feminism. Her book, *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South* is one of the first articulations of Black feminism, arguing that education and equality for Black women are a benefit to the whole African American community. A year after its publication and much in the same vein of argument, Cooper delivered an address in 1893 to the World's Congress of Representative Women to a predominantly white audience. In it, she describes the social progress of African American women after slavery and issues a powerful demand for universal human equality.

2. Compare and contrast these two approaches to Black women's inclusion in the struggle for women's rights.

What is a Woman?

In the first major thematic section of this course, we will read some of the big names in feminist theory who force us to slow down and ask the existential and philosophical questions about the concepts that pervade feminist discourse. Defining womanhood, femininity, and the relationships between sex, gender, and sexuality is not an easy task; moreover, anyone who makes these complex concepts and relationships appear simple is undoubtedly playing ideological games and should be regarded with scholarly skepticism. We will pursue these evergreen problems from a historical perspective first but then work our way into contemporary feminist and queer perspectives.

Wednesday, February 8 – (Lecture)

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (intro)

French existentialist writer Simone de Beauvoir transformed the landscape of feminist thought when she posed “the woman question” in 1949, just five years after women in France won the right to vote. It is always the task of philosophers to ask after the meaning of concepts which appear settled and obvious, and this is precisely the impetus of Beauvoir’s work in *The Second Sex*. Rather than try to give one absolute definition of womanhood, she instead attempts to describe the *situation* of womanhood, that is, the durable historical, political, and cultural conditions that structure women’s lives.

1. Famously, Beauvoir writes, “One is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one.” In your own words, what does she mean by this?
2. How does Beauvoir theorize the relationship of woman to man/feminine to masculine?

Monday, February 13 – (Discussion)

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (cont.)

1. Why does Beauvoir argue that woman’s oppression is distinct from other forms of oppression (ex. class-based or racial oppression)?

Alison Stone, “On the Genealogy of Women: A Defence of Anti Essentialism”

Without being able to address the lengthy history of debate surrounding Beauvoir’s transformative ideas, we will have to think hard about what it means that gender is “socially constructed.” Even though Alison Stone doesn’t address Beauvoir directly, she does pinpoint a major problem that emerges out of Beauvoir’s position. Stone addresses a deep

problem of how to talk about women as a political class without essentializing women's experiences and supposing that all women are in some way the same. This article succinctly considers ways of dealing with the problems of difference and introduces our next key thinker, Iris Marion Young. Stone introduces the method of genealogy as a way of tracing the overlapping modifications of the meanings of femininity that unfold over time.

2. In your own words, explain the concept of “gender as seriality” and why Stone thinks it’s a helpful approach to thinking about woman as a political category.

Project 1 Due

Wednesday, February 15 – (Lecture)

Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl”

History and culture are but two dimensions of the situation of womanhood. Iris Marion Young raises an additional dimension, the phenomenological experience of the body. In short: Young argues that women are enduringly conditioned by patriarchy to experience their bodies, the way they move and take up space, in gendered ways. She—like Beauvoir—rejects biological essentialism (the idea that all women’s bodies bear a fundamental sameness) but shows that there are still ways in which social conditioning, upbringing within patriarchal norms, and internalized misogyny affect women’s everyday experience of their bodies.

1. How is Young building on/extending/expanding Beauvoir’s work which we read last week?
2. Young argues that the situation of gender influence us at the level of our bodies. How? In other words, what social forces does Young think accounts for why most women move, behave, and experience their bodies in this way?

Monday, February 20 – (Discussion)

Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl” (cont.)

1. Young writes, “Not only is there a typical style of throwing like a girl, but there is a more or less typical style of running like a girl, climbing like a girl, swinging like a girl, hitting like a girl.” (33) What does she describe as typical of this style of comporting “like a girl”? Make a list of behaviors that she observes.
2. In the middle sections of the text, Young sketches out a theory that she thinks encapsulates or accounts for what she has observed in the first section. She gives three terms: “ambiguous transcendence,” “inhibited intentionality,” and “discontinuous unity.” Identify a sentence or two where she defines each term and then explain what she means in your own words.

