

WGSS 392Q
Introduction to Queer Theory
 Spring 2017

Tuesday & Thursday, 1:00-2:15 PM Class room: South College W101
 Dr. J. Jeanine Ruhsam jruhsam@umass.edu
 Office Hours: T-TR. 10:00-11:15 AM Office: South College W421

Course Description

Queer Theory critically examines the way power works to institutionalize and legitimate certain forms and expressions of sexuality and gender while stigmatizing others. Queer Theory followed the emergence and popularity of Gay and Lesbian (now, LGBT or Queer) Studies in the academy. Whereas LGBT Studies seeks to analyze LGBT people as stable identities, Queer Theory problematizes and challenges rigid identity categories, norms of sexuality and gender and the oppression and violence that such hegemonic norms justify. Often considered the "deconstruction" of LGBT studies, Queer Theory destabilizes sexual and gender identities allowing and encouraging multiple, unfettered interpretations of cultural phenomena. It predicates that all sexual behaviors and gender expressions, all concepts linking such to prescribed, associated identities, and their categorization into "normal" or "deviant" sexualities or gender, are constructed socially and generate modes of social meaning. Queer theory follows and expands upon feminist theory by refusing the belief that sexuality and gender identity are essentialist categories determined by biology that can thus be empirically judged by fixed standards of morality and "truth."

We will begin the course by developing a critical understanding of Queer Theory through reading foundational texts by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Gayle Rubin and Leo Bersani. We will then examine the relationships between Queer Theory and other social and cultural theories that probe and critique power, privilege, and normativity, including critical race theory, transgender studies, feminist theory, and disability studies.

Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will:

- Be able to identify the key concepts and themes of Queer Theory.
- Be able to describe how sexual and gender identities are social constructs.
- Be able to differentiate between sex, gender, and sexual orientation and develop a working vocabulary of terms used when discussing them.
- Be able to critically examine how gender, sexuality and power intersect- or might not- historically and contemporaneously.
- Be able to discuss how heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia and misogyny are culturally hegemonic and how they contribute to discrimination, oppression, and violence.
- Understand the relationship of Queer Theory and LGBT Studies to feminist theory, critical race theory, ideology and public policy.
- Apply the knowledge gained from this course to the scope of their lives, our university, and the communities they are involved in.

Required Texts:

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (1980). ISBN 978-0679724698

Sullivan, Nikki. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003). ISBN 978-0814798416

Wilchins, Riki. *Queer Theory, Gender Theory* (2014). ISBN 978-1626010895

Other texts- both readings and films- will be available as downloadable or streaming files on the course website via Moodle, designated with (M) before their author and title. If necessary, some films may be available on course reserve at the library at least one week prior to their in-class discussion. Some texts may be offered as links that you may readily access simply by clicking on them. Please have copies of the readings in class so you may reference them in discussions.

Grading Scale

Highest	Lowest	Letter
100.00 %	94.00 %	A
93.99 %	90.00 %	A-
89.99 %	87.00 %	B+
86.99 %	84.00 %	B
83.99 %	80.00 %	B-
79.99 %	77.00 %	C+
76.99 %	74.00 %	C
73.99 %	70.00 %	C-
69.99 %	67.00 %	D+
66.99 %	60.00 %	D
59.99 %	0.00 %	F

Grading

- 15% Participation, attendance and quizzes
- 15% Discussion Leading
- 15% Midterm exam (one class period)
- 10% Policy paper
- 20% Reflection papers (2 @ 10%; 3-4 pages each)
- 25% Research paper (8-10 pages)

Attendance and Participation- 10%

You are expected to attend every class, arrive on time, and stay for the duration of the class. You are to complete the reading of the assigned text by the day that we discuss it in class so that you are prepared to contribute to our discussion. Your meaningful participation in this class will affect your final grade, and you must be in class in order to participate in discussions. You may be excused for appropriate reasons but please advise me of this promptly. Let us expect that more than three absences will strongly affect your final grade, and missing class more than five times will likely result in your failing the course.

Quizzes- 5%

Because frequent evaluation is essential to your grasp of the course work, we will frequently evaluate our progress in this class with scheduled quizzes.

Discussion Leading- 15%

You will lead one (or two, depending on class size) discussion sessions during the semester. For that session you should provide the class with a list of 5-8 discussion questions and an "FYI" sheet on Moodle the night before class. On this information sheet, include (and cite sources for) pertinent factual information that will inform our class discussion beyond what is provided in the text you are discussing.

Mid-term Exam- 15%

You will take a mid-term on March 30 (for the duration of one class period). It will be composed of essay responses to your choice of three (3) out of six (6) prompts. I will thoroughly review the exam guidelines, structure and expectations with you before you receive it.

Exam Make-up Policy

If you cannot attend an exam, please notify me by email on or before the day of the exam. To qualify for a make-up exam, you must provide a valid reason with documentation (i.e., a doctor's note). Make up exams must occur within a week of the scheduled exam and will need to fit both our schedules. Expect the make-up exam to be more difficult, simply because I will have presented the most obvious problems in the scheduled test.

Papers and Written Assignments

I will distribute detailed guidelines for papers and written assignments in class closer to the due date and will also make them available on Moodle. Papers must be typed, double-spaced in 12-point font (Times New Roman or Georgia), with 1-inch margins, printed on standard white paper, and stapled. Your name, the course name and the assignment title should be in the upper left corner of the first page; the title may be placed, centered, below that. Choose a title that is interesting and that helps the reader understand what the paper is about. Do not print a separate title page. Number all pages, in the upper right hand corner. Handwritten submissions will not be accepted.

