



MA Gender Studies core module Autumn 2017

**839P5 Critical Reading in Advanced
Gender Theory**

Tutor: Professor Alison Phipps

Tuesdays 10am – 1pm, Freeman F40

1. Aims and objectives

This module aims to provide students with: (1) an advanced grounding in gender/feminist/queer theory; and (2) the skills to source, critically appraise and synthesise academic literature. It contains both intellectual and study skills components.

The intellectual content of the module is structured via broad themes (for instance, sex, identity, speech, violence) which have a number of possible interpretations: students can either read broadly or read deeply into theory in particular areas. Because the topics are open, students will be able to specialise and tailor their reading to particular issues or theorists they are interested in, and/or to fill gaps in their background knowledge. They may choose to follow a particular ‘thread’ through the whole module, or expand their thinking by dipping into diverse areas. Seminar sessions will be run in an ‘open space’ format, via overarching questions which encourage students to make connections between texts, and practice creative and original thinking together.

This module does not have a reading list. One of the key skills being taught here is the ability to find and evaluate literature, which will help students to become more autonomous and independent as learners. To start with this may cause anxiety, but students will receive a great deal of support and input (logistical, intellectual and emotional). Expectations will be tailored to individual learning approaches and situations, and students will be encouraged to develop self-awareness as learners so they are better able to grow. Library staff will also provide input, and students with particular learning needs will be fully supported in partnership with the Student Support Unit.

Through teaching this module, I aim to actively disrupt commodified understandings of higher education provision. Students will not be supplied with a ready-made ‘product’, but will be expected to take responsibility for their own engagement and development. In return, I will provide a supportive framework which includes intensive expert guidance and the facilitation of constructive debate, in ‘hands-on’ teaching sessions where students will be helped to explore their own ideas and blossom as postgraduate scholars.

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Source interesting and cutting-edge reading materials in feminist, gender and queer theory, in relation to their chosen themes and topics;
- Demonstrate critical engagement with core theoretical debates in relation to their chosen themes and topics;
- Critique current substantive research on their chosen themes and topics, from a theoretical basis;
- Synthesise ideas and develop original arguments in the production of a written term paper;
- Develop independence and originality in their learning and thinking.

2. Teaching and preparation

The module will be taught via three-hour seminar sessions, some on study skills and some topic-based. For study skills sessions, there may be tutor input, group discussions and/or activities. Substantive topic-based sessions will be run in ‘open space’ format. We will start the session with a ‘hustings’ where students will suggest questions to discuss, and will then operate a ‘world café’ style space where students circulate when prompted. The last part of the session will bring the whole class together to talk through common themes and questions and come up with interpretations and ideas.

It is expected that students will read at least one academic text per week (for instance, a journal article or a book chapter), either on the topic for that week or on a topic they are interested in, if the week is a study skills week. They will also be expected to come to the topic-based classes with at least one discussion question prepared. Students’ reading should be oriented towards theory: if they are reading just one text it should have a theoretical focus, but if they are reading more than one they can cover other material as well. Students are also encouraged to engage with non-academic sources such as newspaper/magazine articles, blogs and films, *in addition to* their academic reading.

For each substantive topic session, students should either decide on an interpretation and read in this area, or read broadly around the different possible meanings of the topic. Students are encouraged to develop a reading approach and schedule which suits their own capacities and needs: ‘more’ is not necessarily ‘better’ when it comes to reading, it is sometimes better to try to grasp one text in full. If students wish, they can use one or two books and follow these through the entire module, a chapter at a time.

Students can expect an open, engaged style of tutoring throughout all the module sessions and in office hours, where they can come without an appointment to talk through intellectual issues or other matters related to their study (including difficulties and additional support needs).

3. Assessment

Students will write a 5,000 word term paper, worth 80% of the mark for the module. This is on a question designed by the student, with tutor input. The question must be related to one or more of the substantive module topics, and must have a theoretical orientation. Students will be given assistance with designing their questions in week 5. The term paper is due after Christmas. The remaining 20% of the module mark will be given for participation: this will be measured via evidence (not amount) of reading, participation in group discussions (which will take account of different personalities and learning approaches), and preparation of the discussion questions students are required to bring to each topic-based session.

