COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an overview of important tendencies and controversies in gender and sexuality studies, emphasizing emerging directions in scholarship as well as foundational readings. Gender and sexuality studies are interdisciplinary fields in conversation with feminist theory and queer theory as well as a host of academic disciplines. Drawing on readings from a variety of disciplines (including sociology, anthropology, history, law, political science, philosophy, and literary studies) and sampling a range of methodologies, this course works through some of the key moments, movements, and problems that have shaped and continue to shape contemporary thinking about gender and sexuality. The course also serves as a graduate-level introduction to the skills and practices of reading, discussing, and writing in a variety of theoretical idioms.

VITAL INFORMATION

Instructor: Rostom Mesli
Office hours: Tuesdays 2-4:30 pm, or by appointment.
Meeting times: Tuesdays 6-8:30pm
Classroom: 402E

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and give the significance of central concepts, key propositions, and both hegemonic and contested frameworks in the study of gender and sexuality.
2. Describe and assess how concepts, propositions, and theoretical approaches or questions take on different lives in different disciplines, and discuss a range of ways in which questions about gender and sexuality unsettle disciplinary premises and procedures.
3. Address questions of epistemology, authority, and methodological reflexivity that have been important within gender and sexuality studies.
4. Explore the characteristics and uses of theory in disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies of sexuality and gender.
5. Apply relevant concepts, propositions, and frameworks from theories of gender and sexuality in their own scholarly work.
LEARNING METHODS AND CLASSROOM PHILOSOPHY

An important aim of this course is to promote an inclusive learning community that encourages the dynamic, open exchange of ideas and affirms the diversity and dignity of participants and perspectives within a safe and mutually respectful environment. We will engage with topics and theories that may challenge your assumptions about the world, but will work to do so in a way that values diverse perspectives and experiences and encourages productive reflection and interaction. During our inaugural session, we will collectively construct some basic guidelines of feminist pedagogy to encourage widespread participation, generative creativity, and discursive civility.

No opinion is less legitimate than another in this class, and none of us is less legitimate than anyone else to share an opinion, suggest an approach or offer an hypothesis to the discussion: we are in this together, trying to figure out certain problems, and we should remember that we do not need to agree with someone in order to try to understand where they are coming from. I cannot, therefore, overemphasize the following point: It is fine to disagree (including with me) and it is fine to say it. If someone (including myself) expresses a disagreement with you, or says something with which you disagree, consider this as an opportunity to open a conversation, to sharpen your thoughts (or to reconsider them), as an invitation to convince them (or me), and not as anything personal.

However, please remember that while anything can be said (and I mean it literally), there are ways to say things that are conducive to productive exchanges and ways that are not. Please keep in mind that some students might be sensitive to certain ideas or critiques, especially in a class dealing with a topic that will touch on potentially personal or sensitive matters, or deeply held beliefs. Please understand that this is a request that you make every effort to be considerate and respectful in voicing your concerns and your opinions; it is NOT a request that you silence your opinions or wait until you find the perfect phrasing in order to voice them (it is always possible to apologize after you realize your words were not chosen carefully enough or you spoke too fast). Should you be afraid to say something, it is much better to offer it as an opportunity you give others to specify their argument than to not say it at all; in the latter case, everyone of us stays on their own position and no one makes any progress; in the former, hearing the reservation may make others reconsider the question from a different perspective; and hearing their response may make you reconsider your view too.

INTELLECTUAL PROVENANCE

In designing this syllabus I have benefited from earlier syllabi for the same class, in particular the syllabus used by Scott F. Kiesling last year which itself borrowed from an earlier syllabus by Lisa Brush, which in turn was collectively developed with Sara Goodkind. I have also borrowed from a syllabus from a course in Feminist Theory I took in graduate school 7 years ago, taught by Elizabeth Wingrove (Political Science and Women’s Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor). Finally, I have received very helpful feedback and suggestions from Todd Reeser.

REQUIREMENTS

Participation
Participating in discussions is one of the best ways to learn. You are expected to contribute your questions and insights to the class. Participating means that you are part of the classroom discussions and not an observer to them.

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As for everything we do in the course, the purpose of the discussions is for you to learn. Participation helps you learn how to engage in scholarship, and it also helps you to work out, create, and discover knowledge and understanding.

