

Kirsten Leng  
WGSS 295S-01  
Wednesdays, 2:30-5:00pm  
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## **Sex and Liberation: The 1970s**

Spring 2020

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a “sexual revolution” marked by new forms of sexual expression and new visions for sexual relations, ethics, and social organization. Central to the sexual revolution was the concept of sexual liberation, which held that repressed sexual desires and practices ought to be freed from their previous constraints. Sexual liberation was viewed as particularly important for marginalized sexual subjects, including women; however, many women believed that true sexual liberation did not merely mean an end to repression. In fact, throughout the 1970s, women vigorously discussed and debated what it would mean, and what it would take, for women to be sexually liberated. Was liberation for women synonymous with claiming a right to, and experiencing, sexual pleasure? Was it expressed through agency and independence, including from men? And what should a feminist politics of sexual liberation look like?

This course will explore the complexity of sexual liberation in the wake of the American sexual revolution. Our primary focus will be on theories of sexual liberation (and critiques of sexual revolution) put forward by an array of feminists between the late 1960s and early 1980s. We will begin by examining the social history of the sexual revolution, attending to events and people that helped propel changes in sexual morality, norms, and practices. We will conclude by analyzing how the sexual revolution was reflected in and shaped by diverse media and culture. While this course is by no means comprehensive, it aims to introduce you to some of the major issues, ideas, and debates from the time that have helped shape our own.

### **Course Goals**

#### *Knowledge-based:*

- Examine why sex was politically important and significant to feminists in the 1970s
- Explore how people envisioned sexual liberation in the US during the 1970s, when sexual liberation for women and other sexually marginalized groups seemed possible for the first time
- Analyze how visions of sexual liberation varied among feminists, and why
- Situate these ideas within their historical context(s)
- Reflect on the relationships between sex/uality, society, politics, the law, and technology

#### *Skills-based:*

- Identify, recall, and relate crucial information
- Evaluate the historical, cultural, and political significance of events, groups, and individuals
- Work collaboratively with others to interpret, analyze, and creatively relay ideas
- Critically and creatively examine media and texts
- Express thoughts and reflections coherently and in a structured manner
- Critically engage peers with possibly differing ideas and opinions in respectful dialogue

### **Requirements**

Our class is a discussion-based seminar. A good discussion includes a plurality of diverse, well-informed voices. To this end, it is absolutely imperative that everyone comes to class having read (or watched) the texts attentively, making notes along the way. Do not rush or skim the readings or screenings.

It is important to come to class ready to discuss the assigned texts. This means taking notes, marking passages that were impactful or perplexing, looking up unfamiliar words, terms, people, places, and events,

and thinking about the questions the readings provoked for you. Please also use the questions included with each set of readings to guide your engagement with the texts. It is okay if you didn't understand the texts. Discussions allow us to work through our confusion collectively, not perform our supposedly superior knowledge. Learning is a humbling process for everyone; rarely does anyone grasp everything perfectly, especially the first time. Think of our classroom space as a reading (and viewing) group animated by fearless yet respectful discussion of some really fascinating, at times challenging, and potentially transformative ideas.

Finally, to help ensure meaningful engagement with the readings, please bring printed out copies of the readings to class. Laptops and tablets will be allowed in class in order to do in-class activities; however, you are expected to use your devices only for class purposes.

### **Caveat Emptor!**

1. As a class about sex and sexuality, we will cover a range of sensitive topics and will at times engage explicit materials. Issues and texts are included in this course because they are relevant to our understanding of a particular time, place, and set of issues and ideas. The reasons for including certain materials in class will be explained in advance. I encourage students to be in touch with me if they feel uncomfortable or cannot engage with certain materials in order to arrange alternative assignments.
2. This class is historical in nature. We will be dealing with many primary texts, i.e. documents stemming from the era under investigation. Many of them use terminology and deploy habits of thought that may be out of step with our contemporary moment—particularly surrounding the category of “woman.” While acknowledging that difference, it is my hope that we can endeavor to understand the texts on their own terms, and try to trace how past debates have informed the present.

