

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

SP.601J / 17.006J / 17.007J / 24.237J Feminist Theory
Spring 2008

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

Discussion 10: The Political Sphere: Policy and Change

The Political Sphere:

- What is political economy? Where does the word “economy” come from?

Refer to Lisa Dodson’s work, Don’t Call Us Out of Name:

- What did you think of the way the women chose to “move on” in this chapter?
- How did they do it?
- Did the system assist them in their attempts to be more independent (emotionally, financially)? Find a new job? Go back to school?
- What does the welfare system need to do to assist these women?
- If the state becomes more responsible for household matters, will it seek to interfere?
- Does the state already interfere?
- How did the women illustrate their changing allegiances during this period of their lives? To whom did their allegiance move?

Refer to Susan Schechter’s article, “Social Change on Behalf of Battered Women”:

- Is it right that the police who suspect foul behaviour need a formal complaint before they can go into a household/compound and remove children who are being abused? Is such protection of family privacy a good thing?
- Furthermore, if what some would consider to be an abusive practice is in fact a cultural norm, should the police interfere?
- Should special protection exist for minority cultures?
- Are the police socialized to believe what happens in the home should stay in the home?
- Is there a stigma attached to women, children and minorities in the police force?
- Should doctors have to report abuse cases for women? Would mandated reporting infringe on one’s individual rights? Would it make women more or less likely to tell their doctors what is going on?
- How do you know if someone is abused?
- Is mandated counseling beneficial or intrusive?
- Should one put someone who batters in jail? Does the fact that in some states if a woman calls in with an abuse case, the batterer will be jailed, actually deter women from reporting cases?
- Does this connect to Marcus’s discussion of a woman’s internalized script? Does reporting abuse cases deviate from the script?
- How do the police try to drop abuse cases?
- Should a police goal be family unification, or a woman’s safety (if the husband, boyfriend, or male partner is the batterer)?
- How are policewomen trained? Does their training differ from male training?
- If the police try to prevent breaches of the peace, isn’t abuse considered a breach?
- Should police have better sensitivity training?

- Would it be effective to make battered women a protected class? Would this benefit them, or rather demean their situation and take away personal freedoms?

Refer to Iris Young's article, "Five Faces of Oppression":

- What was the purpose behind the article?
- Is it beneficial to differentiate the various forms of oppression? If so, how?
- Are her categories equally hurtful and oppressive?
- Does her outline give one tools with which to work against oppression?
- What two power structures perpetuate exploitation?
- How do we cope with oppression? Do we internalize our responses? Why?
- If we can better understand how oppression is constructed in our society do we have a better change of deconstructing it?
- How does Young deal with the issue of "blame"?
- Does she talk about individuals oppressing others? Or rather group oppression?
- Can you be white and not feel privilege because of class? Does Young address issues of intersectionality while discussing oppression?
- What are the criteria for considering forms of oppression?
- How can one "test" to see what kind of oppression is being imposed on another?
- Are the five types easily distinguished or are they interconnected?

Refer to Jane Addams article, "Women and Public Housekeeping":

- Should one assume that all women were housekeepers during Addams time?
- Is Addams' claim legitimate? Is the public sphere an enlarged household?
- Is this an effective argument to help move women's roles from the private sphere to the public sphere? Or does it merely stipulate that women can only be successful as housekeepers, be it a private or public "house"?
- Is she essentializing women's roles?
- Does she make an argument that is akin to MacKinnon's difference argument?

Refer to Nancy Fraser's article, "Multiculturalism, Antiessentialism, and Radical Democracy":

- Why must we realize the importance of social distribution?
- Can we fully recognize different cultures without equal social distribution?
- Are people stuck on multiculturalism that we fail to look at social inequalities?
- What is her mission in this article?
- How is social equality not being addressed? Are all cultures equal?
- How can the framework of radical democracy become more concrete?
- Does Fraser make any suggestions on how to equalize social distribution?

Refer to Leslie Feinberg's article, "Walking our Talk":

- What movement is Feinberg talking about?
- What two major points does she make?
- How can transgendered people find common ground with other groups in our society? Is this an important step for voicing the needs of the trans community?
- How can the trans movement unite with other like-minded movements and not lose its identity?
- Why is the article called, "walking our talk"?
- How do trans people fit into Young's five groups of oppression?

- Does Feinberg fear being “marked”? Does she talk of invisibility versus over visibility?
- In what section of the volume *Theorizing Feminisms* can you find this article? Why is the article in this section? Does trans issues dilute the strength of the feminism movement?
- Do lesbian issues sidetrack the feminism movement?
- Can one only understand gender oppression by understanding other forms of oppression?
- As long as lesbians continue to be marginalized, can other women also be stigmatized and marginalized?