

GSWS 2252

Theories of Gender and Sexuality

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: Scott F. Kiesling

Office hours: Wednesdays 1:30-2:30pm, Fridays 1-2:30pm.

Meeting times: Mondays 2:30-5pm

Classroom: 306 CL

Required Text: There is no single required text. All readings will be posted on courseweb. Students may wish to purchase some books excerpted.

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.

Intellectual provenance

This syllabus is based heavily on one by Lisa Brush (much of it completely copied), which in turn was collectively developed by her and Sara Goodkind. That syllabus was based on a previous version developed by Nancy Glazener. Helpful suggestions for readings and advice about the course were given to her by Dan Barlow, Frayda Cohen, Amanda Godley, Molly Nichols, Lisa Parker, Todd Reeser, and Dawn Winters.

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. 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.

You might find this participatory learning odd, as there will be no lecture, but I hope you find it refreshing. It also might be harder than sitting and trying to soak up knowledge as a sponge, but at some point, learning requires the effort of thinking about what you are learning. In order to talk about something, you need to think about it, and through this thoughtful engagement, learning and understanding occurs. In addition, there is no one way to come to this knowledge (and indeed, everyone's knowledge and understanding will inevitably be slightly different). One way to make this more comfortable is to not think about knowledge being *in* the reading (or my head). Rather, it is something that you (and the rest of the class) must construct together.

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. That 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 can not 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 Sundays, you'll need to have your reading done by then; you probably don't want to try to do it all on Sunday though. 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. *Good academic writing makes a point, and does so through argument and evidence.* Style and voice is individual, but must be different in form from casual conversations or unscripted lectures. For your writing for this course, all of the writing should be done as if there is a wider audience in mind; these are not emails or texts to me, but arguments that reflect your thinking.

That said, 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/prompts for the task – I have reduced grades most often in my career when students do not answer the question or do not do what is asked. 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; just 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 12 noon on the Sunday 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. 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 Monday.**

Group Presentations

20 percent of final grade

For most of the sessions, a small group of 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 (Monday, 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

Policy statements

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,
- 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.

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>

Calendar

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1	Aug 29	Introductions, What is 'theory?'	Brush, Breeze	
2	Sep 05	No class.		Labor Day
3	Sep 12	Feminist Foundations 1	Chodorow, Rubin, West & Zimmerman	Concept
4	Sep 19	Feminist Foundations 2	de Beauvoir, Mill, Wollstonecraft	Concept
5	Sep 26	Feminist Foundations 3	Engels, Gilman, McKinnon, Ochs, Rich	Concept
6	Oct 03	Foundations of Sexuality Studies	Foucault, Freud, Simon & Gagnon, Stein	Concept; Rosh Hashanah
7	Oct 10	Feminist Standpoint Theory	Collins, Hartsock, Smith	Concept
8	Oct 18	Debates on the Category of "Woman"	Alcoff, Butler (1990), Scott, Young	Note Tuesday class due to Fall break! Concept
9	Oct 24	Response to Gender Essentializing/Universalism: Masculinities	Allan, Halberstam, Kiesling, Pascoe & Bridges, Reeser	Concept
10	Oct 31	Sexuality and Queer Theory	Ahmed, Butler (2004), Chauncey, Rubin (1984)], Sedgwick (1990), Sedgwick (1995)	Concept
11	Nov 07	Response to Gender Essentializing/Universalism: Transgender Studies	Bettcher, Butler (2003), Preves, Stryker, Westbrook & Schilt, Zimman Watch <i>Paris is Burning</i> , the film Butler 'reads' in her chapter.	Concept
12	Nov 14	Intersectionality	Choo & Ferree, Crenshaw, Fordham, Munoz (Bettie, Wilkins, Hamilton & Armstrong)	Concept
13	Nov 21	Response to Gender Essentialism/Universalizing: "Third World" Feminisms	Narayan, Mahmood, Mohanty (1988, 2003)	Concept
14	Nov 28	Feminism and Neoliberalism: Disciplining the Self and Buttressing Global Capitalism	Eisenstein, Fraser, Goodkind, Ling	Concept
15	Dec 05	Theory, Politics, and Social Change: Praxis Revisted	Hemmings, Ehrlich and King, Zerilli (2005)	Concept
16	Dec 12	Theory, Politics, and Social Change: Praxis Revisted	Halley, Ferguson (2010)	Paper presentations