

Theories of Sex and Gender

Fall 2018

PHIL 3820 Section 1

TR 10:30-11:45

Main 203

Instructor: Erica Holberg (erica.holberg@usu.edu)

Instructor's Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30 in Old Main 002K
and by appointment

Course Description:

"The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other. If this is true, sexuality is the linchpin of gender inequality." –Catherine MacKinnon

"The sexual fringe is a scary place." –Gayle Rubin

This course is a survey introduction to the study of gender and sex. Our goal is to learn about the influential theories, and some of the social and political histories, that inform North American Anglophone humanistic academic work with and from questions about sex and gender.

Questions we hope to address – and constructively fail to answer – include: What are productive methods for the study of gender and sex? Are sexuality and gender best studied, or best understood, as individual traits, organizational points for identity, or kinds of experiences? as embodied difference? as social structure? none of the above? Why do discussions of *power* dominate some kinds of work on sex and gender? Is desire best understood as a psychological state? Can we understand desire apart from work on fantasy? What are the relations between sexualities and subjectivity? What does political or politicized sexuality look like in the United States, and what do political claims to sexual justice look like here? Is there immoral sex? Is there ethical sex? What would make sex ethical or unethical? Why does sex make us a little crazy?

Course Objectives:

1. *Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.* We will be reading crucial texts in the history of sex and gender studies. The goal is to understand the aims of the arguments presented, evaluate the arguments for their strengths and weaknesses, and to understand what assumptions underlie the argumentative steps taken.
2. *Develop skills in expressing oneself orally and in writing.* You cannot do well in this class if you do not participate in class discussion. Just as importantly, you will have multiple chances to get better at writing clear and persuasive analysis of how key theoretical texts function, including what the main argument is, how this argument is made, what assumptions are necessary for the argument to go through, etc. Your grade is a direct result of your efforts and successes in communicating your thoughts clearly in class and in writing.
3. *Acquire an interest in learning more by asking questions and seeking answers.* One guiding question for this course is how, or even if, theories of sex and gender matter. The aim is to be able to make connections between what we are reading and talking

about in the classroom with various questions about identity, ethics, politics, sexuality, and gender we encounter outside the classroom. Students are encouraged to bring in materials they feel are relevant to the themes of the class and explain the connection to their classmates. Students are also encouraged to come to class with questions, either about the previous class discussion or about the readings for that day.

Texts: (books available at the USU Bookstore)

Foucault, *History of Sexuality*

Freud, *Dora*

Conboy, Medina, Stanbury, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*

All other course readings will be available on the Canvas site.

Grading:

Response Papers: 48%

Group Presentation: 8%

Final Paper: 16%

Class Participation: 16%

Canvas Q & A: 12%

Class participation requires that you 1) ask questions, 2) contribute your own ideas and interpretations of the readings, and 3) follow up on the ideas of others. “Show and tell” and bringing questions to class are excellent ways to improve your participation grade.

Respect your co-learners (classmates and professor). This includes sharing responsibility for seeing that as many of your classmates participate as possible. Think of this as a space in which we are all trying to work out our positions and responses to what we read; play nice. It often takes a while to work towards a fully-formed thought; it is important to be patient with ourselves and each other, but this need for patience does not license the passive consumption of your classmates’ efforts to work through these difficult issues. Thinking happens best together, so get together and help one another out.

Learning is easier if you approach each argument (whether made in a text or by a fellow classmate) with the intention to understand why the speaker is saying what he or she says: imagine where they’re coming from, and take seriously their reasons. To understand is not the same thing as to agree or endorse. Understanding adds to your knowledge and does not obligate you to sympathize with the object of your comprehension.

There will be 6 Response Papers due over the course of the semester. Each response paper should start with 1-2 quotes from the text, and then your analysis of the claims being made. What is being asserted by the text? How is the argument being made? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the argument being made? Are the author’s various claims consistent?

Response papers should be 1-2 pages single-spaced. The point of these response papers is to work at developing your own argumentative analysis of the text, which means each response paper should: 1. Make a claim about the reading, and 2. Use evidence *from the reading* to back up your claim.

The Final Paper is due by 5 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 12th. It should be 6-7 pages long (double-spaced) on a topic of your choosing. Final paper topics should be cleared with the professor by Nov. 14th.

There will be 12 Canvas Question and Answer (Q&A) responses usually due Tuesdays over the course of the class. In order to get full credit for this form of class participation, you need to post by noon Monday, under the correct discussion thread on canvas, a question, either about the reading/discussion last Thursday or about the reading for that Tuesday. By midnight Monday, you must have posted a response that engages with a question or response already posted to the Canvas discussion thread.

Plagiarism is forbidden. Plagiarism consists in presenting someone else's work as your own. Plagiarism is a sign that the person has lost sight of one's role as a student and the ends of education. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask the instructor.

Schedule:

I. Introduction to Feminist Questions:

Sex vs. Gender vs. Sexuality; Sexism and Heterosexism;
Essentialism vs. Social Constructionism; Feminist Identity Politics and
Differences between Women

Tuesday, Aug. 28th – hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody*

Paper 1 Thursday, Aug. 30th – Frye, "Sexism"; Sedgwick, "Introduction:
Axiomatic", Q&A 1

Supplementary Readings: hooks, "Black Women: Shaping Feminist
Theory"; Berlant and Warner "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us
about X?"