Wednesday, February 22 –

Workshop Day

Monday, February 27 – (Lecture)

Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience”

Adrienne Rich, radical lesbian feminist poet from Baltimore wrote this essay in 1980, taking feminists to task over the erasure of lesbianism from feminist articulations of the meaning of womanhood. She asks us to consider how we can understand the meaning of being woman without understanding how women's desires and experiences are shaped by the demands of heteropatriarchy. By treating heterosexuality as a political institution, Rich argues that compulsory heterosexuality is the internal logic that drives various forms of gender-based violence and oppression and provocatively suggests that all the myriad ways that women enact love for other women (sisterhood, motherly care, and romantic affection) should be considered lesbianism and that lesbianism entails a political strategy for resisting patriarchal domination.

1. How did feminist theory regard lesbianism prior to Rich's intervention? Cite and explain an example.
2. What is compulsory heterosexuality and by what mechanisms does it operate to oppress women?

Project 2 Due

Wednesday, March 1 – (Discussion)

Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" (cont.)

1. It seems (to me at least) that Rich doesn't settle on one explanation of the origin or cause of compulsory heterosexuality, however she does consider several explanations. What are these explanations and which does she find most convincing?
2. What is the "lesbian continuum" and in what way(s) is lesbianism conceived of as a political strategy?

Monday, March 6 – (Lecture)

Jack Halberstam, "Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum"

This work is a chapter of Halberstam's 1996 book "Female Masculinities" which adds at least three important considerations to our discussion of the meaning of womanhood. Until now, we have somewhat unproblematically linked femininity and womanhood together without considering the multiplicity of possible linkages between woman and masculinity. Nor have we considered how transgender experience ought to figure into our understanding of gender and womanhood. A challenging read, nonetheless, important because it addresses some of the uncomfortable problems that surround the possible synthesis of trans identities and queer politics with feminist understandings of gender. In this work, Halberstam insists that a masculine continuum is not the best way to parse the gender and sexual identities of butch lesbians and trans men.

1. What are some of the ways that Halberstam outlines the figures of the butch lesbian and trans man have been pitted against each other in gender politics? How do these antagonisms hinge on concepts like "authenticity," "playfulness," or the notion of the "wrong body" and what problems do these present for gender theory?
2. What problems emerge in discussing trans and butch identities in relation to home/migration metaphors?

Wednesday, March 8 – (Discussion)

Film, *Disclosure*

This 2019 film—a study in the filmic representation of trans people—provides a much-needed sequel to *The Celluloid Closet*, the first documentary to argue that the representation of LGBT people in cinema and television have real world consequences. Whereas the earlier documentary paid almost no attention to the “T” in “LGBT,” *Disclosure* focuses solely on the history and tropes of trans representation, which, it is argued, has been present in cinema since its very beginnings. An all-star, all-trans cast of Hollywood stars discuss the limited progress that has been made in the sphere of mass culture towards authentic and diverse representations of trans experience.

1. What arguments does the film present about the social significance and impact of trans representations in Hollywood?
2. In what ways does the documentary address the issue of “coming out” or trans visibility? What problems or conditions does the documentary help us take into consideration?

Monday, March 20 – (Lecture)

Georgiann Davis, “Medical Jurisdiction and the Intersex Body”

Part of her 2015 book, *Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis*, in this essay Davis looks at the ways in which medical diagnosis and surgical intervention can have profound and damaging consequences on the healthy development of intersex people. Looking closely at the controversy around Dr. John Money’s sexual assignment surgical experiments and the introduction of the term “Disorders of Sex Development” (DSD) by medical experts, she explains the role that doctors have in shaping the meaning of gender in their attempts to reshape sexed bodies and articulates an agenda for returning medical and narrative autonomy to intersex people.

1. Davis explains, “In this chapter, I argue that the medical profession holds a unique position at the institutional level of gender structure, where it can either perpetuate or challenge traditional gender ideologies and, in so doing, use its authority either to harm or to help intersex people.” Elaborate on this thesis. What evidence does Davis provide to substantiate this view about the role of medical institutions in shaping gender?
2. Who was John Money and what was he trying to prove about gender identity in his research? What might it mean for our understanding of gender identity that he was not successful?

Wednesday, March 22—

Film, *Intersexion*

Existing research suggests that as much as 1.7% of the global population is intersex; meaning that they have biological sex characteristics that do not conform to the normatively male or female sex. This film gives voice to intersex people to discuss their experiences of medicine, family, sexuality, and identity. It deals with cultural anxieties, shame, and secrecy surrounding ambiguous genitalia and the pressures to conform to normatively sexed ideals.

1. What did you learn from the documentary (or the following online article) about the biological indicators of sex? What is “intersex”?
2. How do the documentary subjects think about the relationship between sex and gender?

