

GENDRST 700
Current Debates in Feminist and Gender Theory
*The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Gendered
Subordination*
McMaster University
Winter 2022

Meeting time TBD

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Course Description:

This course is an introduction to some of the ongoing debates in feminist and gender theory about the nature of gender, race, and sexuality, as well as an investigation into some of the most fundamental practices of knowledge, knowing, and who counts as a knower. We will consider these questions along structural and individual lines. We will bring these inquiries together and apply them through an extended examination of the thinking and concepts that explain gendered subordination via Trudy Govier's book *Victims and Victimhood* and Manon Garcia's book *We Are Not Born Submissive*.

Course Objectives:

- Critically analyze the arguments of feminist theorists;
- Discuss feminist theories in a respectful, engaging, and constructive way;
- Reflect on one's own social location and knowledge practices;
- Construct clear and persuasive arguments about topics in feminist theorizing;
- Produce a conference paper on feminist theory.

Required Texts:

Victims and Victimhood – Trudy Govier. Broadview. 2015.

We Are Not Born Submissive – Manon Garcia. Princeton. 2021.

All other readings will be provided via pdf on the course website.

Assignments and Evaluation Scheme:

Your grade in this course will be determined by the following:

Participation: 20%

Presentation – course material: 10%

Engaged participation: 10%

'Podcast' assignment – **due after reading week** – 20%

Seminar paper: 60%

Presentation – paper plan: **last meeting** – 5%

Seminar paper – **due during exams** – 50%

Participation

Participation comes in two parts: first, all students will present a summary / facilitate a discussion on material for the course. You must sign up for these in advance. Prior to the class where you are the discussion facilitator, meet with me so we can discuss your understanding of the material, what kinds of questions or topics you want us to consider, how this might relate to real life / other fields of inquiry / etc. Second, all students will be present and engaged members of the intellectual community: you will ask questions, offer your views, and be engaged participants in other ways, too. This course is something we are doing together – you need not be an expert either as facilitator or as participant. We will co-construct our understandings as a collective.

Podcast assignment

In the spirit of cooperative inquiry, and with the knowledge that conversations are often some of the most interesting and intellectually productive tools at our disposal, you will work in groups to produce a podcast (which is really just a record of a conversation you've had) about some topic, theme, etc. related to the course material. This is much less structured than a paper, but that is precisely the point: there are many ways to make a point, and many ways to engage in collaborative inquiry. This is but one. We will talk more about the mechanics of this assignment around the winter break.

Seminar paper

You will write a conference-length paper offering an interesting and sophisticated argument and/or analysis. Hopefully, you will also submit this to a conference (and be accepted as a presenter). These papers are usually about 4000 words, which sounds a lot easier than it is. Conferences and writing conference papers is a crucially important skill in academia, and even if this isn't your main interest, conferences offer a wonderful social and intellectual experience (well, not quite the same in the time of covid, but still fun!). When you've settled on a broad topic, please contact me to set a meeting so that we can refine your question and source any further secondary literature relevant.

It is possible that such a final project will not be useful for you for various disciplinary reasons/norms. In that case, we should meet to discuss a reasonable alternative – a creative project, some other kinds of literary output, etc. – so that you are getting the most out of this course.

Course Expectations

Zoom etiquette

This course will take place via synchronous Zoom meeting. While I'm sure we're all quite familiar with it by now, it is somewhat less conducive to collaborative conversation than in-person meetings. In our first course meeting, we'll establish some practices to ensure that folks can participate fully and freely. In the interim, I suggest that we begin by remaining muted and using the raise-hand function or chat to indicate that one has something to say. While I would prefer to see you (and thus that you have cameras on), I completely understand if some folks have privacy concerns that make this untenable. I will remind you that Zoom allows folks to use digital backgrounds that block out what is behind the speaker, but if this is still insufficient, let me know. If there are ever any accessibility or comfort concerns with Zoom – sound quality concerns, captioning, etc., please email me and we'll see what solutions are available.

Behaviour

It is deeply important that we maintain an attitude of respect for one another and for the subjects we cover in this class. Philosophy is, at its core, a practice of critical thinking. This often consists in making arguments and responding to one's interlocutors in ways that interrogate their positions and claims; we will consider reasons for and against views in a way that incorporates an underlying commitment to trust, empathy, and

cooperative inquiry.