This means, among other things, that you should come to class with your own copy of the readings and with your notes, and be prepared to talk and engage what others have to say about the readings. When reading the material, ask yourself why this particular piece was assigned? What does it bring into the picture that was not there before? What previous readings does it share key assumptions with? What other readings does it differ from, complement, or disagree with? What does it allow us to see that we could not see before? Once you have answered those questions (but not until then!) it may be interesting to point to the text’s failures or shortcomings. In other words, our goal in this class is to develop critical skills, but to do so through generous readings of the material: we will want to see what an author allows us to understand before pointing to what she misses.

Of course, I understand that different students are comfortable with different levels of participation; nevertheless, I do want to emphasize that your contributions are necessary to maximize everybody’s learning in this course. Remember that you always have something specific to contribute that will enrich the rest of the class because you have a reading that is your own, and a perspective that is probably not everyone else’s. Your class participation grade is primarily based on attendance, preparedness, thoughtfulness of your contributions, attention to what others say, and capacity to engage others’ arguments.

If you are afraid to say something stupid, you will probably want to keep it for yourself (we all do!). I ask that you consider doing the opposite! That will hopefully get you the help you need to understand what about your idea doesn’t work or is too simplistic. Keep it for yourself and you will waste precious time not knowing quite what — if anything — was wrong with your idea. If you worry that you are the only one who did not understand something someone said, or who needs clarifications… chances are a few others in the seminar room are having the exact same thought: be the one others will be grateful to for asking the question that gave them the answer they too needed.

That said, participation is not all about you talking; it is at least as much about you listening. You cannot engage with a conversation if you do not hear what others are saying, and considering those viewpoints in your own contributions. So, if you hold back from participation for a large portion of the class time, and then make a speech about what you think and say nothing else, you are not really participating. You are pontificating, and that is something even I (whom you may expect to pontificate) will not do… well, let’s be realistic here: I’ll try not to… if I do, stop me! you’ll earn the eternal gratitude of your classmates… and even my own!). Not pontificating doesn’t mean you don’t have opinions, just that you are engaging in collaborative learning through participation.

Similarly, part of what it means to participate in this course is to help create a community that values the voices and opinions of all of its members. If you are someone who is uncomfortable, or even terrified, of ‘talking in class,’ please remember that it is a goal for me and all of your classmates to create conversations that invite everyone in. So, take a deep breath and say what you think! whatever you do, do not suffer in silence. Say anything you can defend against reasoned argument. Treat your colleagues’ contributions with respect (which means taking them seriously and challenging them as well as extending basic courtesy). You have my professional pledge that I will work to do the same.

Of course in order to participate you must attend. If you have any foreseeable reasons which prevent your attendance, please let me know far in advance; if you are ill please send me email alerting me that you cannot attend and why. This is all up to you, but if you want to learn something (and learning is what your grade is based on) you need to make it a priority.
Reading

Participation means preparation. There is a graduate-level reading load in this course, so set aside plenty of time for careful reading each week. Since your concept IDs (see below) are due on Mondays, you’ll need to have your reading done by then; you probably don’t want to try to do it all on Monday though: most of the readings should probably be done by the end of the weekend. If you don’t think you can put in the time to do all of the reading and writing for this course, you should drop it.

Writing

Much of the assessment in this course, as in many graduate courses, is based on writing. I understand good academic writing to be writing that is ‘simple and direct,’ although that does not mean unsophisticated. Use specific terminology when it is needed, but avoid jargon if it is not absolutely necessary: your writing should be understandable by any reader with a solid education level, not just by those who have done all the readings you have done.

*Good academic writing makes a point, and does so through argument and evidence.* Your opinion is important, but what is more important is to make sure you understand the readings, and that you can defend and demonstrate the validity of your arguments. “I like” or “I don’t like” is not an argument and there is nothing to discuss about them: if you like, then I can only agree that, well, you like it. “This approach illuminates this” or “fails to take into account that” are arguments in that these assessments can be discussed, agreed with or challenged.

When writing, keep in mind that these are also assessments; do not expect me to fill in the gaps because I have done the reading as well. In addition, follow the instructions/prompt for the task – your writings may be very interesting, but if they don’t follow the instructions, they won’t get the maximum grade. Be specific when referring to a text, either through quotation or citation (the latter is better for short pieces such as concept IDs). For citations, use any reference system that you are used to (or whatever is customary in your field); whatever you choose, make sure to be consistent within a single paper. References/bibliography does not count toward word count.