Scientific American, “Beyond XX and XY: The Extraordinary Complexity of Sex Determination”

This short read with an impressive infographic provides a basic explanation of the biological indicators involved in the determination of sex—to the best of scientific knowledge so far.

Gender, Domination, and Social Institutions

The second and final major thematic unit of the semester revolves around the lived realities of gender and domination in particular arenas of social and institutional life. We'll begin with Patricia Hill Collins' framework of the “matrix of domination” to generate a conceptual toolkit that will help us break down the problems of patriarchy that the subsequent authors take up. We will read the notorious Marxist feminist Angela Davis to investigate the prison industrial system and how it constructs different models of domination for different racialized and gendered subjects. We will also look at the effects of racialized sexism on access to reproductive justice and consider the politics of white saviorism that pervade US military and humanitarian efforts alike. Finally, we will turn to Linda Nochlin's landmark essay to consider the structural inequalities that undergird the culture of “great artistry.”

Monday, March 27 –

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (ch. 1)

Black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins is committed to taking Black women's knowledge seriously as the foundations of a critical social theory. In the early chapters of this work, Hill Collins sets out to explain what kinds of insights and innovations that Black feminist thought makes possible and how this thinking has been historically suppressed and undervalued. Without essentializing the vibrant diversity of Black women's experiences and identities, she works to develop a methodology for reclaiming their subjugated knowledge.

1. What are the mechanisms and interests that suppress Black women's knowledge and ways of knowing? And what are the four ways that Hill Collins proposes we can reclaim this knowledge?

Project 3 Due

Wednesday, March 29 — (Lecture)

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (ch. 12)

In this chapter, Hill Collins establishes her most notable idea, the matrix of domination. She articulates four domains of domination that are operative in all social institutions in order to offer an analytic framework for understanding (with an eye toward changing) the conditions of oppression in everyday life. This dialectical model for understanding oppression ultimately challenges the fiction of straightforward demarcations of oppressor/oppressed and allow us to resist reifying discourses to see where agency is truly possible.

1. What are the four domains of domination? Explain them in your own words.
2. In what way does this framework function “toward a politics of empowerment”?

Monday, April 3 — (Discussion)

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (ch. 12) cont.

Wednesday, April 5— (Discussion)

Film, *Reversing Roe*

This 2018 film provides a thorough account of the winning policy strategies of the religious right that were ultimately successful in accomplishing the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*. It addresses the advent of “heartbeat bills” and the “partial birth” propaganda at the heart of the campaign to roll back women’s access to reproductive health care in the decades following the *Roe* decision. The film provides important context for Dorothy Roberts’ discussion and serves as an excellent example of the white-centered discourses of reproductive freedom that obfuscate the racialized power dynamics that multiply the oppression of Black mothers and women.

Project 4 Part 1 Due

Monday, April 10 — (Lecture)

Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (intro)

This 1997 book was written when the US media landscape was saturated with derogatory stereotypes about Black mothers as promiscuous, unfit, drug-addicted, and lazy. This book powerfully rewrites the narrative by tracing a history of abuses against Black mother’s reproductive liberties from enslaver’s financial stakes in Black women’s fertility to government programs that forcibly sterilized thousands of Black women well into the 1970s. Roberts also shows how the exclusion of these violent injustices from both white feminist reproductive justice movements and the civil rights movement all led to the degradation of Black motherhood in American politics and powerfully demands its remediation.

1. What motivates Roberts to write this book? What problem(s) does she seek to address? Provide at least one quote that supports your answer (don’t forget to share the page number).
2. On page 20, Roberts writes, “Black children are born guilty.” What does she mean? How is this connected to her concept of “bio-determinism”?

Wednesday, April 12 – (Discussion)

Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (ch. 1)

When we think about the major US institutions that today perpetuate the oppression of Black and brown folks, it’s easy to make a distinction on gender lines: prisons oppress men of color, the welfare system oppresses women of color. Angela Davis—a former political prisoner herself—upsets this easy distinction by analyzing the role that the prison industrial complex plays in producing gender through incarceration, surveillance, and disciplinary practices. The first chapter to this work sets up the aim of the work overall—to question the

continued presence of prisons in our future communities and to reject the idea that justice can ever come from carceral punishment. The fourth chapter analyzes women's experiences in the prison system and how racialized and gendered subjects are produced and demarcated in differential disciplinary practices.

