

THE POLITICS OF GENDER IN WORLD RELIGIONS
LSHV: 431-01
Draft Course Syllabus

Dr. Lauve H. Steenhuisen
Office: New North 140A
Office Hours: Before & after class

Spring, 2019
Tuesdays, 6:30-9:30p.m.
steenhul@georgetown.edu
ICC 208B

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 Islamic feminism.

The dynamic force of "fundamentalism" in contemporary world religions will be examined, and we will ask these question:

- Why do women *choose* more restrictive religious paths when more open paths are available?
- How does religion serve as a *cultural system*, liberalizing and conservatizing social norms 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.
4. To understand the meanings of what it is to be 'human', 'woman', and 'man', within the contexts of the social construction of gender and the world.

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:

1. "*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay on Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*", Judith Butler
 2. Fundamentalism and Gender, ed. John Stratton Hawley, Chaps: Intro, 2, 7
 3. "*How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore*", Jane Schaberg
 4. "*What Became of God the Mother?*" Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza
 5. "*Women in the Early Christian Movement*", Elaine Pagels
 6. "*Emotional Labor*", Rose Hackman
 7. "*Bowing Not Scraping*", Kate Wheeler
- 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 7 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 10-12 pages, maximum, double-spaced.

2. **Assignment #2: 1st Graded discussion on Fundamentalism and Gender.**
Each student will prepare verbal answers to assigned questions and contribute them in a ‘graded discussion’.

3. **Assignment #3: 2nd Graded discussion on “*Bowing Not Scraping*”.** Each Student will prepare verbal answers to assigned questions and contribute them in a ‘graded discussion’.

4. **Assignment #4: 3rd Graded Discussion on The Red Tent.**

5. **Assignment #5: 4th Graded discussion on Women and Gender in Islam.**

6. **Assignment #6: Team PowerPoint Presentation: Topic in gender and religion.**
-Minimum of 20 slides

7. **Assignment #6: Final Paper.** Each student will write a final paper answering the question: “What Have You Learned About The Politics of Gender in World Religions?” for submission the final day of class. Grading will be on intellectual engagement with course ideas, use of texts, breadth, and innovative thinking.

There will be no extensions to the paper delivery dates.

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

-Soc. Con. Gender Paper:.....20%
-Red Tent Graded Discussion.....10%

-Women in Islam Graded Discussion.....	10%
-Graded discussion Buddhism.....	10%
-Hawley graded discussion.....	10%
-PowerPoint Presentation.....	10%
-Final “Learned?” paper.....	20%
-Attendance/participation.....	10%
-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. 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.

7. Professor contact. One of the goals of Liberal Studies at Georgetown is to enable the student to create a personal theology/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.

8. General Learning Goals and Outcomes

The Graduate Liberal Studies Program at Georgetown University offers a course of study which engages students in reading, research, reflection, discussion, and writing. In the pursuit of the degree, students are to discern and wrestle with the content generally associated with the “liberal” arts in the root meaning of that term, namely, what it means for human beings to be endowed with freedom and what ennobles and enhances human freedom. The two general goals of the program, therefore, are to analyze and assess human values (who are we and what ought we to do?) and to undertake such study in an interdisciplinary fashion.

9. Disability Notice:

If you are a student with a documented disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or arc@georgetown.edu.

10. TurnItIn. Students acknowledge that by taking this course all required papers MAY be submitted for a Textual Similarity Review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

11. Extreme weather, Emergencies, and Instructional Continuity

During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check the university's Web site or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet. If the university is closed, this class will meet through distance means such as online videoconferencing; check your e-mail for a message from me on how we will proceed in that situation. Due dates for written assignments submitted through Blackboard will not be changed due to campus closings.

The university recently has acquired the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up on MyAccess.

12. Georgetown Honor System

All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at <http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/honor-code>, and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, What is Plagiarism, Sanctioning Guidelines, and Expedited Sanctioning Process. Papers in this course will all be submitted to turnitin.com for checking.

Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

13. Plagiarism

In accord with university policy, all incidents of suspected plagiarism or other Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Council without fail.

If the Honor Council finds that a student has plagiarized or has violated the Honor Code in any other way, the student may receive a grade of F for the course.

14. Policy Accommodating Students' Religious Observances **This is the university policy:**

Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because

of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes.

15. Sexual Misconduct

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (“Title IX”) prohibits discrimination based on sex in any educational programs, which includes sexual harassment or any acts of sexual misconduct. Title IX requires the University, upon becoming aware of any incident of sexual harassment and misconduct to respond appropriately to protect and maintain the safety of the University community, including students, faculty, and staff.

Georgetown University prohibits sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, and stalking.