II. Biology, Sex, and Gender

Paper 1 Tuesday, Sept. 4th – Beauvoir *Second Sex* (Introduction); Williams "On
Being the Object of Property"*, Q&A 2

Paper 1 Thursday, Sept. 6th – Kimmel "Masculinity as Homophobia"; Kaufman,
"Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power"

Supplementary Readings: Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (Chapter 1);
Lowe, "The Dialectic of Biology and Culture"; Wittig, "One is Not Born
a Woman"*

III. Freud and His Critics

- Paper 2 Tuesday, Sept. 11th – Freud, *Dora* (pp. 1-55)*; “Remembering, Repeating, Working Through” (Paper 1 due) Q&A 3
- Paper 2 Thursday, Sept. 13th – Freud, *Dora* (pp. 56-124)*; “Female Sexuality”
- Paper 2 Tuesday, Sept. 18th – Lear, “Sex, Eros and life”; Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality”, Q&A 4
- Paper 3 Thursday, Sept. 20th – Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality* (excerpts); Chodorow “Family Structure and Feminine Personality” (Paper 2 due)
- Paper 3 Tuesday, Sept. 25th – Rubin “Traffic in Women”, Q&A 5
- Paper 3 Thursday, Sept. 27th – Berlant, *Desire/Love* (excerpt); Nagel, “Sexual Perversion”
- Supplementary Reading: Freud, “Elisabeth von R.”; “Contributions to the Psychology of Love”; “The Infantile Genital Organization of the Libido” and “The Passing of the Oedipus-Complex”; Freud, “A Child is Being Beaten”

IV. Foucault and His Critics

- Paper 4 Tuesday, Oct. 2nd – Foucault, *History of Sexuality**, pp. 1-49 (Paper 3 due), Q&A 6
- Paper 4 Thursday, Oct. 4th – Foucault, *History of Sexuality**, pp. 77-159
- Paper 4 Tuesday, Oct. 9th – Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”*, Q&A 7
- Paper 4 Thursday, Oct. 11th – D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity”; Foucault, Preface to the *History of Sexuality*, Vol. II
- Supplementary Reading: Martin, “Medical Metaphors of Women’s Bodies”

V. Sexual Violence

- Paper 5 Tuesday, Oct. 16th – MacKinnon, “Rape, Coercion, and Consent”*; Davis “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist” (Paper 4 due), Q&A 8
- Paper 5 Thursday, Oct. 18th – Phillips “What’s a Young Woman (Not) to Think?”

Paper 5 Tuesday, Oct. 23rd – Nussbaum, “Objectification”, Q&A 9

Supplementary Reading: Kaufman, “The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men’s Violence”; Tolman, “Getting Beyond ‘It Just Happened’”

VI. Feminist Critiques of Gender and the Body

Paper 5 Thursday, Oct. 25th – Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”*; Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Introduction)

Paper 6 Tuesday, Oct. 30th – Bordo, “The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity”* (Paper 5 due) Q&A 10

Paper 6 Thursday, Nov. 1st – Sedgwick, “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay”,

Paper 6 Tuesday, Nov. 6th – Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Post-Transsexual Manifesto”*; Bettcher, “Trans Women and the Meaning of ‘Woman’”, Q&A 11

Supplementary Reading: Smith, “What is this Thing Called Queer?”;

VII. Race/Ethnicity

Paper 6 Thursday, Nov. 8th – Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I A Woman?”*; Anzaldúa, “La Consciencia de la Mestiza”*; hooks, “Selling Hot Pussy”*

Supplementary Reading: Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”

VIII. Group Presentations

Tuesday, Nov. 13th – Group 1 (Paper 6 due)

Thursday, Nov. 15th – Group 2

Tuesday, Nov. 27th – Group 3

Thursday, Nov. 29th – Group 4

Tuesday, Dec. 4th – Group 5

Group presentations are opportunities for each group to lead discussion for one class period. I will work with each group to find an appropriate reading to assign the entire class that fits the group’s chosen topic. What the group chooses to do with this topic, with this reading, with the class, is up to the group.

Possible Contemporary Issues for Group Presentations:

advertising, pornography, sexual harassment, coercion, contraception, feminization of care, rape, rape jokes, power and consent, prostitution, children and sexuality, sex

crimes, abortion, gay conversion therapy, gay marriage, masculinity in crisis, men's rights movement, motherhood, maternity leave, wage equality/independence, women and religion, sexual liberation, masturbation, S & M, affirmative action, eating, global feminism, body image, consumerism, sex education, sex and fantasy, sex and technology, online self-representations, transgendered persons, domestic violence, divorce, teen sexuality, love and romance, AIDS, virginity, women and poverty, public vs. private, virtue ethics, science, knowledge, athletics

IX. Ethics and Desire

Thursday, Dec. 6th – Bartky, “Feminine Masochism and the Politics of Personal Transformation”, Q&A 12