### **Readings**

There are no readings to purchase. All texts (readings and screenings) are available via Moodle, or will be provided as hard copies in advance of class.

The readings might seem like a lot. Please keep in mind, however, that we are meeting once a week instead of two times. We will effectively be doing two meetings worth of readings per session. I've tried to keep the reading reasonable. It's really important we all do the readings to have an interesting and productive conversation. Please budget your time accordingly.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Attendance and Participation: 30%

Assignments: 70%

#### *What Constitutes Attendance and Participation?*

Everyone is expected to:

- Attend all class meetings with the reading completed and thoughts on questions prepared
- Bring a printed out, i.e. hard copy, of the readings so that we can discuss particular passages
- Participate actively in class discussions as much as possible
- Bring notes on readings/viewings

I believe that our class meetings constitute important sites of learning and intellectual development; consequently, I take preparation for class meetings rather seriously! Attendance will be taken each class; if you have to miss a class, please be sure to email me beforehand. If you miss more than two classes, please arrange to meet with me in order to discuss how to make up the work missed. More than two unexplained absences will negatively affect participation.

## *Assignments*

### Collage (20%)

You will prepare a collage encapsulating ideas, themes, events, and individuals covered in class to date. We will discuss the particulars closer to the due date, which is Wednesday, February 26th at the end of class.

### Imagined Conversation (30%)

Working with a partner, you will write a six-page, double-spaced paper that imagines a conversation between two of the thinkers examined in this class. It would be helpful to choose two individuals who have radically different positions on a particular topic. You can also choose thinkers we haven't yet approached in class (i.e. thinkers who are scheduled for after the assignment is due.) In this assignment, you and your partner must identify what issues concern these thinkers, creatively summarize the central elements of their ideas and arguments, and compare and contrast their viewpoints regarding what the problem is, and what ought to be done about it. Additionally, you must identify what beliefs and arguments they share in common, and think about whether these shared points of view could provide the foundation for a broader argument or a position on how to deal with the problem at hand. This assignment will be graded based on how well you and your partner described the ideas at play (did you understand them?), as well as on creativity, quality of writing, and systematic source citation. The imagined conversation is due via email on Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup> at 5pm EST.

### Media Analysis (20%)

The sexual revolution was very much a product of the media. Forms like film and television not only helped propel the sexual revolution, but also mirrored many of the changes underway. They further provided a staging ground for working out the conflicts, anxieties, and aspirations provoked by growing sexual freedom. Working alone this time, you will prepare a seven-page, double-spaced analysis of one of the films listed below. This collection represents a mix of feminist and non-feminist, mainstream and independent, US and foreign, comedic and dramatic films. Be sure to research these titles before choosing one!

Your analyses should address the following questions:

- When was this film made? Where?
- What is the genre? (Comedy? Drama? Romance? Crime? Thriller?)
- What is its plot? Major themes? How does the story end (spoilers allowed and required!!!)
- Who are the central characters? What relationship do they have with one another? How are they represented?
- Who is not represented in this film?
- Who wrote, performed, and directed this piece?
- How does it dramatize the sexual revolution?
- How does it represent sexual liberation? What message does it send?
- Do you think this piece has an intended audience? If so, explain?
- How was this work received (If you can find this information)?
- How does its message and implicit or explicit argument resonate with ideas and events we've encountered and engaged in this class?
- How would you describe and analyze this text as a reflection of its time, and as a political statement?

This assignment will be evaluated based on the extent to which it addresses these questions factually, comprehensively, and with an eye to detail, as well as on the quality of writing and proper citation of sources. The media analysis is due in class, as hard copy, on Wednesday, April 29<sup>th</sup> by 5pm EST.