**Assessment**

**Participation**

10 percent of final grade

**Weekly Concept Identifications**

30 percent of final grade

**Before 8pm on the Monday before class, post to the Courseweb site a Concept Identification (ID) of about 350 words.** In these brief writing assignments, you will identify and give the significance of a concept featured in the reading for that class session.

There is no formula for this requirement. It should not be easy, because the product is meant to represent a process of thought around a concept in the week’s reading, which you must identify and investigate yourself. To that end, a
Concept ID answers two questions: “What is it?” and “What of it?” Use these two questions to define the concept and explain why it was and whether it still is important for the development of theories of gender and sexuality. In particular, explain what the concept helps the theorist and reader to see, say, or show about the central topic(s) of the reading. This requirement is not a summary of the reading. Although a sentence that distills what you think the reading is “really about” can be very useful (contributing to the sense of “What is it?”), this assignment is not to be fulfilled with an abstract or your undigested reading notes.

Once you identify the concept/idea/notion, evaluate it and its context, development, and deployment in the text, using political-practical-aesthetic-affective as well as “theoretical” criteria (and we will discuss these). You are free to use those that are from your discipline. You should connect the concept to other readings (in and outside of class). You should definitely raise questions; bafflement is a very productive intellectual stance, and I want you to go for articulating your confusion rather than trying to avoid or hide it. Try to show your reader what (and, if possible, why) you don’t “get” about the text.

However, this is not primarily a “response paper.” Be critical, generous, and thoughtful and don’t think you have to be in attack mode; if you find yourself responding defensively, reflect on why. It can be useful to point to where the author fails or what she does not talk about. But it is truly more useful to start with understanding what she allows us to think or see; what are the problems she is trying to solve (which, most of the time, are not the problems that you or I are trying to solve, the author having an agenda of her own). A great strategy for writing in this idiom is to get to what seems to be the end of your very brief concept ID and see if you can use your concluding insight as the first sentence, or at least connect the heart of your “what of it?” to your account of “what is it?” and follow the thread from beginning to end.

These Concept IDs will not only help you organize and record your engagement with the readings in preparation for class participation but will also serve as a guide for collective discussions. You should also read all the posted Concept IDs each week (the easiest way to do this is to subscribe to the postings on Courseweb). Presenters should use them to prepare for presentation/discussion facilitation (see below). I will give you formative but not evaluative feedback on these assignments. All together, these short written assignments contribute thirty-five percent to your final grade (all pass/fail). For full credit, submit at least nine Concept IDs over the course of the term.

Conceptual Essays

15 percent of final grade

For three of the sessions, each student must write a somewhat longer (approximately 750 words) conceptual essay on the text for that week. In addition to identifying and giving the significance of two or more concepts featured in the reading for that class session as in concept IDs, these essays should:

• provide relevant interpretive background or context,
• evaluate the concepts in terms of the contribution they makes to the theorist’s project, and
• comment succinctly on what you found most interesting, important, puzzling, infuriating, controversial, fundamental, exasperating, inspiring, etc., about the concept and its theoretical deployment in the reading.

I will give you formative and evaluative comments on these assignments. You may revise them in whole or in part for inclusion in your final essay. Email these essays to me before 9am on Tuesday.
Presentations

20 percent of final grade

For most of the sessions, 1 or 2 course participants (the people who chose that week as one of the three sessions for which to prepare a conceptual essay) will be collectively responsible for presenting and facilitating discussion of salient background/context, key concepts, and controversies from the readings. The presentations will formally occupy the first hour of the appropriate session, should stimulate discussion, and may of course run longer than 60 minutes. Groups will receive a collective grade for the presentation. The criteria for evaluation (peers and instructors will evaluate) are effectiveness of the presentation in conveying important points from the reading and stimulating useful discussion, and apparent equity in preparation among the group members.

Presentations may be in any format (although long media presentations, unless produced by the group, are generally discouraged, as are “talking head” recitations of prepared written materials). Especially strong presentations

- incorporate the written comments from other students (available by noon on Sunday),
- structure small-group interaction around a set of discussion questions, topics, or specific texts,
- very briefly present background on the theorist(s) and the central debate(s) the theorist(s) address (with a tight focus on connections between biography or historical background and central theoretical concepts or developments),
- and/or otherwise build on the assumption that everyone has completed the readings.