Discrimination based on sex, including sexual misconduct and discrimination based on pregnancy or parenting status, subverts the University's mission and threatens permanent damage to the educational experience, careers, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff.

Please know that as a faculty member I am committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. However, University policy also requires me to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct.

Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include:

Jen Schweer, MA, LPC

Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention
(202) 687-0323

jls242@georgetown.edu

Erica Shirley

Trauma Specialist

Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(202) 687-6985

els54@georgetown.edu

More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at:

<https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/get-help>.

Pregnancy Adjustments and Accommodations

Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant and parenting students. Students may request adjustments based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication. Specific adjustments will be handled on a case by case basis and will depend on medical need and academic requirements. Students seeking a pregnancy adjustment or accommodation should follow the process laid out

at: <https://titleix.georgetown.edu/student-pregnancy>.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Class 1: Jan. 15- 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 'masculinity' and 'femininity' will be examined, and the 'experiential exercise' assignment will be distributed and explained. The human value of 'gendered cultural norms' will be emphasized.

Task: None.

Class 2: Jan. 22- Social 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 geographical societies or whether biology contributes to such constructions. We will examine how women are assigned the 'emotional labor' of society.

Task: Read 2 articles: 1. Judith Butler "Performative Acts" and 2. "Emotional Labor", Rose Hackman, on BlackBoard for this class; continue collecting 'experiential exercise' data; begin reading Vincent Self-Made Man for paper.

Class 3: Jan. 29- Fundamentalism and Gender

We will have our first 'graded discussion' on Hawley's chapters tonight.

Task: To demonstrate mastery of the readings for tonight. Read: Read Hawley's Fundamentalism and Gender, chaps. Intro, 2, and 7 on BlackBoard. Prepare verbal responses to discussion questions for this class' 'graded discussion'.

Class 4: Feb. 5- Experiential Exercise Data Discussion and Paper Submission

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 10-12 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. (this is the most important section)--analysis of Butler and Vincent through lens of data---"does your experience provide evidence for or against these theories (Butler) and experience (Vincent)"? (2pp).

Class 5: Feb. 12- Judaism's Two Themes

This class will be a presentation on Judaism and gender, examining the history of the religion and its origins in the goddess-worshiping Middle East, orthodox interpretations of gender roles, and interpretations of the Torah. We will introduce the idea that 2 themes exist in every religion, "patriarchal role assignments" and "egalitarian role assignments", and that each religion's scripture **supports both themes.**

We will view part of a video, "The Return of Sarah's Daughters", and discuss one of the important questions in this course "*Why do women choose restrictive religious paths when less restrictive paths are available?*"

Task: None. Begin reading Red Tent and prepare verbal responses to discussion questions in preparation for next week's graded discussion.

Class 6: Feb. 19- Judaism and "The Red Tent"

We will have a 'book club' evening, discussing Anita Diamant's novel, the transition in early Judaism from goddess polytheism to patriarchal monotheism, and the role of the midwife Inna.

Task: Prepare verbal responses to discussion questions in preparation for this class' graded discussion.

Class 7: Feb. 26- Buddhism After Patriarchy

Of the Eastern religions, Buddhism is said to have the most adaptability to ideas about women's egalitarianism. What does Buddhism look like "after patriarchy"? Is there a usable past for women in this religion? Do innate female traits exist in a reincarnation system? We have a '**Graded Discussion**' on an article about sexism in Buddhist practice, and have our **1st PowerPoint presentation** on "Buddhism and the Full Ordination of Nuns."

Task: Read and provide content from "*Bowing Not Scraping*" by Kate Wheeler during 3rd 'graded discussion'.

Mar. 5- Spring Break, No Class

Class 8: Mar. 12- Christianity: Two Themes

The history and theology of Christianity with regard to gender will be examined; was Jesus a 'feminist'? How did the religion change from a persecuted sect to the religion of an empire, and what did this do to women's leadership? We will discuss (non-graded) Jane Schaberg's "*How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore*" on BB.

Task: Read Jane Schaberg "How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore".

Class 9: Mar. 19:- Christianity-PowerPoint Presentations

PP #2: "Christian Abstinence Movement" and PP#3:"Catholic Non-Ordination of Women" presenters, and accompanying discussion will follow.

Task: None. Presentations only.

Class 10: Mar. 26- Islam's 2 Themes

We will examine Islamic feminism and traditionalism in its history and theology. Did Muhammad introduce women-affirming rules into Jahilia Arabia? What are 'sharia', 'hadith', and 'hijab' with regard to the status of women in Islam? Is there an 'Islamic feminism'?

Task: None. Begin reading Ahmed text in preparation for graded discussion in 2 weeks.

Class 11: Apr. 2- Islam PowerPoint Presentation

We will view PowerPoint #4 on the theology and practice of Islamic veiling.