Pieces of Culture for Analysis (Choose One):

- \*Midnight Cowboy (1969)      \*Hair (1979)      \*Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice (1969)
- \*Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore (1974)      \*Alien (1979)      \*Sex and the Single Girl (1964)
- \*Carnal Knowledge (1971)      \*An Unmarried Woman (1978)
- \*Daughter Rite (1974)      \* Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975)
- \*Annie Hall (1977)      \*Girlfriends (1978)      \*I am Curious (Yellow) (1967)
- \*Claudine (1974)      \*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant (1972)      \*Harold and Maude (1971)
- \*Barbarella (1968)      \*The Graduate (1967)      \*Kramer vs. Kramer (1979)
- \*The Boys in the Band (1970)      \*Sunday Bloody Sunday (1971)      \*Women in Revolt (1971)

*A note about formatting assignments:*

- If you submit work electronically, I would prefer assignments be prepared on Microsoft Word so I can track changes and provide comments. Such interaction is not possible if assignments are submitted as PDFs or on alternative formats (e.g. Pages). If this requirement poses a difficulty for you, please let me know.
- When submitting work electronically, please title your document as follows: "LAST NAME\_TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT COURSE NUMBER"
- Please ensure that your assignments contain, in addition to page numbers, the following elements:
  - Your name on every page
  - A Title on the first page

**Emails**

I do not answer emails on the weekend.

**Statement Regarding Pronouns**

There is a long history of dialogue and activism around how we address one another, with respect to both names and pronouns. Students should be referred to by the name they prefer, and with the proper pronunciation, by faculty and other students. I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name you prefer and gender pronouns that correspond to your gender identity. Please advise me of your name's proper pronunciation, and any name or pronouns not reflected by the record in Spire early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

**Policy on Use of Course Materials**

Course materials can be shared among classmates, roommates, friends and family. They cannot be shared on social media. Recording of class sessions is not allowed barring special permission; these recordings cannot be shared on social media.

**Accommodation Statement**

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

**Academic Honesty**

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors

should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent ([http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)).

## Schedule of Readings

### Wednesday, January 22: Introduction

\* David Allyn, *Make Love Not War: The Sexual Revolution, An Unfettered History* (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2001), 3-9.

- Getting to Know You; Course Overview
- When was the “Sexual Revolution”? What was it?
- What events and people do the texts identify as helping to bring about the so-called “sexual revolution”?
- What things surprised you? What was left out of these accounts?

### Wednesday, January 29: Accounting for the Sexual Revolution

\* David Allyn, *Make Love Not War: The Sexual Revolution, An Unfettered History* (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2001), 10-22, 30-40, 85-92, 256-269

\*In class: Sex in '69: The Sexual Revolution in America (approx. 75 minutes)

- According to Allyn, what major cultural, social and legal changes in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to the transformation of sexual norms, values, expressions, and cultures?
- Did any of these factors surprise you? Why?
- What do you make of these contrasting narratives of the sexual revolution?
- Do these texts reflect a certain viewpoint? If so, how would you describe it?
- Do you think these texts had any intended audiences? If so, how would you describe them?

### Wednesday, February 5: Changing Understandings of Sexuality

\*Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920-1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 51-80

\*This American Life, “81 words,” Parts I and II

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/204/81-words>

- How did the findings of new, post-WWII scientific research on female sexuality challenge existing work? In what ways did they affirm existing beliefs?
- Who was creating this knowledge? How?
- What role did new scientific research on female sexuality play in changing views of women’s sexuality?
- How were scientific understandings of homosexuality changing during the 1960s? Who was causing these changes, and how?

### Wednesday, February 12: The Personal Becomes Political: The Rise of Liberation Movements

\* Film: “She’s Beautiful When She’s Angry” (92 minutes) [Kanopy Streaming Video]

\*Film: “Before Stonewall” (87 minutes) [Moodle]

\*Film: “Pay It No Mind: The Life and Times of Marsha P. Johnson” (55:30 minutes)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjN9W2KstqE>)

\*Timeline of the Modern Women’s Liberation Movement, courtesy of Monmouth College:

<http://department.monm.edu/history/SACordery/Gender%20and%20Film/Timeline.htm>

- How do the documentaries represent women's lives in the 1950s and 1960s?
- How do these documentaries represent LGBT life in the 1950s and 1960s?
- What pivotal issues do the documentaries identify as contributing to the (re) emergence of the women's movement?
- How do the documentaries address issues relating to race, class, and gender as factors that shaped "women's experience" and the rise of the women's movement?
- How does sexuality feature as a major issue in the documentaries?
- Why was Stonewall such a pivotal event?
- What can you find out about the individuals interviewed in the documentaries?
- How do the documentaries address issues relating to race, class, and gender as factors that shaped people's experiences of sexuality and/or gender performance?