Presentations that go no further than to summarize or outline the readings are not acceptable. Presentations should cultivate and demonstrate creative collective preparation and oral presentation skills.

An especially effective group presentation format is the “Fishbowl,” in which the small group of presenters collectively places the readings in any appropriate historical and biographical context, reproduces the highlights (controversies, areas of rapid consensus, points of contention, productive revelations, etc.) of their planning discussions, and asks and answers within the group a set of questions with which they later – or in the process, if that’s the vibe – want the seminar group as a whole to engage.

Final Concept Clarification Essay and Presentation

20 percent of final grade

In the last few weeks of the semester, we will dedicate some time in each session to developing final concept clarification essays. Final essays, which are due the last week of the semester, should demonstrate your engagement with the topic, themes, and skills of the seminar. The concept clarification essay is a substantial piece of scholarly work (at least 2500 words) that revises and extends your earlier Concept IDs, essays, and presentations into an essay that clarifies two or three central concepts from theories of sexuality and gender in order to articulate or contribute to a disciplinary or interdisciplinary theoretical puzzle, problem, or debate that is especially interesting or relevant to your own research.

Your final concept clarification essay should fulfill one of the purposes of theory (we will identify and discuss these throughout the semester). You may focus on social diagnosis of some vexed aspect of representation, inequality, knowledge and ideology, power, or whatever interests you about gender and sexuality. Or you can clarify concepts, propositions, and frameworks in the interest of guiding and framing empirical inquiry (we will read some research articles with especially explicit theoretical agendas to give you a sense of how some scholars do this). Or you can
contribute to the exegetical theoretical tradition in feminist theories of gender and sexuality. Whatever purpose of feminist theory you aim to fulfill, you should choose two or at most three concepts you find particularly intriguing, potentially useful, puzzling, or important (explain which concept you pick and why in the introduction to your essay). Carefully describe, explain, contextualize, and assess the ways at least two of the theorists we read this semester define and use it. Bring the ideas of feminist theorists into dialog with each other and with your intrigue, confusion, or need, and work to clarify the concept (what it means, why there are debates about it, what good it might do for disciplinary and interdisciplinary feminist endeavors) for a peer audience.

The final written version of this concept clarification essay is due the last class session (Tuesday, December 12). You must submit a draft of your text to another seminar participant for comments by December 1 at 5pm. Email this draft to both your commenter and me. Needless to say, the more complete the version you submit for peer review, the more useful feedback you can expect. Everyone is expected to make a brief presentation of the highlights of this essay during the final class session, connecting it verbally (you don’t have to do this in your essay itself) to the readings for the last session.

Comments on essay drafts

5 percent of final grade

Each participant will be responsible for reading and providing written and oral formative feedback on the draft concept clarification of one fellow participant. This will be your opportunity to provide supportive-yet-critical feedback to your colleagues at a crucial stage in the development of their essays. You will receive drafts by December 1 and must return by December 5 to allow time for revisions. You may also serve as commentator on final presentations. Hand in your colleague’s comments with the final version of your own project. This is all most easily done using the “track changes” and “comments” functions in Word or other current word-processing programs, and you should be prepared to submit drafts electronically. These comments count toward five percent of your grade. What is most important is that you submit helpful comments in a timely manner. Email the commented draft to me and the author by class time on December 5.

Grading

A: Truly exceptional and outstanding work
B: Solid, acceptable graduate-level work
B- or below: Below acceptable level for graduate work

Academic integrity

Enrollment in this course makes you a member of an academic community. The University of Pittsburgh enforces expectations for the members of its academic communities. These standards are designed to ensure the integrity of your education and of the evaluation process. Read the Guidelines on Academic Integrity: Student and Faculty Obligations and Hearing Procedures with great care. The expectations of academic integrity are central to the intellectual liveliness and standards of this academic community. As a student, you have a responsibility to be honest and to respect the ethical standards of your chosen field of study. You will have violated these standards if you:

• Refer to unauthorized materials,
• Provide unauthorized assistance,

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• Receive unauthorized assistance,
• Possess, buy, sell, copy, or use unauthorized materials,
• Act as or use a substitute in an evaluation setting, or
• Present as your own, for academic evaluation, the ideas or words of another person without proper
  acknowledgement and citation of sources.

