

THEMATIC AREAS AND QUESTIONS FOR FINAL STATE EXAMINATION

A partial requirement for the Master of Arts degree in Gender Studies

Department of Gender Studies 2019

The oral part of the final state examination (FSE) in the Gender Studies MA program is divided into two parts: a theoretical one and an analytical one. In order to pass the FSE, students must successfully complete both parts.

A. Theoretical part (45 mins)

The list of the following 25 questions and areas of inquiry represents the body of knowledge students are required to master in order to successfully complete the oral FSE. The questions are divided into five thematic areas, which correspond with the mandatory courses of the MA program. Each thematic area contains five questions. Before the oral part of the FSE, each participating student will draw a number from 1 to 5 (the numbers are written on five pieces of paper). The number drawn corresponds with the number of the questions from the thematic areas that the student will prepare for prior to appearing in front of the examination committee. Out of the five thematic areas listed below, students will be required to respond to questions from three randomly-selected thematic areas that will be announced on the day when the FSE takes place; i.e. each student will be required to respond to three questions. (For example, a student draws number 2. S/he will be told to prepare for the thematic areas of History of Feminist Theories, Politics of Identity and Construction of Sexuality, and Methodological Approaches in Gender Studies. Within each area s/he will be required to respond to question number 2. The answer to each question should be approximately 15 minutes long, i.e. 45 minutes in total.). Both the thematic areas and the numbers of questions will be changed randomly. In other words, the student has to be prepared to answer all 25 questions on the list below.

B. Analytical part (15 mins)

The second part of the oral FSE is an analysis of gender-relevant text. From a collection of texts, students will draw a short text of expert or polemic nature (about 300 words in length). The goal for the student is to demonstrate their analytical skills in dissecting written texts. Students should ask the following questions when analyzing the text: What type of text is it? In what paradigm is it written? What theoretical assumptions does it present? What is the structure of the argument? How persuasive is the argument? How solid is the empirical evidence supporting the argument? What are the weaknesses and strengths of the text? What is the methodology employed and what are the findings of the text? Etc. It goes without saying that students are expected to demonstrate their ability to deconstruct the text using a gender perspective.

A. Theoretical part: Thematic areas and questions

HISTORY OF FEMINIST THEORIES

1. To enlightenment feminists of the first wave, the ideal of universal human rights was a subject to substantial critique. Please elaborate on the main characteristics of this critique and discuss it with regards to the historical context of the French Revolution. Use the comparison of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* (1789) on the one hand and Olympe de Gouge's *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Citizen* (1791) on the other as your point of departure. Furthermore, discuss the role of reason and education in Mary Wollstonecraft's understanding of women's equality.
2. Please compare two dominant strands of feminism of the first wave – liberal feminism and socialist feminism. Use John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women* and Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of Family* as your point of departure. According to Mill, what rights should be accorded to women and why? What consequences follow from Engels' statement that “the first class oppression [coincides] with that of the female sex by the male”? Elaborate on Mill's and Engels' understanding of marriage and women's involvement in paid work.
3. Compare the two early post-WWII feminist approaches of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. Focus on the similarities and differences in their theories of transcendence (de Beauvoir) and growth (Friedan). In your discussion of de Beauvoir's theory, elaborate on the subject/Other and the transcendence/immanence dichotomies as well as de Beauvoir's notion that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. In your discussion of Friedan's theory, contrast her understanding of women's growth with the feminine mystique prevailing in the US postwar society. Also, explain why according to Friedan, women must face “the question of identity”.
4. Describe the most important characteristics of the project of second wave radical feminism. Provide the sociohistorical context of its emergence and discuss the main principles of radical feminism (such as consciousness raising, the private is political, etc.). Elaborate on one of the radical-feminist theories – Kate Millett's or Mary Daly's – in detail. Primarily, explain how your chosen author theorizes patriarchy and women's liberation. Furthermore, compare and contrast the chosen radical feminist approach to women's liberation with other approaches to women's liberation in the second wave (you may use Alison Jaggar's text to guide you in the comparison).
5. Describe two strands of feminism that draw on the theoretical achievements of radical feminism while critically revising it – socialist (Marxist) feminism and Black feminism of the second wave. Primarily explain why – according to both socialist and Black feminists of the second wave – radical feminist theory of patriarchy is insufficient in providing a clear understanding of the oppression of women and state, and further explain how the theory of patriarchy needs to be complemented. In your explication of socialist feminism, focus on dual system theory (as discussed in Barbara Ehrenreich's text) and Wages for Housework's understanding of the role of housework in women's oppression (as explained

in Silvia Federici's text). In your explication of Black feminism of Combahee River Collective, elaborate on their concept of "identity politics" and explain, why CRC are considered a forerunner of intersectional feminism.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN GENDER STUDIES (MAGS)