### Wednesday, February 19: Feminists Reconceptualize and Represent Certain Kinds of Female Sexualities

\*Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," in *Sexual Revolution*, edited by Jeffrey Escoffier (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 100-111

\*Jill Johnston, "The Myth of the Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," in *Sexual Revolution*, 504-512

\*Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sexual Revolution*, 166-174

\*Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women*, Second Edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 11-14 and one other chapter of your choosing!!

- How do these texts about female sexualities differ from previous work? What makes their work different? What are their arguments and findings?
- How are certain kinds of female sexuality tied to women's liberation in these texts?
- To what degree can their arguments be said to apply to all women?
- How do these texts represent same sex desire?
- How does Lorde conceptualize "the erotic"? How is it different from the sexual? How does it function as a source of power? How is it uniquely attached to women's liberation?
- In what ways is *Our Bodies Ourselves* unique in its representation of women's sexuality?
- How was knowledge about women's sexuality produced?
- How does it address issues related to race, class, sexuality, and ability?

### Wednesday, February 26: Theorizing Women's Sexual Liberation I: Diagnosing the Problem

\*Kate Millett, "Sexual Politics: A Manifesto for Revolution," in *Radical Feminism*, edited by Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: Quandrangle, 1973), 365-368

\*Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1970), 1-15, 232-274

- For Millett, in what ways is the sexual political?
- What does Millett identify as the major cause(s) of women's sexual oppression?
- What does liberation look like for Millett?
- How does Firestone approach her analysis of women's sexual oppression? What causes does she identify?
- What social, cultural, political, and economic changes are necessary, in Firestone's view, for the achievement of women's sexual liberation?
- To what extent can these visions be said to apply to all women?

### Wednesday, March 4: Theorizing Women's Sexual Liberation II: Lesbian and Trans Perspectives

\*Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman," in *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, edited by Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 107-109

\*Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980), 631-660

\*Cheryl Clarke, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995), 241-252

\* Sylvia Rivera, "Queens in Exile, The Forgotten Ones," in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries*, 40-55 (<https://untorellipress.noblogs.org/files/2011/12/STAR.pdf>)

- What relationships do these authors posit between lesbianism and women's sexual liberation?
- What relationships do these authors posit between the women's liberation movement and lesbians?
- What relationships do these authors posit between trans liberation, gay liberation, and women's liberation?
- What role do society and culture play in shaping sexuality, according to Rich and Clarke?
- How does Rich represent the relationship between heterosexuality and women's oppression?
- How does Clarke analyze the relationship between race, gender, and sexuality?

### Wednesday, March 11: Theorizing Women's Sexual Liberation III: Women of Color Feminism

\* "The First National Chicana Conference, Workshop Resolutions," *Dear Sisters*, 166-167

\* Selections from *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, edited by Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), 340-353, 360-362, 379-384

--Frances M. Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female"

--Black Women's Liberation Group, Mount Vernon, New York, "Statement on Birth Control"

--Enriqueta Longueux y Vasquez, "The Mexican-American Woman"

\* Mary Ann Weathers, "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force," *Words of Fire* (1995), 157-162

\* "A Black Feminist Statement," Combahee River Collective, *Words of Fire*, (1995 [1977]), 231-240

\* Watch: *Born in Flames* (1983) (90 minutes)

\*\* Available online through UMass library catalogue; search title

- What relationship do Women of Color feminists envision between sexual liberation, women's liberation, and racial liberation? How is sexual liberation complicated here?
- What unique concerns do they bring to the fore, particularly regarding reproduction?
- How is racism implicated in sexual politics? In the women's liberation movement?
- How does the film *Born in Flames* bring to light these critiques?
- How does the analysis put forward in the Combahee River Collective's "Black Feminist Statement" address many of the problems raised by Women of Color feminists, lesbian feminists, and (white) socialist feminists? How do they frame these issues? In what ways are they represented as interconnected?
- What solutions does the Collective put forward to the problems they identify?