When writing their term papers, students should not copy out big chunks of text, carefully edited, from books or articles in print or on the Internet. On finding a writer whose analysis is highly relevant to their topic, students should summarise it in their own words with accurate citation in the text and bibliography. If found guilty of plagiarism, students can lose their degree completely – this has happened before. Tutors would much prefer to spend time helping students with their term papers, than finding and evidencing plagiarism after they have been handed in, so if you are struggling with your work please make contact sooner rather than later. Guidance on referencing and plagiarism is available on the University website.

4. Module structure

(Teaching session outlines are in grey)

<u>Week</u>	<u>Study skills development components</u>	<u>Intellectual development components</u>
1	<i>Introduction to the module: why are we here?</i> This session will introduce the purposes of the module and encourage you into deep reflection on your motivations for postgraduate research. It will also incorporate discussion of the capacities required for postgraduate study, and you will create their own personal/intellectual development map.	In your own time, do some thinking about your existing knowledge of gender/feminist/queer theory, where the gaps are and which ones you might want to fill through this module. You could also start to do some basic reading around topics you are interested in, in books, journals or non-academic sources.
2	<i>Library session: searching and engaging with literature</i> THIS SESSION WILL BE HELD IN THE LIBRARY TRAINING ROOM In this session experts from the University of Sussex library will assist you in defining keywords, searching databases, and evaluating material. You should come to this session with an idea of how you plan to approach session three on 'sex', so you can do your first literature search.	In your own time, start developing your reading and think about potential themes or writers you might want to follow throughout the module. Is there one key book you want to get to know really well? Do you want to focus on a theme, for instance intersectionality or agency, across all the module topics? Or would you prefer a mixture of approaches? Discuss your ideas with your fellow students and tutor if you wish.
3	As you read around this first topic, think about how you read and take notes and whether your reading strategies are as effective as they could be. Discuss this with your fellow students and think about ways to support each other.	<i>Sex</i> This will be our first topic-based session. 'Sex' could mean what we define as biological 'sex', sexual intercourse, sexual identity, or all three.
4	Alongside your academic reading for this week, look at some materials on reading and note-taking (on Study Direct, the university website or elsewhere). Think about which strategies might work for you and experiment with some new approaches.	<i>Speech</i> This topic has many different possible interpretations. For instance, gendered differences in language, pornography and other forms of 'controversial' speech, hate speech and/or debates around 'free speech.'
5	<i>Planning your term paper</i> This week you will be given assistance with thinking about and planning a term paper. We will cover issues such as synthesising reading, forming a question, developing an argument, and starting to write. You will be encouraged to ask questions and support each other.	In your own time this week, think about what you might like to write your term paper on. This does not have to be on just one of the module topics: it could be on several, for instance linked through a cross-cutting theme or the work of a particular writer. You will get support with formulating a question in this week's session.

<u>Week</u>	<u>Study skills development components</u>	<u>Intellectual development components</u>
6	Alongside your academic reading this week, look at some materials on how to develop an argument from literature, on Study Direct, the university website, or elsewhere. As you start to read around your potential term paper topic, try to read critically and form analyses of the sources you engage with.	<i>Experience</i> Some suggested interpretations: the use of experience as a source of knowledge (and critiques of this), the phenomenology of experience, or particular gendered experiences such as childbirth, transition, or harassment.
7	READING WEEK – this week, you should really begin to get to grips with material relevant to your term paper.	
8	As you do your academic reading this week, think about ways to deepen your reading so you are developing an analysis or argument to be used in your term paper. How is this different from just reading for informational purposes?	<i>Identity</i> Some possible interpretations of this topic are theories of identity, particular gendered identities, histories and/or critiques of ‘identity politics’.
9	Alongside your academic reading this week, look at some materials on how to plan an essay or term paper, on Study Direct, the university website, or elsewhere. Try sketching out a very rough plan for your term paper.	<i>Violence</i> Some possible interpretations: particular experiences of violence, the gendering of violence, state violence, and micro-aggressions.
10	Look at your term paper plan and figure out where the gaps are in your analysis that you might need extra reading to fill. Think about the difference between general and more targeted reading; consider how to be more focused in your reading practice.	<i>Labour</i> This topic has many possible interpretations around work (and particular types of work such as sex work or housework), or reproductive labour. You can choose one or read around the concept more generally.
11	Alongside your academic reading this week, think about drafting. What is the purpose of drafting and how do you do it? How many drafts of your term paper do you think you will need to do? Try drafting a section you feel more confident on, and reflect on how it went.	<i>Culture</i> Again, this has many possible interpretations such as popular culture, religion and culture, and particular gendered cultures such as ‘lad’ and rape culture. Again, you can pick one or approach the concept more generally.
12	<i>Finishing your term paper</i> This week you will be given final input with your term paper, covering issues such as editing and polishing, referencing and presentation.	You should use this week for targeted reading to fill gaps in your term paper analysis, ready for drafting over the Christmas break. By the start of the break, you should have a detailed plan or even a first draft ready to go.