1. What are the main methods employed in research based on existing materials (texts, artefacts etc.) that were discussed in the MAGS? You should also discuss advantages and disadvantages of studying existing materials in comparison to other methodological approaches discussed in the MAGS. You may start with Reinharz, but develop your response further using other literature, which you consider relevant.
2. What are the choices and key decisions a researcher has to make when carrying out **feminist** research projects? You should also discuss what makes a research project a feminist one. You may start with Ramazonglu and Holland, but develop your argument further using other literature, which you consider relevant.
3. Define the following concepts: methodology, epistemology, ontology, and paradigm. Discuss their implications for research work in general and for feminist researchers in particular. You should also discuss the received paradigm and alternative paradigms. You may start with Guba and Lincoln, but develop your response further using other literature, which you consider relevant.
4. Discuss the theoretical assumptions and practical issues relevant to interview research and the place of interview research in **feminist** research. Compare interview research with questionnaire research (sample selection, research questions, strengths and weaknesses). You may start with Reinharz, but develop your response further using other literature, which you consider relevant.
5. Discuss the theoretical assumptions and practical issues relevant to field research and the position of field research in **feminist** research. You should also mention challenges that researchers face because of their gender when conducting field research. You may start with Reinharz, but develop your response further using other literature, which you consider relevant.

ACADEMIC WRITING AND LITERARY THEORY

1. Please explain on what basis postcolonial theories of the third wave establish their criticism of “white feminism” as reflected in the mandatory essay by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (and/or texts by other authors such as bell hooks, G. C. Spivak, Amy Ling). What sort of relationship between discourse and reality follows from Mohanty’s text? How are the representations of “Third World Women” mostly constructed according to this text? How are these representations influenced by power? Please define the concept of intersectionality.
2. Please elaborate on the feminist critique of literary gender archetypes. Define the concept of archetype in the literary context. What is the difference between the essentialist and constructivist conceptualization of archetypes? Use Annis Pratt’s text to illustrate your argument; you may also support your response by drawing on, especially, Pam Morris and Hélene Cixous or, possibly Luce Irigaray. In what respect does Pratt criticize Carl Gustav Jung’s conceptualization of archetypes? Define some traditional archetypes of femininity in classic literature as represented in texts by the above mentioned authors.
3. Using the lens of feminist literary criticism, elaborate on the concepts of literary canon and politics of literature. What is the core argument in Judith Fetterley’s text? Continue by applying Fetterley’s principle on two literary pieces of your choice. What does “literary canon” mean? How does the concept of literary canon relate to aspects of power and representation? What are the possible alternatives to literary canon and their pitfalls?
4. Literary authorship: what is the significance of the author from the perspective of feminist literary criticism? What is the difference between the feminist conceptualization of the author and that of traditional, humanist literary studies? Please refer to Pam Morris’ book. Continue by defining the concepts of the private and the public within the context of a story as presented in literature (i.e. private and public narration). Use Susan Lanser’s text to support your argument. Elaborate on the significance of context in feminist literary criticism.
5. Please elaborate on the concepts of women’s reading and women’s writing as reflected by Pam Morris, Elaine Showalter and Hélene Cixous. What is (can be) the difference between the concepts of “women’s writing” and “writing by women”? What does “feminist reading/writing” mean? Provide the periodization of women’s writing according to Elaine Showalter and elaborate on the respective phases she detects. What does Hélene Cixous identify as the most significant aspect of women’s writing? How is her argument related to experience and identity?

POLITICS OF IDENTITY AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF SEXUALITY