Academic integrity is not limited to these points, but these are the most important elements. They will be enforced
without fail in this course. Do your own work. Figure out what you want to say and say it in your own words. Cite
your sources when you quote or paraphrase. Violate these community standards and you will flunk so fast your head
will spin.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

If you have a disability that makes it impossible for you to complete the requirements for this course in the manner
specified in the syllabus, please see me with documentation and a recommendation from the Office of Disability
Resources and Services (216 William Pitt Union; x8-7890) and we will make appropriate arrangements.

GENDER-INCLUSIVE/NON-SEXIST LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

Aspiring to create a learning environment in which people of all identities are encouraged to contribute their
perspectives to academic discourse, The University of Pittsburgh Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program
provides guidelines and resources regarding gender-inclusive/non-sexist language. Following these guidelines fosters
an inclusive and welcoming environment, strengthens academic writing, enriches discussion, and reflects best
professional practices. Language is gender-inclusive and non-sexist when we use words that affirm and respect how
people describe, express, and experience their gender. Just as sexist language excludes women's experiences,
nongender-inclusive language excludes the experiences of individuals whose identities may not fit the gender binary,
and/or who may not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Identities including trans, intersex, and
genderqueer reflect personal descriptions, expressions, and experiences. Genderinclusive/non-sexist language
acknowledges people of any gender (for example, first year student versus freshman, chair versus chairman,
humankind versus mankind, etc.). It also affirms non-binary gender identifications, and recognizes the difference
between biological sex and gender expression. Students, faculty, and staff may share their preferred pronouns and
names, and these gender identities and gender expressions should be honored. These guidelines fulfill the best
intentions of the University of Pittsburgh’s Non-Discrimination Policy:
https://www.cfo.pitt.edu/policies/policy/07/07-01-03.html. For additional information please visit the Gender,
Sexuality, and Women’s Studies Program: http://www.gswstudies.pitt.edu/

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, REQUIRED REPORTING, AND TITLE IX

The University is committed to combatting sexual misconduct. As a result, you should know that University faculty
and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct, including harassment and sexual
violence, to the University’s Title IX office so that the victim may be provided appropriate resources and support
options. What this means is that as your professor, I am required to report any incidents of sexual misconduct that are
directly reported to me, or of which I am somehow made aware.
There are two important exceptions to this requirement about which you should be aware:

A list of the designated University employees who, as counselors and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality, can be found here: http://www.titleix.pitt.edu/report/confidentiality.

An important exception to the reporting requirement exists for academic work. Disclosures about sexual misconduct that are shared as part of an academic project, classroom discussion, or course assignment, are not required to be disclosed to the University’s Title IX office.

If you are the victim of sexual misconduct, Pitt encourages you to reach out to these resources:

- Title IX Office: 412-648-7860
- SHARE @ the University Counseling Center: 412-648-7930 (8:30 A.M. TO 5 P.M. M-F) and 412-648-7856 (AFTER BUSINESS HOURS)

If you have a safety concern, please contact the University of Pittsburgh Police, 412-624-2121.

Other reporting information is available here: http://www.titleix.pitt.edu/report-

**UNIVERSITY EMAIL POLICY**

The University of Pittsburgh e-mail Policy 09-10-01 states:

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address. The link to this policy is located at:

http://www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html

Instructions on how to forward e-mail messages are at: http://www.technology.pitt.edu/email-accounts/email/imap/imap-forward.html

**COMMUNICATION**

The most efficient way to communicate with me outside of class is through e-mail. I will do my best to reply to your emails within 24 hours. However, we all forget sometimes… and I apologize in advance if I do. If you do not receive a response after 48 hours, please do not hesitate to send me a reminder (if your email requires immediate action on my part, send me a reminder after 24 hours, but please wait 48 hours if there is no emergency). For longer, complicated questions, or questions that require more elaborate answers, please see me in person, either during office hours or through individual appointments.

