

THE POLITICS OF GENDER IN WORLD RELIGIONS
LSHV: 431-

Draft Course Syllabus

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Spring, 2018

Course Description:

In what ways is gender socially constructed? How does religion provide the theological matrix for conceptions of gender norms? This course will explore such questions by analyzing the theological context for the construction of gender in world religions. We will analyze, for example, issues of ritual impurity and Torah fulfillment in Judaism, what Buddhism looks like 'after patriarchy', and Qur'anic egalitarianism.

The dynamic force of "fundamentalism" in contemporary world religions will be examined, and we will answer the question: Why do women choose more restrictive religious paths when more open paths are available? We will also examine **how religion serves as a cultural system**, offering its own political aims, both liberalizing and conservatizing, with regard to gender.

Goals of Course:

1. To gain a level of objective knowledge concerning the social constructions of gender.
2. To understand why some women choose more conservative religious paths when less restrictive paths are available.
3. To understand the fundamentalist forces within world religions.

Texts:

Self-Made Man: One Woman's Year Disguised as a Man, Norah Vincent, \$7.61
The Red Tent, Anita Diamant, \$10.20
Women and Gender in Islam, Leila Ahmed, \$15.77

Articles on Blackboard:

"*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay on Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*", Judith Butler
"*How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore*", Jane Schaberg
"*Buddhism After Patriarchy*", Chaps. 2, 5 Rita Gross
"*Bowing Not Scraping*", Kate Wheeler
"*Banning the Burqa*", Lauve Steenhuisen
-And various distributed handouts

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and participation are required. Two unexcused absences will earn an "F" for the course. Peer learning is a critical component of graduate education, so **participation is a critical portion of your grade.**
2. Responsibility for all readings. Readings are chosen with care and intentionality, and an ability to discuss and analyze them is required for this course.
3. Graded Assignments: There will be 4 graded assignments for this course:

1. **Assignment #1: Social Constructions of gender paper.** Each student will write an “experiential exercise/theoretical analysis” paper on the social construction of gender. Paper length 12-14 pages, maximum, double-spaced.
2. **Assignment #2: Graded discussion of Red Tent.** Each student will prepare verbal answers to assigned questions and contribute them in a ‘graded discussion’.
3. **Assignment #3: Paper analysis of Women and Gender in Islam.** Each student will write a 6-7 page double-spaced paper in response to assigned questions on this book.

There will be no extensions to these paper delivery dates.

4. **Assignment #4: PowerPoint Presentation: Topic in gender and religion.**
 - Minimum of 20 slides
 - Must provide full spectrum of basic information and critical analysis of 1. gender construction and 2. how religion provides theological matrix for gender.

4. Grade Percentages: Final grades will be determined in the following percentages:

-Soc. Con. Gender Paper:.....	30%
-Red Tent Graded Discussion.....	10%
-Women in Islam paper.....	20%
-PowerPoint Presentation.....	20%
-Attendance/participation.....	20%
-Total.....	100%

5. Grading Policy for this course:

An “A” grade means “truly exceptional work which exceeds the expectations of the task and peer submissions”
 A “B” grade means “very good quality work, above peer submissions”
 A “C” grade means “average work, equal to the average of peers”
 A “D” grade means “below expectations, needs significant improvement”
 An “F” grade means “submission failed to meet all expectations and did not fulfill the requirements”

6. Learning Goals and Outcomes: Liberal Studies investigates ‘human values’ and as such, we will challenge how gender and religion has evolved the values which makes someone a gendered human. This is an interdisciplinary course, its approach is through the sociology of religion. As such, the course requires strong academic research and writing, a critical component of all graduate work.

7. Honor Code: Presenting another’s language, ideas, syntax, as one’s own is deceitful and constitutes the theft of another’s work. The Georgetown University Honor Code requires all professors to present suspect work immediately to the Honor Board. If a student in this course submits work which contains another’s work which is uncited, it will be immediately submitted to the Honor Board, and the Board will contact the student directly. Thus, all research must be cited and attributed to avoid the charge of plagiarism and an Honor Board investigation.

8. Professor contact. One of the goals of liberal studies at Georgetown is to enable the student to create a personal philosophy through which life’s decisions and ways of being in the world are processed and enacted. And one of the rewards of college life for professors is dialogue with students in which such life philosophy is deepened and enhanced.

If you would like to have coffee, lunch, or just a get-together with the professor please feel free to schedule a time and a place. The issues this course addresses often necessitate further conversations outside the classroom, and these conversations can result in interesting dialogues on religion, gender, and the meaning of life.