1. Define essentialist and constructivist paradigms in the study of sexuality and, based on concrete examples, explain the differences between them. What are their advantages and limits? Are they mutually compatible or not? Elaborate on the theoretical foundations of both approaches and explain how each of them affects the study of sexuality and what are the (theoretical, research, political and social) consequences of both approaches. In your answer, use the arguments and evidence from Jonathan Katz, Leila Rupp, David Halperin, and Adrienne Rich.
2. Explain the term and concept of “compulsory heterosexuality” and explain how (hetero)sexuality functions as a tool of (self)regulation, social organization and coercion. How does “compulsory” or “automatic” heterosexuality” work? Whom does it affect and in what ways? What are the consequences of “compulsory heterosexuality” for different individuals and collective bodies in society? In your answer, utilize the work of Adrienne Rich, Michael Warner, Michel Foucault, and J.P. McGann.
3. Discuss theories of recognition and collective rights and apply them to the study of sexuality. Elaborate on the conceptualizations of collective identities, their rights and claims formulated by Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas, and Nancy Fraser and explain what these conceptualizations have in common and how they differ. Discuss the difference between emancipatory and assimilatory sexual politics (Annamarie Jagose, Jonathan Alexander) and, within this debate, contextualize the concept of “sexual minorities”.
4. Please elaborate on the terms of “transsexuality” and “transgender” and use them in a critical discussion of the limits of binary understandings of the body and sexuality. Which term do you find more productive/appropriate and why? What is the role of medicine and biology in constituting sexual difference and what consequences do these definitions have for thinking about sex, sexuality, and sexual identity? In your answer, use arguments of Anne Fausto-Sterling, Judith Halberstam, and Laurel Westbrook and Kristen Schilt.
5. What does it mean to “do gender” and why do we talk about gender as a “performative act”? Using the texts of Candace West and Don Zimmerman, Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, Judith Halberstam, and Judith Butler elaborate on these concepts and discuss how they relate to sexual identity and sexual politics. Is transgressing sex/gender boundaries entertainment or political subversion? Can we have masculinity without men, femininity without women and what happens to heterosexuality/homosexuality when we all perform all roles?

FEMINIST CULTURAL STUDIES

1. In his book *The Idea of Culture*, Terry Eagleton deconstructs the understanding of ‚culture‘ as apolitical, universal and essential value. Where do cultural studies see the political nature of ‚the idea of culture‘? Cultural studies scholars (Anne McClintock, Stuart Hall and others) have also focused on mapping out the intricate ways in which ‚culture‘ has been utilized not only to build a hegemonic normative social order but also on how ‚culture‘ supported imperial expansion and provided it with gendered, sexualized and racialized legitimization. Discuss examples of such uses of the concept of ‚culture‘.
2. The concepts of power, ideology, and hegemony have been central to cultural studies. How have cultural studies transformed the understanding of ideology, and in what ways has the discipline drawn on the “linguistic turn” in this? In what sense do cultural studies perceive language as an instrument of power? How does the new understanding of ideology (as well as power) affect concrete areas of research and chosen methodologies? Give and discuss examples of your choice.
3. In „Culture is Ordinary“, Raymond Williams famously writes, „there are no masses, there are only ways of seeing the masses“. Discuss this quote and discuss its relevance for cultural studies in more general terms. How does this rejection to think the „masses“ and „mass culture“ differentiate cultural studies from other critical schools (e.g. Frankfurt School of Critical Theory)? How has this, for instance, informed cultural studies analysis of media and “low genres”?
4. Why are cultural studies interested in subcultures? And why do the scholars of this intellectual tradition not see subcultures as ‘pathological’ behavior of unintegrated youth? Feminism of color scholars as well as queer and disability studies scholars have shifted the focus again and talk about strategies of survival in marginalized communities and express their critique/s of the dominant culture in new ways. Elaborate on their theses and think about how/whether these concepts could be used to discuss materials/cultural practices (in particular) outside of the Global North.
5. What are the main lines of critique of neoliberalism presented by the feminist theorists we have read? What feminist legacies are critically discussed by Sara Ahmed? Why is she skeptical towards politics of happiness? Where do you see parallels/differences in Duggan’s and Engel’s discussion of the neoliberal take on sexual politics and sexual difference? Explain the relevance of the concept of “disaster capitalism” coined by Naomi Klein for feminist politics of sustainability.

B. Analytical part - examples

An example of expert text:

Woman-identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, violently curtailed and wasted under the institution of heterosexuality... The lie of compulsory female heterosexuality today admits not just feminist scholarship, but every profession, every reference work, every curriculum, every organizing attempt, every relationship or conversation over which it hovers. It creates, specifically, a profound falseness, hypocrisy, and hysteria in the heterosexual dialogue, for every heterosexual relationship is lived in the queasy strobelight of that lie...

The lie keeps numberless women psychologically trapped, trying to fit mind, spirit, and sexuality into a prescribed script because they cannot look beyond the parameters of the acceptable... The lesbian trapped in the "closet," the woman imprisoned in prescriptive ideas of the "normal," share the pain of blocked options, broken connections, lost access to self-definition freely and powerfully assumed.