One final note, on email etiquette. I consider emails to be a semi-formal way of communicating. I will start my emails with a greeting, write full sentences, edit my spelling as best I can, and end my emails with a closing formula. I ask that you do the same. The only exceptions to these rules are when I or you respond from our smartphones (because the email requires an immediate answer and the phone is the only device we have readily available at the
moment). Please also consider that it is your responsibility to write the last email of any exchange you started (as I will). Acknowledge the reception of the answer you get to a question you asked. Similarly, please acknowledge the reception of any information, feedback, etc. you receive. I will, of course, do the same.
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CLASS CALENDAR

**Tuesday August 29:** Introduction to the class syllabus.


**Tuesday September 5:** The foundations of Feminist Theory

*How to delineate the contours of a women’s movement and of a feminist theory? How would they relate to political movements addressing other social inequalities/oppressions? And how would they relate to social theories meant to describe those other social inequalities/oppressions?*


**Suggested readings:**


**Thursday, September 7 — Reading Group for faculty and grad students:** “Is Transracial the New Transgender?” 1/2. Email mesli@pitt.edu for access to the readings (5-7pm, CL 501).

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Tuesday September 12: Standpoint Epistemology

What is standpoint epistemology? Do women have a specific standpoint? Is it a female standpoint? Or a feminist standpoint? What is the difference? Is there only one feminist standpoint?


Suggested readings:


Wednesday, September 13 — Lecture by Denis Provencher (U. of Arizona): “Queer Maghrebi French” (1:30-3pm, CL 602).

**Tuesday September 19:** Sex: Nature or Nurture?

How to conceptualize the social nature of the sexual? What are some of the frameworks/theories that have been used for that purpose? What role (if any) do they leave for nature? What questions that could not be asked as long as we conceived of sex as natural are now opened for inquiry? How do these texts answer them?


**Tuesday September 26:** Sexuality as power

What does it even mean to write a “history” of sexuality? In what sense can sexuality have a history? Is it the same thing as a history of sexual identities? Or a history of sexual practices? Or is it something more? In what sense is sexuality an apparatus of power, according to Foucault? What exactly does that apparatus get people to do or not do? What political consequences might we draw from Foucault’s essay?


**Suggested readings:**

Davidson, Arnold. “Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality.” Chapter II from The Emergence of Sexuality. 2001.


**Thursday, September 28 — Faculty/Graduate Colloquium by Kathryn Stockton (U. of Utah): “Making Out, Queerly: Kissing, Reading, Sex With Ideas” (12:30-2pm, CL 602).**

**Thursday, September 28 — Reading Group for faculty and graduate students on Gayle Rubin 1/2. Email mesli@pitt.edu for access to the readings (5-7pm, CL 407).**

**Friday, September 29 — Lecture by Kathryn Stockton: “Race, Face, Ravage, and Lyrical Fat: Deleuze and Childhood Poverty” (4-5:30pm, William Pitt Union, room 548).**

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**Tuesday October 3:** The Feminist Sex Debates

*How can we envision the relations between a movement for sexual liberation and a feminist movement? What are the consequences, both theoretical and political, of grounding a sexual politics in feminism? What do we gain from doing that, and what does it foreclose? Where else could we build a sexual politics and for what purposes?*


**Suggested readings:**


**Tuesday October 10: NO CLASS**

**Thursday, October 12 — Reading group for graduate students and faculty on Gayle Rubin 2/2. Email mesli@pitt.edu for access to the readings (5-7pm, CL 407).**

**Monday, October 16 — Gayle Rubin**

Exceptionally, this week, the seminar will meet on Monday (same hour, same room unless otherwise indicated). We will be hosting Gayle Rubin to whom the session will be dedicated. The seminar will be framed as a conversation and there will be no lecture: you should therefore come prepared to ask questions and discuss her work past, present or future. Exceptionally also, the seminar will be open to other graduate students interested in the work of Gayle Rubin.

In order to prepare for the conversation, you are encouraged to participate in the reading groups scheduled on September 28 and October 12. Whether you can participate or not, you are
encouraged to do the readings for those two meetings (email me to have access to them). If you cannot do all the readings, at minimum re-read the two essays by Rubin we have read earlier this semester as well as the following essays:

“Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong: An Analysis of Anti-Pornography Politics” (1986);
“The Catacombs: A Temple for the Butthole” (1991);
“Sexual Traffic: Interview with Gayle Rubin by Judith Butler” (1994);
“Elegy for the Valley of the Kings: AIDS and the Leather Community in San Francisco, 1981-1996” (1997);
“Studying Sexual Subcultures: Excavating the Ethnography of Gay Communities in Urban North America” (2002);

**Monday, October 16 — Colloquium by Gayle Rubin (U. of Michigan): “A Short History of Perversion” (12:30-2pm, CL 602).**