1. Explain Davis' assertion that there is "reluctance to face the realities hidden within [prisons], a fear of thinking about what happens inside them. Thus, the prison is present in our lives and, at the same time, it is absent from our lives" (15). How is prison present and absent in our lives at the same time?
2. How do prisons function to "relieve us" of the hard work of dealing with racism, capitalism, and gender-based violence in our society? What is the problem that Davis sees with this?

Monday, April 17 – (Lecture)

Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (ch. 4)

1. In what ways does the prison system—from sentencing to disciplining—serve to construct gender and racial difference?
2. What is Davis' answer to the common feminist question "Without prison, what will we do with all the rapists?"

Wednesday, April 19 — (Video Lecture, no class meeting)

Rafia Zakaria, *Against White Feminism* (ch. 3)

This 2021 book presents a sophisticated but readable polemic against white supremacy in feminism and reveals some of the myriad ways in which whiteness takes priority over sisterhood in feminist movements. In the chapters we will read, Zakaria critiques western philanthropy and aid programs that patronize nonwestern women and mystify the conditions of imperialist oppression. She criticizes white feminist justifications for the Iraq war and invasion of Afghanistan and demonstrates how news and popular media perpetuate dangerous orientalist ideas about nonwestern women.

1. Trace the lineage of the feminist discourse of "empowerment" that Zakaria sets out in the context of US aid efforts. How does the term's meaning change over time?
2. The chapter is called "The White Savior Industrial Complex and the Ungrateful Brown Feminist." Explain the concept of this complex in your own words and the negative consequences it has for its recipients.

Monday, April 24 — (Discussion, zoom meeting)

Rafia Zakaria, *Against White Feminism* (ch. 4)

1. Zakaria uses Lila Abu-Lughod's concept of "securo-feminism" to explain the entanglement of white feminism and the war(s) on terror. What is "securo-feminism" and what makes the position self-contradictory in Zakaria's view?
2. How are journalists and news media organizations complicit in securo-feminism?

Wednesday, April 27 — (Lecture)

Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"

As the title of this article suggests, feminist art historian Linda Nochlin argues that indeed, there have been no great women artists. Ever. At least up until 1971 when this essay was originally published. It's not at all clear whether this claim is defensible today, but the argument is watertight. Nochlin asks readers to consider how museums, art schools, and the ideology of great art all conspire to keep women from achieving greatness in the sphere of fine arts. The [Guerilla Girls](#), an activist group catalyzed by this very article, have shown time and again in their installations that the situation for women's art remains stagnant.

1. Nochlin anticipates two counterarguments she expects feminists to make about her claim that there have been no great women artists. The first is the rebuttal “But what about...?” and attempting to list the “greats” (Frida Kahlo, Georgia O’Keefe, Hilda Af Klimt, Agnes Martin, Berthe Morisot, Judy Chicago, etc...) How does she respond to this objection?
2. The second counterargument is to suppose that women’s art is different in kind from men’s art and should have different standards for greatness. How does she reject this counterargument?

Monday, May 1 — (Discussion)

Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (cont.)

1. Nochlin gives three case studies to show how the conditions of the production of great art have been (and perhaps continue to be) very sexist. How does she evince this argument through her discussion of the section entitled, “The Question of the Nude”?
2. How does she evince this argument through her discussion in the section “Successes”?

Project 4 Part 2 Due

Wednesday, May 3 — (Lecture)

Audre Lorde, *Poetry is Not a Luxury*

This very short essay doesn’t exactly fit anywhere programmatically in the syllabus, but it is nonetheless always my favorite way to end the semester. In it, Audre Lorde argues that poetry is a vital gesture of feminist resistance. More profoundly, and contrary to the idea that poetry is for stodgy white men and English classrooms, she claims that poetry is fundamental to feminist politics.

1. In what way or ways does poetry serve feminist politics?
2. Identify one work of poetry (broadly construed—a song works!) that you believe fits Lorde’s understanding of political poetry. Explain why.

Monday, May 10 — (Discussion)

Audre Lorde, *Poetry is Not a Luxury* (cont.)

Audre Lorde, *Power*

This short poem was written in the wake of the extrajudicial murder of a ten-year-old unarmed Black boy by a police officer who was acquitted of any crime in 1976. In it, Lorde grapples with the uses of poetry and rage in the face of racist gun violence, affording us a stunning and heartbreak example of the kind of poetry that she suggests has revolutionary political potential. Bring your own example of feminist poetry to discuss with the class.

Final Essay due at final exam period