Email

I will sometimes communicate with you via email, particularly if something changes in the course – unexpected cancellation, new or additional readings, etc. Please ensure that you are receiving these notifications. My general policy is to respond to emails within 24 hours of receiving them; however, I will not discuss grades over email, and would prefer that longer questions about assignments are addressed in office hours. Please check the syllabus and the instructions on assignments, etc. before emailing me about them.

Late Work

My policy on late work is for every 24 hours after the deadline, you will lose one third of a letter grade. So, if you turn in a B+ assignment, after one day it is a B, after another it is a B-, etc. That said, I know that extenuating circumstances do occur. Should you find yourself in such a situation, please contact me as soon as possible, but keep in mind that this is no guarantee of an extension.

Academic Integrity

It is very important that you are graded on your own contributions rather than those of others. If you are drawing from other work, please be sure to cite it appropriately. Since philosophy is an activity that we do together, feel free to discuss things with your peers, friends, etc. Just be sure that what you hand in for grading is reflective of your position on things.

Accessibility and Support Services

I want all of you to succeed and flourish philosophically. There are, of course, many ways to learn; I will strive to adapt to your needs, but this means that you must tell me how you learn best. Please feel free to contact me via email or in office hours to let me know what works for you. Students with disabilities are strongly encouraged to make use of services here at the University, and, if you feel comfortable with it, to let me know how I can make the course more accessible to you.

Schedule and Readings

I may change the readings, depending on student interest, and if so I will email you in advance.

McMaster's Statement on Academic Integrity:

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- 1) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- 2) Improper collaboration in group work.
- 3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Avenue to Learn:

In this course we will be using ‘Avenue to Learn’ (the online learning management system at McMaster). Students should be aware that when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course.

The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

I will use ‘Avenue to Learn’ to distribute additional information about course assignments and expectations, so you should make a point of accessing it frequently in order to keep up-to-date with our course. Students who are unfamiliar with the ‘Avenue to Learn’ system should familiarize themselves with the system as soon as possible; if you have any questions please seek immediate assistance by seeing me during office hours, or review the online tips and help available on the McMaster ‘Avenue to Learn’ webpage.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Privilege and Intersectionality: Setting the stage

- Kimberlé Crenshaw, “The Urgency of Intersectionality”
 - https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality
- Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”
- A brief explainer on cisprivilege can be found here:
 - <https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2011/11/list-of-cisgender-privileges/>
- Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”
- Carla Rice et. al., “Bodies at the Intersections: Refiguring Intersectionality through Queer Women’s Complex Embodiments”

Week 2: What is ‘woman’?

- Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman” & Combahee River Collective Statement
 - Presenter 1:
- Mari Mikkola, “Gender Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism”
 - Presenter 2:

Week 3: Metaphysics of gender

- Talia Mae Bettcher, “Trans Women and the Meaning of ‘Woman’”
 - Presenter 1:
- Qwo-Li Driskill, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies.”
 - Presenter 2:

Week 4: Metaphysics of race

- Quayshawn Spencer, “The Unnatural Racial Naturalism”
 - Presenter 1:
- Chike Jeffers, “Cultural Constructionism”
 - Presenter 2:

Week 5: Epistemic injustice, pt. 1

- Veronica Ivy, “Epistemic Injustice”
 - Presenter 1:
- Trip Glazer, “Epistemic Violence and Emotional Misperception”
 - Presenter 2:

READING WEEK

Week 6: Epistemic Injustice, pt. 2

- Elena Ruíz, “Cultural Gaslighting”
 - Presenter 1:
- Nora Berenstain, “White Feminist Gaslighting”
 - Presenter 2:

Week 7: Epistemic Injustice, pt. 3

- Natasha Behl, “Mapping Movements and Motivations: An Autoethnographic Analysis of Racial, Gendered, and Epistemic Violence in Academia”
 - Presenter 1:
- Dina Lupin Townsend and Leo Townsend, “Epistemic Injustice and Indigenous Peoples in the Inter-American Human Rights System”
 - Presenter 2:

Week 8: *Victims and Victimhood*

- Chapters 1 & 2
 - Presenter 1:
- Chapter 3 & 4:
 - Presenter 2

Week 9: *Victims and Victimhood*

- Chapters 5 & 6
 - Presenter 1:
- Chapters 7 & 8
 - Presenter 2

Week 10: *We Are Not Born Submissive*

- Chapters 1-3
 - Presenter(s):

Week 11: *We Are Not Born Submissive*

- Chapters 4-6
 - Presenter(s):

Week 12: *We Are Not Born Submissive*

- Chapters 7-9
 - Presenter(s):

Week 13: Presentations

- See Avenue for sign-up sheet