5. Marking criteria

80 - 100 A mark in this range is indicative of outstanding work. Marks in this range will be awarded for work that exhibits all the attributes of excellent work but has very substantial elements of originality and flair. Marks in this range will indicate that the work is of a publishable academic standard.

70 – 79 A mark in this range is indicative that the work is of an excellent standard for a postgraduate level. The work will exhibit excellent levels of knowledge and understanding comprising all the qualities of good work stated above, with additional elements of originality and flair. The work will demonstrate a range of critical reading that goes well beyond that provided on reading lists. Answers or essays will be fluently written and include independent arguments that demonstrate an awareness of the nuances and assumptions of the question or title. Essays will make excellent use of appropriate, fully referenced, detailed examples. Marks at the upper level of this range will indicate that the work is of near publishable standard.

60-69 A mark in this range is indicative of that the work is of a good to very good standard at postgraduate level. Work of this quality shows a good level of knowledge and understanding of relevant course material. It will show evidence of reading a wide diversity of material and of being able to use ideas gleaned from this reading to support and develop arguments. Essay work will exhibit good writing skills with well-organized, accurate footnotes and/or a bibliography that follows the accepted 'style' of the subject. Arguments and issues will be illustrated by reference to well documented, detailed and relevant examples. There should be clear evidence of critical engagement with the objects, issues or topics being analysed. Any empirical work will be clearly presented, the results should be correct and any conclusions clearly and accurately expressed.

50-59 (PASS) A mark in this range is indicative that the work is of an acceptable to satisfactory standard at postgraduate level. Work of this type

will show adequate knowledge and understanding of relevant course material. It will focus on the essay title or question posed and show evidence that relevant basic works of reference have been read and understood. The work will exhibit adequate essay writing and analytical skills. It will be reasonably well presented, but the essay or answer may be weakly structured, cover only a limited range of the relevant material, or have a limited or incomplete argument. Essay work should exhibit satisfactory use of footnotes and/or a bibliography, and in more empirical work it should be possible to follow the logical steps leading to the answer obtained and the conclusions reached, even if there are flaws in the logic. Arguments and issues should be discussed and illustrated by reference to examples, but these may not be fully documented or detailed.

30-49 A mark in this range is indicative that the work is below, but at the upper end is approaching, the standard required for a pass mark at postgraduate level. It indicates weak work of an inadequate standard. This will be because either the work is too short, is very poorly organized, or is poorly directed at the essay title or question asked. It will show very limited knowledge or understanding of the relevant course material and display weak writing and/or analytical skills. Essay work will exhibit no clear argument, may have very weak spelling and grammar, inadequate or absent references and/or bibliography, and may contain major factual errors. Empirical work will contain significant errors and incorrect conclusions.

0-29 A mark in this range is indicative that the work is far below the standard required for a pass mark at postgraduate level. It indicates that the work is very weak and seriously inadequate. This will be because either the work is far too short, is incoherent in content, or fails to address the essay title or question asked. It will show very little evidence of knowledge or understanding of the relevant module material and may exhibit very weak writing and/or analytical skills.