Course Description:
What is gender identity? How is gender politicized? Cross-culturally why are women so frequently politically subordinate to men? What are the varied ways women assert their political agency and challenge gender oppression? These questions frame this interdisciplinary course on gender and power relations. Scholars of women and gender demonstrate that there is considerable social and cultural variation in how women become women and men become men, even providing diverse cross-cultural examples of gendered identities that do not strictly conform to either category. Over the course of the semester, we will examine this variation and how it shapes gender identity and power relations around the globe by exploring both the intimate politics of women’s everyday lives and their formal participation in national and transnational politics. While we focus on the globalized and persistent nature of gendered inequalities, we also examine women’s agency and resistance as rich and varied sites of cultural politics.

The first section of the course is dedicated to reading and debating interdisciplinary approaches to understanding sex and gender as social and political categories. We begin by discussing why gender difference is so often explained in relation to biological sex. Early readings turn the table on this question by examining how scientific and medical discourses draw on socially constructed gender norms to explain biological processes of sexual differentiation. We then turn to a discussion of the origins of patriarchy—masculine social, political, economic dominance—and how it operates as a social system. The remainder of this section maps diverse feminist contributions to the study of culture, power, gender, sexuality, race, and class. The second section of the course examines women’s agency and resistance in cross-cultural perspective. We first work to define agency, power, and resistance and then apply these theoretical concepts to diverse sites of politics such as sex work and new social movements, international debates about gendered violence, and development discourses about global poverty and women’s social status. The final sections of the course are devoted to applying these approaches to cross-cultural literary and ethnographic representations of women, gender, and power relations. These texts include a fictional account of young women’s experiences in colonial Rhodesia and two concluding ethnographies about working-class Catholic women’s resistance in Northern Ireland and women’s sexual culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora.

Course Objectives:
MC 386 has five objectives: 1) to introduce key theoretical perspectives on gender and power relations; 2) to examine how gender structures inequality as well as women’s political agency in national and transnational contexts; 3) to develop an understanding of varied cross-cultural forms of gender identification and politics; 4) to build competency in interdisciplinary inquiry and analysis; and 5) to improve research, writing, and speaking skills.
Required Texts:
- Additional readings available on Angel

Requirements and Grading:
Participation/Attendance 20%
Quizzes 25%
Gender Journal 10%
Discussion Facilitation 10%
Paper Proposal and Bibliography 5%
Peer Reviews 5%
Final Research Paper (12-15 pages) 25%

Attendance and Participation Policy:
Your attendance in class will figure into your participation grade. In order to earn a 3.0 or higher for attendance/participation a student must miss no more than two class periods, consistently arrive to class on time, come prepared with printed course readings, and make at least one informed contribution to class discussion per week. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. If you are having a serious medical or personal issue that keeps you from attending class and completing your assignments on time, please come to discuss this with me in office hours as soon as the problem arises.

Academic Honesty:
I adhere to JMC and MSU policies on academic integrity for all work in the course. The James Madison College student handbook specifies that the minimum sanction for academic dishonesty is a 0.0 for the course. A record of the incident will be included in the student’s confidential file. In some cases, students unknowingly engage in plagiarism by failing to attribute ideas or data, paraphrased sentences, and direct quotes to their original sources. While I do not distinguish between unintended and intended plagiarism, I am available to help you learn to incorporate proper paraphrasing and citation practices into your academic work. Do not hesitate to consult with me in office hours if you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it.

Other Course Ground-Rules:
- Attend class regularly and on time.
- Read all materials before coming to class.
- Bring your readings to class and take notes.
- Meet class deadlines for assignments.
- Do not use electronic devices (including computers) in class.
- Let me know if you have special needs related to a learning disability.
- Be collegial and show respect for all class participants.
- Speak up. Express yourself. Offer your opinions, criticisms, perspectives, and experiences.
- Have fun. Be humorous, forgiving, and lighthearted about the learning process.
- Come to office hours to discuss any ideas, questions, suggestions, and/or challenges you may have regarding the course, assignments, or academic work in general.
Course Schedule:

M 1/10 - Introductions

I. Theoretical Foundations

W 1/12 – Making Women and Men

M 1/17 – No Class

W 1/19 – Making Women and Men II
  • Deborah Rosenberg, “(Rethinking) Gender: What Makes Us Male and Female” and “It’s Not as Simple as Pink or Blue” Newsweek, May 21, 2007

M 1/24 – Defining Patriarchy

W 1/26 – The Origins of Women’s Oppression

M 1/31 – Gender Subordination: Universal or Particular?

W 2/2 – Gender Subordination: Universal or Particular?

M 2/7 – Third Wave Feminisms
W 2/9 – Third World Feminisms

II. Women’s Agency: Power and Resistance

M 2/14 – Resistance
• Due in Class: Gender Journal

W 2/16 – Resistance II

M 2/21 – Sex Work: A New Social Movement
Film Screening: Tales of the Night Fairies (2002) Dir. Shohini Ghosh
Due in Class: Paper Proposal and Bibliography

W 2/23 – Sex Work: A New Social Movement II

M 2/28 – Death by Culture?

M 3/7 and W 3/9 – No Class Spring Break

III. Women and Colonialism

M 3/14
W 3/16
  - Class Facilitators: _____________________________________________________

M 3/21
  - Class Facilitators: _____________________________________________________

IV. Gendered States

W 3/23

F 3/25
- Angel Drop Box: Paper Drafts Due (10-12 pages) at 12noon.

M 3/28
- Begoña Aretxaga (1997) Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland, pgs. 3-53

W 3/30
- Begoña Aretxaga (1997) Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland, pgs. 54-104
  - In Class: Peer Reviews Assigned

M 4/4
  - Class Facilitators: _____________________________________________________

W 4/6
- Begoña Aretxaga (1997) Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland, pgs. 146-175
  - In Class: Peer Reviews Due
  - Class Facilitators: _____________________________________________________

V. Diaspora and the Politics of Sexuality

M 4/11
W 4/13

M 4/18

W 4/20

  • Class Facilitators: _____________________________________________________

M 4/25

  • Class Facilitators: _____________________________________________________

W 4/27 – Last Class

Final Exam Period – Wednesday, May 4, 5:45-7:45 p.m.