

Feminist Philosophy

Isaac Wilhelm (iwilhelm@nus.edu.sg, isaacwilhelm.com)

PH3217

Fri 12-2:30pm, AS8-0402, Fall 2026

Office hours: Fri 9am-10am and by appt, AS3-0504

Course Description

What sorts of things are genders? How is gender related to our social practices? What is it to be a woman, or a man, or a trans woman, or a trans man, or bigender, or agender, or genderfluid, or any of the other genders which there are? Similarly, what sorts of things are races, and what is it to be one race rather than another? How do different social properties, like gender and race, interact? What specific sorts of oppression do people with certain genders, or races, or other social properties, face? And how should all these questions inform our pursuit of social justice: for example, in opposing colonialism?

Throughout this course, students will explore some answers to these questions. We will begin with five weeks on gender: what gender oppression and gender privilege are, how gender properties are socially constructed, what gender is, and more. The next two weeks will focus on topics related to race: how race intersects with gender, what race is, and so on. Finally, in the last four weeks, we will focus on feminism in Southeast Asia in particular: feminism and colonialism, single-sex schools, feminist theories of military conscription, and interracial dating.

We will discuss difficult, sensitive topics in this course. Some of you may have strong political views about some of the topics. And some topics may, for some of you, be extremely personally significant. So when engaging in discussions, keep that in mind. Everyone should treat everyone else with thoughtfulness, kindness, and respect.

Course Requirements

1. Participation (100 points).
 - Students are expected to ask questions, attend all lectures, and occasionally work together in small groups.
 - See the course website for the rubric which I use to grade participation.
2. Reading comprehension quizzes (10 points each, 100 points total).
 - Date: at the start of each class, take a 5-minute reading comprehension quiz on the assigned article.
 - Your lowest quiz grade is dropped.
3. Final exam (100 points).
 - Date: Nov 13 at 12pm.

- This is an in-person exam, which consists of writing a paper about a selection from the course readings.
- A few weeks before Nov 13, a detailed description of this will be posted to the course website.

For information about various course policies—for instance, the late assignment policy, the grade appeals policy, and the make-up work policy—see the following course websites.

1. Canvas course website: <https://canvas.nus.edu.sg/courses/97538>
2. My course website: isaacwilhelm.com/teaching.htm

Learning outcomes

By this course's conclusion, you should be able to

- present some basic ideas of feminist philosophy,
- defend those ideas against standard criticisms,
- identify forms of oppression, and privilege, that often get overlooked,
- write clear, coherent papers that argue for a particular thesis, and
- discuss difficult, politically charged topics respectfully.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Please adhere to the NUS policies on plagiarism and academic integrity. Penalties for violations of these policies can be severe: they include an automatic failing grade for the course, and possibly worse. A comprehensive overview of these policies can be found here:

<https://www.nus.edu.sg/celc/programmes/plagiarism.html>

Accessibility

This class should be a great, fun, and educational experience for everyone. And of course, everyone deserves equal access to all educational opportunities at NUS. Those with disabilities are encouraged to speak with me if that would be helpful, and to avail themselves of the services provided by the Student Accessibility Unit:

<https://nus.edu.sg/osa/student-services/student-accessibility-unit>

Schedule

The readings are drawn from several sources: articles, websites, and selections from books. All readings are required. And all are posted on the course's Canvas website.

In the schedule below, I list the requirements for each week. The requirements include attending lectures, reading literature, taking short quizzes, and taking a final exam. Note that the readings, for any given week, should be completed before the lecture in that week.

Announcements about changes in the readings—if they occur—will be made in class, and only later added to the syllabus. You are responsible for knowing about those changes.

Aug 14: Introduction to Feminist Philosophy

Readings

- “Logic for Justice,” Chapters 1 and 2 (Wilhelm).
- “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression” (hooks).

Aug 21: Oppression and Privilege

Readings

- “The Politics of Reality,” pp. 1-16 (Frye).
- “Five Faces of Oppression” (Young).

Aug 28: Gender as a Social Phenomenon

Readings

- “Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender,” sections 1 and 2 (Mikkola).
 - See <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/>
- “The Second Sex,” Introduction (de Beauvoir).
- “Ain’t I a Woman?” (Truth).

Sept 4: Genderspace

Readings

- “Trans 101” (Bettcher).
- “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies” (Stryker).

Sept 11: What is Gender?

Readings

- “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?” (Haslanger).

Sept 18: What is Race?

Readings

- “Racial Realism I: Are Biological Races Real?” (Spencer).
- “Cultural Constructionism” (Jeffers).

Oct 2: Intersectionality

Readings

- “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (Crenshaw).

Oct 16: Feminism and Colonialism

Readings

- “Decolonizing Universalism” pp. 21-49 (Khader).

Oct 23: Single-Sex Schools in Singapore

Readings

- “Causal Effects of Single-Sex Schools on College Entrance Exams and College Attendance” (Park, Behrman, Choi).
- “Single-sex schools linked to better student performance” (Seah, Cheng).
- “Accounts of Self-Differentiation in Singapore’s Schools” (Yi et al.).
- “ACS Primary going co-ed” (Teng).

Oct 30: Military Conscription in Asia

Readings

- “The Spread of Feminism and the Silence of Gendered Militarism in the Neoliberal Era” (Choo).

Nov 6: Racial Dating Preferences in Singapore

Readings

- “Navigating Sexual Racism in the Sexual Field” (Ang et al.).
- “Attitudes, Actions, and Aspirations” p. 73 statistics on dating, and pp. 80-81 statistics on dating (Mathews et al.).

Nov 13: Final Exam (no lecture)

- This is a 2.5 hour exam. You will write a paper—at least five pages long—on one of three different selections from the course readings.