**Tuesday, October 17 — Lecture by Gayle Rubin (U. of Michigan): “Gay Sex and the Post-Industrial City: Leathermen and San Francisco’s South of Market” (5-7pm, University Club).**

**Friday, October 20 — Faculty/graduate workshop by Kris Knisely (U. of South Dakota): “Transgender/Non-binary Approaches to Language Teaching” (University Club, 2-4pm).**

**Tuesday October 24:** Is there a unified subject for feminism? Intersectionalities undermining the global model of sisterhood

*What is intersectionality? What do we mean when we say that two (or more) systems of oppression intersect? Is it the same as saying that they are interlocking? Where does intersectionality come from? Black feminism? Legal Doctrine? Why does the answer matter to some? What constitutes intersectionality? Race? Gender? Class? Sexual Orientation? Is any of those dispensable or is any of those necessary to constitute an intersectional analysis? Which ones and why? Can we add other identity features to them? How many?*

Does intersectionality describe a way that legal doctrine functions? A way that political movements function? Or is it about a characteristic of individuals? If it is a characteristic of individuals, are we all intersectional or only some of us? Where are systems of oppression difficult, or impossible, to separate? In our lives (i.e. in experience)? Or is it that racism as such is inseparable from sexism?

* Colloquia typically involve a pre-circulated piece of writing, generally a draft of an unpublished essay. This means that the draft should not be circulated outside the group of colloquium’s participants without the author’s permission. The essay is generally made available 1 to 2 weeks prior to the colloquium through http://www.humcenter.pitt.edu/

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Does intersectionality simply call our attention to the diversity of women so that we are aware, when we say "women," that we are only talking about some of them? Or does it have a politics in itself? If so, what does it look like? Does it create a new subject for feminism? Which one? Black women? Another one? How do we choose? What happens to the old subject of feminism (say, White, middle-class, straight women, to reuse the caricature that is often circulated about 1970s feminist movements)? Wouldn’t the new subject be liable to the same critiques that displaced the old one (namely, that it obscures from view the diversity of women and that it erases those who are not that subject)? Is an intersectional feminist politics possible or does intersectionality lead to refusing to privilege any identity feature, not even gender, which would seem to preclude the possibility for a specifically feminist movement?


Suggested readings:

**Wednesday, October 25 — General lecture by Chloé Georás (U. of Puerto Rico): “The Unkindest Cut of All”: Coloniality, Performance, and Gender in the Courtroom and Beyond” (3-5pm, CL 602).**

**Wednesday, October 25 — PACWC lecture for new women faculty by Amanda Godley, School of Education, on “Gender, Intersectionality, and Equity in U.S. Schools” (3-5pm, 2500 Wesley W. Posvar Hall).**

**Thursday, October 26 — General lecture by Stacey Waite, University of Nebraska, on “Teaching Queer (12:30-2pm, CL 501).**
Thursday, October 26 — Lecture by Jack Halberstam (Columbia U.): “Wild Things: Notes on Queer Anarchy” (6-7:30pm, Frick Fine Arts Auditorium).
Tuesday October 31: Is there a unified subject of feminism? Transnational feminism undermining the global model of sisterhood

How do transnational feminisms undermine further the notion of a global feminist sisterhood? How do they show that Third-World women may not have the same agendas as Western women? Worse yet: that these agendas might be contradictory? Do they ultimately provide a basis for re-unifying women on a more solid ground or is the split one that can never be overcome?


Tuesday, October 31 — Faculty/graduate colloquium by Benjamin Kahan (Louisiana State University): “After Sedgwick: The Gordian Knot of the Great Paradigm Shift” (12:30-2pm, CL 602).

Tuesday, October 31 — General lecture by Benjamin Kahan, “Sex in the Age of Fordism: The Standardization of Sexual Objects” (2:30-4pm, Scaife Hall, Auditorium 5).

Tuesday November 7: Reassessing theories of social construction

Are categories such as homo- and heterosexual entirely constructed or is there a primary element to them that is more or less universal, and it is only secondary features that are changing? If we accept the first hypothesis (there was no gay or straight in the past), then can we date the moment when that divide appeared? And when did it become hegemonic? Did it ever, by the way? Doesn’t that theory presuppose that the features that were once in use have completely disappeared and left no traces? Doesn’t that unduly homogenize people living in the present time? But doesn’t the alternative theory also end up denying that a change happened, which is hardly satisfactory? Can we find a theory that accounts for both phenomena — namely that yes, there was a shift but that past ways of conceiving of sex, although not as central as they once were, are still with us nevertheless?