The lie is many-layered. In Western tradition, one layer--the romantic--asserts that women are inevitably, even if rashly and tragically, drawn to men; that even when that attraction is suicidal (e g, *Tristan und Isolde*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*) it is still an organic imperative. In the tradition of the social sciences it asserts that primary love between the sexes is "normal," that women need men as social and economic protectors, for adult sexuality, and for psychological completion; that the heterosexually constituted family is the basic social unit; that women who do not attach their primary intensity to men must be, in functional terms, condemned to an even more devastating outsiderhood than their outsiderhood as women. Small wonder that lesbians are reported to be a more hidden population than male homosexuals. The black lesbian/feminist critic, I,orraine Bethel, writing on Zora Neale Hurston, remarks that for a black woman--already twice an outsider--to choose to assume still another "hated identity" is problematic indeed...

Another layer of the lie is the frequently encountered implication that women turn to women out of hatred for men... Yet woman-hatred is so embedded in culture, so "normal" does it seem, so profoundly is it neglected as a social phenomenon, that any women, even feminists and lesbians, fail to identify it until it takes, in their own lives, some permanently unmistakable and shattering form...

(Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", 1980 – 327 words)

An example of literary essay:

The news of my legacy reached me one night about the same time that the act was passed that gave votes to women. A solicitor's letter fell into the post-box and when I opened it I found that she had left me five hundred pounds a year for ever. Of the two—the vote and the money—the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important. Before that I had made my living by cadging odd jobs from newspapers, by reporting a donkey show here or a wedding there; I had earned a few pounds by addressing envelopes, reading to old ladies, making artificial flowers, teaching the alphabet to small children in a kindergarten. Such were the chief occupations that were open to women before 1918. I need not, I am afraid, describe in any detail the hardness of the work, for you know perhaps women who have done it; nor the difficulty of living on the money when it was earned, for you may have tried. But what still remains with me as a worse infliction than either was the poison of fear and bitterness which those days bred in me...

However, as I say, my aunt died; and whenever I change a tenshilling note a little of that rust and corrosion is rubbed off, fear and bitterness go. Indeed, I thought, slipping the silver into my purse, it is remarkable, remembering the bitterness of those days, what a change of temper a fixed income will bring about. No force in the world can take from me my five hundred pounds. Food, house and clothing are mine forever. Therefore not merely do effort and labour cease, but also hatred and bitterness...

So imperceptibly I found myself adopting a new attitude towards the other half of the human race. It was absurd to blame any class or any sex, as a whole. Great bodies of people are never responsible for what they do. They are driven by instincts which are not within their control. They too, the patriarchs, the professors, had endless difficulties, terrible drawbacks to contend with. Their education had been in some ways as faulty as my own. It had bred in them defects as great. True, they had money and power, but only at the cost of harbouring in their breasts an eagle, a vulture, forever tearing the liver out and plucking at the lungs—the instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition which drives them to desire other people's fields and goods perpetually; to make frontiers and flags; battleships and poison gas; to offer up their own lives and their children's lives.

(Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1928 – 332 words)

An example of the polemic newspaper article:

Religious exemptions for private business offering services to the world at large are problematic.

First, the most recent legislation explicitly states that motive is irrelevant when determining whether actions are discriminatory. However, religious exemptions imply that discriminatory conduct is acceptable if the motive was a personal objection to same-sex weddings. This directly contradicts existing legislative language.

Second, the legislation's stated purpose is to eliminate discrimination in areas where discrimination has historically been prevalent. This involves a situation where a powerful group has used that power to harm the victimized group. In part, this is premised on the inherent unfairness in discrimination. In part, it is premised on the real world harm that such discrimination causes.

In this context, LGBTI individuals have historically faced discrimination. This manifests in higher rates of depression and anxiety, according to Beyond Blue. Such discrimination has historically been religiously based.

Third, services are not magically different merely because they are for a same-sex wedding. Thus, religious exemptions are not necessary to prevent discrimination against religious groups. Indeed, this, in and of itself, suggests that the only purpose for religious exemptions can be to facilitate discrimination under the artificial shroud of religious observance.

Anti-discrimination law exists to prevent prejudiced and exclusionary actions. In this context, the laws balance the need for equality with the need to preserve religious freedom.

There is an argument for exempting religious groups from anti-discrimination laws when they perform religious actions.

However, there is no such argument for exempting businesses, or religiously affiliated organizations, when they offer services to the public at large. Such exemptions would undermine the very purpose of anti-discrimination law.

(Mark Humphery-Jenner, „Why religious exemptions on same-sex marriage are a backward step“, ABC News, Nov 14, 2017 – 270 words)