9. Disability Notice: Please note: if you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

*****These dates are NOT correct, content of each class displayed for information purposes only.*****

Class 1- Jan. XX: Course Introduction

The concept of the ‘social construction of gender’ will be introduced, along with ideas of how religions provide the matrices for such constructions. Ideas of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘feminism’ will be examined and critiqued. The ‘experiential exercise’ assignment will be distributed and explained.

Task: None.

Class 2-Jan. XX: Constructions of Gender

Judith Butler’s seminal article will be discussed and critiqued, and we will discuss whether we believe gender is wholly a construct of cultures or whether biology contributes to such constructions. We will examine the constructions of ‘manhood/masculinity’ and ‘womanhood/femininity’.

Task: Read Judith Butler “Performative Acts” on BlackBoard for this class; continue collecting ‘experiential exercise’ data; begin reading Vincent Self-Made Man.

Class 3-Jan. 27: Self-Made Man

Norah Vincent’s book will be the primary topic of discussion tonight. Come prepared to analyze the environments she places herself in disguised as a man, and the gendered behavior she experiences there.

Task: Read Self-Made Man and take notes on her/your gender insights in the book.

Class 4-Feb. 3: Experiential Exercise Data and Paper Discussion

We will finalize our understandings of gender construction theories by testing them with our own experiential data. We will share material, test theories, explore the freedoms and constraints in modern gendered role assignments.

Task: Submit “experiential exercise/theoretical analysis” paper on the social construction of gender. Paper length 12-14 pages, max, double-spaced. The paper will be written in four sections: 1. Presentation and analysis of Butler’s article (2 pp), 2. presentation of gender construction in Vincent’s Self-Made Man (3-4pp), 3. presentation of experiential data (3-4pp), 4. analysis of Butler and Vincent through lens of data---“does your experience provide evidence for or against these theories (Butler) and experience (Vincent)”? (3-4pp)

Class 5-Feb. 10: Judaism

This class will be an in-depth presentation on Judaism and gender, examining the history of the religion and its origins in the goddess-worshipping Middle East, orthodox interpretations of gender roles, and interpretations of the Torah. We will view part of a video, “The Return of Sarah’s Daughters”, and discuss one of the most important questions in this course “*Why do women choose restrictive religious paths when less restrictive paths are available?*”

Task: For tonight, none. But begin reading Red Tent and prepare responses to discussion questions in preparation for next week’s “graded discussion”.

Class 6-Feb. 17: Judaism and The Red Tent

We will discuss Anita Diamant’s novel, the transition in early Judaism from goddess polytheism to patriarchal monotheism, and the role of the midwife Inna. We will also have our first PowerPoint presentations on “Judaism and Mikvah”.

Task: Prepare responses to discussion questions in preparation for this class’ graded discussion. If a “Judaism and Mikvah” presenter, complete and submit presentation via email by this class period, present in class.

Class 7-Feb. 24: Christianity-2 Themes

The history and theology of Christianity with regard to gender will be examined, and the idea introduced that 2 themes exist in every religion, “patriarchal role assignments” and “egalitarian role assignments”, and that each religion’s scripture supports both themes.

Task: None.

Class 8-Mar. 2: Christianity PowerPoint Presentations

Tonight the “Christianity and the Non-Ordination of Women” and “Christian Abstinence Movement” small groups will present.

Task: For non-presenters, none.

No Class Mar. 9 Spring Break

Class 9-Mar. 16: Patriarchy Bites Back: Mary Magdalene

Tonight we will view a video “Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor” and discuss an online article “How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore”. What are the tools of repression for social systems, and what are the tools for redemption?

Task: Read on BB “How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore”. Discussion questions are provided in the syllabus packet for the discussion this evening.

Class 10-Mar. 23: Buddhism After Patriarchy

Tonight we will discuss the chapters online in Buddhism After Patriarchy by Rita Gross. We will examine three specific issues: 1. The gender dimensions of reincarnation, 2. 'Do innate traits exist?', and 3. The 'nun's order'.

Task: Read the chapters with specific focus on the 3 issues listed above.

Class 11-Mar. 30: Islam: 2 Themes

We will examine Islamic feminism and traditionalism in its history and theology, Qur'anic verses dealing with veiling, and will examine which countries have banned the Islamic headscarf (headscarf='hijab'; full body covering='burqa') and what they hope to accomplish through this action.

Task: Read "Banning the Burqa: A Guide to the Issues" online; begin reading Ahmed text in preparation for paper to be submitted in two weeks.