Suggested readings:

Tuesday, November 7 — Screening of transgender documentary Real Boy and discussion with director Shaleece Haas (7-9pm, Frick Fine Arts Auditorium). [I regret that we will have to miss this... 😔]

Tuesday November 14: Transgender Studies

How do transgender studies continue the work of undermining the unified subject of feminism? How do they also provide a model that it is better equipped to account for major features of contemporary subjectivities? In the 20th century, particularly in the 2nd half of the century, social as well as medical developments allow for a shift: transgender identities, once inseparable from gay and lesbian identities, slowly become autonomous. Transgenderism is conceptualized as having to do with gender whereas homosexuality belongs to the realm of sexuality. What social groups and institutions promote that new understanding? What are some of the mechanisms that allow for its internalization by transgender people on the ground? Why do they use it? Because they feel it provides a better account of their subjectivity? Or for other reasons?


Suggested readings:

**Tuesday, November 14** — General lecture by Kathleen Perry Long (Cornell University): “Depathologizing Diversity: Critiques of Normative Thinking about the Body” (CL 602).

**Thursday, November 16** — General lecture by Elizabeth Rodríguez Fielder (Department of English): “The ‘Crooked Stitches’ of Desire: Sewing and Sexual Awakening in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple” (4-5pm, CL 501).

**Tuesday November 21:** The problems with the late 1960s to early 1980s politics

1990s feminist and queer theorists pointed out the theoretical flaws of their foremothers’ frameworks not just for the sake of theoretical sophistication: of primary importance to them were the very concrete and unfortunate consequences of those flaws on political organizing. What are some of the theoretical commitments of late 1960s to early 1980s feminists (or gay and lesbian activists) taken to task here? What do those commitments dictate in terms of political organizing? Why do poststructuralist thinkers view those as a problem? Reading somewhat between the lines, try to draw from the texts some of the features of poststructuralist politics (if one may use that phrase).


**Suggested readings:**


**Tuesday November 28:** The political consequences of poststructuralism’s theoretical antifoundationalism: how to build a movement?

One of the key features of poststructuralism is the notion that there are no essences. Put in feminist terms, there is no such thing as an eternal essence of Woman uniting all females. Woman, then, is an effect of language, an arbitrary name given to certain individuals who, by receiving that label, become “women.” Put differently: there is no such thing as Woman; there are instead an infinity of “women” who are widely different from each other and that are only perceived as sharing something essential. Rather than being an essence, then, woman is a fiction; and a fiction that produces “women.”

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What are the consequences of that insight for the women’s movement? Does it make it impossible to organize as “women”? After all, who wants to organize around a fiction? Or does it make it impossible and at the same time inevitable? What would be the alternatives? How can we theorize the fact of organizing as women anyway? What new possibilities does that insight open for the women’s movement? What did we lose exactly? What did we gain?

And the same goes for the gay and lesbian movement. Since there is no eternal, natural, pre-existing gay man or lesbian, the goal of a political movement can not be to “liberate” homosexuals: there is no there there, i.e. there is nothing to liberate. How is the goal of the movement transformed then?


Tuesday December 5: The political consequences of poststructuralism’s theoretical antifoundationalism: The antisocial theory and the antinormative

How is the antisocial theory fundamentally rooted in psychoanalysis? In what sense can it be described as emancipatory? What might the politics of the antisocial theory look like? In what sense can it also be described as not so emancipatory? Does it seem to you that the critiques of the antisocial theory, whether they acknowledge it or not, are led to return to an old-style left politics (i.e. a pre-poststructuralism politics)? Or does it seem to you that they move forward by deepening the poststructuralist insights and pushing them one step further?


Tuesday December 12: Theory as vocation, politics as vocation

Having spent the whole semester trying to find the theories that would produce the good political results we aspire to, the time has come to ask, with Robyn Wiegman, the key question that has been left unexamined so far: why do we want so much that our theories fix the world? What is at stake in this desire? Realistically, should you want to fix the world, is a theory what is needed? Is that what a theory does? Are politics and theory coextensive, as we like to believe, or is that too a fiction we tell ourselves? If the latter, why do we insist on repeating it so much?