Wednesday, March 18: NO CLASS

Wednesday, March 25: NO CLASS yet Imagined Conversations are due via email!

### Wednesday, April 1: Criticizing the Sexual Revolution I: Heterosexuality's Ills

\* Roxanne Dunbar, "Sexual Liberation: More of the Same Thing," in *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969), 49-56

\* Dana Densmore, "Independence From the Sexual Revolution," in *Radical Feminism*, edited by Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), 107-118

\* Ti-Grace Atkinson, "The Institution of Sexual Intercourse," in *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links, 1974), 13-25

\* Ti-Grace Atkinson, "Radical Feminism and Love," in *Dear Sisters*, 91-92

\* Selections from *Dear Sisters* (2000), 194-200:

--Karen Lindsey, Holly Newman, and Fran Taylor, "Rape, The All American Crime"

--Susan Brownmiller, "The Mass Psychology of Rape"  
--Nekenge Toure and Michele Plate, "Black Women Organizing Against Rape"

- Why do these authors seek "independence from the sexual revolution,' in Densmore's terms? How do these authors represent the sexual revolution? Is it good or bad for women?
- Why are (hetero)sexuality and gender equality antithetical, to use Dworkin's framing? According to these authors, why is a feminist embrace of (hetero)sexuality problematic? What in their view should be the feminist perspective on sexuality?
- How do these authors analyze rape? What role does it play in the larger scheme of women's oppression?
- Is rape merely an individual act, according to these authors? Why or why not?
- How do these authors propose to end rape?

### Wednesday, April 8: Criticizing the Sexual Revolution II: Pornography

\*Selections from *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*, edited by Laura Lederer (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1980), 105-114, 134-140, 286-292, 307-312

--Tracy A. Gardner, "Racism in Pornography and the Women's Movement"

--Robin Morgan, "Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape"

--Andrea Dworkin, "Pornography and Grief"

--Kathleen Barry, "Beyond Pornography: From Defensive Politics to Creating a Vision"

\*Selections from *Sexual Revolution* (2003), 435-443, 444-467

--Ellen Willis, "Feminism, Moralism, and Pornography"

--Deidre English, Amber Hollibaugh, and Gayle Rubin, "Talking Sex"

#### *First set of readings:*

- How do these authors conceptualize pornography? How do they distinguish it between other forms of sexual expression?
- Does pornography play a role in women's oppression, according to these authors?
- What harms does pornography produce, in their view?
- What do they argue pornography reveals about relations between the genders? Between races?
- What solutions do they propose to the problems they identify?

#### *Second set of readings:*

- What alternative understandings of pornography do they put forward?
- Why is censorship dangerous, according to these authors?
- In what ways might pornography play a role in sexual liberation, according to these authors?
- Do these authors share any viewpoints in common with the authors in *Take Back the Night*? If so, what are they?
- How and why do these author differ from the authors in *Take Back the Night*?
- What solutions do these authors propose to the dilemmas associated with pornography?

### Wednesday, April 15: The Sexual Revolution in Culture I

\*Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex: The New Sexual Culture of 1970s American Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1-15

\* "Love is All Around," Mary Tyler Moore Show, 19 September 1970

\* "Maude's Dilemma," Maude 14 and 21 November 1972

\* "A Man About the House," Three's Company 15 March 1977

- In what ways did television reflect and precipitate new ideas, morals, and desires surrounding sexuality in the 1970s?
- Can any of these shows be said to reflect a feminist perspective on sexual liberation? Why or why not?
- Beyond sexuality, do these shows address issues relating to race, ethnicity, or class? If so, how?

Wednesday, April 22: NO CLASS

Wednesday, April 29: The Sexual Revolution in Culture II

- In class watch *Free to Be You and Me* (48 mins)