Class 12: Apr. 6: Veiling: What those who veil say

Tonight we will view a video "Under One Sky" about women in North America discussing the veil. We will hear that the symbol is complex as well as the reasoning for adopting it.

Task: None.

Class 13: Apr. 13: Islam and Veiling; Ahmed and Course Closing

The "Islam and Veiling" presenters will present. We will discuss gender constructs in Islam through the lens of Ahmed's text, and we will ask of the course as a whole: "What Have We Learned?"

Task: Complete and submit final 6-7 pp. paper in response to assigned questions on Women and Gender in Islam.

Social Constructions of Gender Research Paper Guidelines

Politics of Gender in World Religions

Scope of project:

The paper will be a 12-14 page research project on the social constructions of gender. It will consist of four parts:

Part 1 In-depth, nuanced examination of Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" online article. (c. 2 pages)

Part 2 Analysis of how gender is constructed in the representative arenas in Vincent's Self-Made Man book. (c. 3-4 pages)

Part 3 Thorough explanation and analysis of your own life's "experiential exercise" data. (c. 3-4 pages)

Part 4 a. Application of Butler's theories to your experiential data;
b. comparison of your data with Vincent data, is she right?
c. intellectually sophisticated insights, and conclusions you come to after your analysis. (c. 3-4 pages)

Attach as an addendum to your paper the list of 20 experiential data items. They won't be counted in the page length.

The paper will be graded on its intellectual depth, that is, of the student's ability to research and apply sophisticated concepts of gender to actual life experience analytically.

Politics of Gender in World Religions
Experiential Exercise

This data collection will be used as the basis for the “social constructions of gender” paper.

1. Write a list explaining **ten ways** in which **other than biologically**, you know you **are** your gender. (If a woman, how you **know** you are a woman, other than biologically. If you are a man, how you **know** you are a man, other than biologically).

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

2. Write a list explaining 10 ways in which, **other than biologically**, you know you are **not** the gender opposite your own. (If you are a woman, how do you really **know** you are **not a man**? If you are a man, how do you really **know** that you are **not a woman**?)

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|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

LSHV Politics of Gender in World Religion Guidelines for PowerPoint Presentations

Goal of presentation:

To educate your peers about gender issues within a specific religious subculture.

Format:

-Minimum of 20 slides

-Topics the presentation should address

1. History/geography of gender in this religion,
2. Scriptural gender guidelines/rules,
3. Current status of issues,
4. Use many images

-Allow 30-35 minutes for presentation, we will have 15 minutes or so for questions/discussion afterward.

The Politics of Gender in World Religions
Questions for Graded Discussion of:
The Red Tent

1. How is status allocated among Jacob's wives?

2. What is Inna's social status; how is it acquired? (This is an important question.)

3. a. In what ways do the women's goddesses differ from El?
b. What roles do they play in the lives of the women?

4. a. How is gender socially constructed in this novel?
b. In what ways is gender 'performed'; give examples.

5. What insights did you come away with after reading this novel?

Politics of Gender in World Religions

Discussion Questions for article “How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore”
& “Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor” Video

1~According to the film and article, how does Mary Magdalene ‘become a whore’?

2~What WAS she before this process was begun?

3~ In the video, artists, theologians, and social workers are interviewed. They are aware of the myth-making of Mary Magdalene, yet prefer to use the myth creatively. What do they believe is gained by working WITH the myth rather than trying to eliminate it?

4~In your opinion, which approach to Mary Magdalene is better now—to leave her as a ‘redeemed whore’ or to redeem her in the light of truths about patriarchal interpretations of scripture? If the latter, how can this be accomplished?

5~ Why do negative sexual inferences (‘whore’) have such power when applied to women; when male slang equivalents (‘you dawg’; ‘he’s a pig’; _____) lack such sharp cultural power?

Questions For Final Paper
Women and Gender in Islam

1. In what ways did **Jahilia** Arabia differ from **Islam** in its treatment of women?

2. Discuss "**veiling**" with regard to
 - A. **social class**, and
 - B. **religious justifications**.

3. What **Qur'anic** and **Hadith** foundations does Ahmed find for Islamic "egalitarianism"?

4. Your reflection and opinion question:

How can Westerners criticize the imposition of the veil, and other efforts to "suppress" women in totalitarian patriarchies, without resorting to 'cultural imperialism' ("We know better than you") or 'cultural relativism' ("Such practices are part of their culture, we have to tolerate it.")?