Task: None.

Class 12: Apr. 9- **Graded Discussion** on "Women and Gender in Islam"

Task: Read Ahmed text in preparation for graded discussion #4 this session.

Class 13: Apr. 16- Last Class---Islam and Course Closing: What Have We Learned?

We will discuss our final papers on the topic: "What Have We Learned?"

Task: Complete and submit final 8-10 page (maximum) paper in response to question: “What have you learned about the “politics of gender in world religions” in this course? Organization of paper will be: Part 1. Soc con gender, 2. Two Religion’s “Theologies of Gender”, 3. Concluding insights into how and why religions construct and maintain their gendered constructs. Grading will be on 1. intellectual engagement with course ideas, 2. use of texts, 3. breadth of paper, and 4. innovative thinking. Citations of sources mandatory.

Apr. 23: Snow Day Class Only if Necessary.

The Politics of Gender in World Religions

Questions for Graded Discussion: Fundamentalism and Gender, Hawley

1. What are the characteristics of fundamentalism Hawley delineates? (Intro)
2. In what ways is fundamentalism a response to, and product of, modernity? (Intro)
3. What are the fundamentalist "ideologies of gender", and constructions of "femininity"? (Intro & Chap. 2)
4. Karen McCarthy Brown (Chap. 7) argues that fundamentalists wish to control women, what are her arguments?

Discussion Questions for: The Red Tent, Anita Diamant

1. How is status allocated among Jacob's wives?
2. Inna's status, how is it acquired?--How is it lost?

3. How do the feminine goddesses differ from El in the roles they have?
4. How is gender socially constructed among men and women? ---How is it performed?
5. How does this novel illustrate how women's narratives and voices differ from men's?

Politics of Gender in World Religions

Discussion Questions for: *Bowing Not Scraping*, Kate Wheeler

1. Kate Wheeler asks the question "Why would a woman be a Buddhist?" when the religion is so patriarchal. What are her answers?
2. Explain the 'nun's order issue'.
3. What sexist indignities does she enumerate throughout the article?

4. Isn't there an ironic paradox between sexism and Buddhist theology?—that is, if getting 'liberated' through enlightenment is the goal, and suffering (e.g. bowing, etc.) is the path, shouldn't being a woman suffering the indignities of sexism be the more honored path?

Discussion Questions for Women and Gender in Islam, Leila Ahmed

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. 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.”)?

Scope of project:

The paper will be a 10-12 page research project on the social constructions of gender. It will consist of four parts:

Part 1: Brief examination of Butler’s “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” online article. (c. 2 pages)

Part 2: Analysis of how gender is constructed 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; (are people performing gender around you? Do they ‘code’ your gender and act toward you accordingly?)
b. insights, and conclusions you come to after your analysis. (c. 3-4 pages)

~~~~~  
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.

Attach at the end of your paper 1. Your list of gender data, 2. Works Cited page.

**The Politics of Gender in World Religions**  
**Guideline Sheet for PowerPoint Presentations**

**Presentation Requirements**

1. Each small group will prepare a 20-30 minute (maximum) in-class presentation clearly delineating for their topic:

A. the history & B. the theology of the religious practice.

2. Prepare discussion questions to further discussion on the topic. (for discussion of 20 minutes or so)

--Minimum of 20 Powerpoint slides

--Engaging images

The entire presentation should be interesting and entertaining.

**Grading:**

The small group project accounts for 20% of the student's grade for the course: Each group member will receive the grade which the group as a whole is awarded. Thus, please be responsive to emails, step-up in your participation, and be sensitive to the work/life demands of your teammate.



**The Politics of Gender in World Religions**  
**Guideline Sheet for “What Have You Learned?” Paper**

The final paper for the “Politics of Gender in World Religions” course will be a comprehensive attempt to examine course content for themes and connections. Texts, videos, lectures, presentations, will be examined for what they demonstrate about the politics of gender in world religions.

**Specifications:**

- ~8-10 pages
- ~Double-spaced
- ~Citation mandatory

**Organization of paper will be:**

**Part 1. Social construction of gender:** Re-examine Butler and Vincent and your own data insights, providing concluding reflective insight. Cover text content lightly, you don't have to re-prove mastery, just insights. 2pp.

**Part 2. Two Religious Theologies of Gender:** Examine lightly 2 religions covered in the course in the light of their theology and gender. 3pp.

**Part 3. Concluding insights** into

- a. how power is used in religion to construct gender (examples) and
- b. your ‘take-away’ learning from this course. 3-5pp.

**Grading will be on:**

1. Intellectual engagement with course ideas,
2. Use of texts, videos, articles, presentations, lectures,
3. Breadth of paper, and
4. Innovative thinking.