Papers must be via Moodle by the beginning of class on the due date. Assignments that are not submitted on time will drop one letter grade for each class period past the due date. Computer or technical problems are not acceptable excuses for late papers.

Contemporary Issue Reflection Paper (2) – 20% (10% each)

Locate an article in national or local news that deals with issues surrounding gender identity or sexual orientation. Write a 2-3 page reflection on this article. Do not merely summarize the contents, but present your own, unique and informed analysis of the issues involved. For example, you might question what viewpoint the article represents, who the article is targeting, what preconceived ideas are embedded in the article, or why the events in the article have taken place. You will use Queer Theory to inform your analysis of the argument or issue. These reflection essays are due on February 9 and April 6.

Policy Paper – 10%

Whether or not we realize it, we are all impacted by policy and legislation surrounding gender identities or sexual orientation. Locate a piece of legislation or policy that directly impacts you or comes from your local government (ex: employee handbooks, state law, local law, health insurance policy, school policy, dress code, etc. The possibilities are endless!) Write a 2-3 page reflection of this policy/legislation and attach a copy of the portion of the policy/legislation about which you write. You may begin with a brief overview of the policy, but the bulk of your essay should concentrate on analyzing it using the tools of Queer Theory. You may also choose in your essay to evaluate whether or not you agree with the policy, what you see as the potential benefits or drawbacks, and what you see as the motivations behind the legislation. This essay is due March 2.

Research Paper – 25%

You will research and write an 8-10 page paper that investigates a key issue pertaining to gender identity or sexual orientation. You may choose to concentrate on a specific event, person, or issue, or you may take a comparative approach. At least part of your paper should use Queer Theory to assess your topic. You are encouraged to consider how issues of race, class, and location impact your research topic. You will confirm the topic of your paper with me by submitting a 200-300 word abstract by April 11. You are welcome to turn in a draft of this paper for review up to ten days before it is due.

5% of this paper's grade will be based on your in-class presentation of your paper's topic. These presentations will take place during the last day of class.

WGSS Writing Tutor

Our WGSS department is fortunate to have a full-time writing tutor available to help all students with their papers. Elise Swinford is available to meet with students to discuss any aspect of their writing. Her drop-in office hours in South College W414 are 12:00-4:00 on Tuesdays, 9:30-12:00 on Wednesdays and by appointment. You may reach her at: eswinfor@umass.edu

Moodle

I will provide a quantity of important material to you on Moodle, including the syllabus, assigned reading material, assignment instructions, and any informative/lecture presentations. Please consult Moodle regularly and habitually so you do not miss assignments.

Technology in the Classroom

While you are expected to take notes and access texts on your laptop or tablet, other use not integral to our course (such as surfing the net, engaging in email, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) is prohibited. Infractions of this policy may result in your dismissal from class. I reserve the right to ban the use of computers or tablets for any individuals or for the entire class (unless you need it for accessibility purposes). Cellphones are to be turned off and kept out of sight; earbuds are prohibited.

Academic Freedom

We will all work together to foster a classroom environment that is welcoming and respectful to all, especially in light of the sometimes controversial topics that we will be dealing with in this class. I encourage you to engage in discussion of contemporary controversies while remaining respectful of others, especially those with whom you disagree. Because this college is a secular institution, intellectual values will be held in higher regard than religious, moral or political ideals.

Trigger Warnings and Self-Care

We will be openly engaging with numerous topics and issues that some students might find discomforting. If you feel you need to excuse yourself from the conversation or the classroom because of emotional stress brought on by our discussion, you are certainly permitted to do so. Please be sure to indicate to me at some point before or after if this is the case. You are responsible for any information you might have missed in your absence from class.

Title IX and Mandated Reporting

WGSS classes are a place where issues of sexual violence and other sexual misconducts are discussed as a matter of course. It is not a taboo subject, and feminists have long worked to develop theory and activism around sexualized violence, including rape, dating violence, child sexual abuse and the like. If you want to discuss your own personal experiences of sexual violence in class, we do not

consider that a “report” covered by Title IX (although if you want faculty help and support in reporting sexual violence, we are here to help you do that). Other available resources on campus for addressing sexual violence include both confidential and non-confidential resources—non-confidential resources will keep your concerns private but will report your concerns to the Title IX coordinator, or, the Dean of Students Office who will provide you with different options to assist you. Confidential resources will keep your concerns confidential and will provide you support, assistance in addressing safety concerns and other services such as providing you with an advocate. The resources can be found at www.umass.edu/titleix/

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 the gender pronouns that correspond to your gender identity. Please inform me of your name’s pronunciation and any name or pronouns not reflected by the record in Spire early in the semester so that I may make any appropriate changes.

Academic Integrity

Do not cheat. You are here to learn, and that is what your grade reflects; there are no shortcuts. Academic dishonesty, which includes but is not limited to cheating, fabrication and plagiarism, is prohibited by 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. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to my 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. For more information about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please see the Dean of Students’ website:

http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/.

Disability Access

If you need accommodations related to disability, please let me know as soon as possible so that your learning needs can be appropriately met. For information about campus services, visit Disability Services at www.umass.edu/disability/

Absences

You are expected to attend every class meeting. You may miss up to two classes for reasons you deem valid—religious holidays, illness, emergencies, inescapable appointments. Each additional absence, up to six, will lower your participation grade by a full grade (i.e., from B to C). If you miss more than six classes, you will fail this course. Repeated tardiness will adversely affect your grade because it is disruptive to class and is inconsiderate of your professor and your classmates. Similarly, leaving early is discouraged and can adversely affect your grade. If you need to come late or leave early from class, please let me know in advance. If you do not attend class, it is your responsibility to ask a fellow class member for details and catch up. I encourage you to exchange contact information with one or two classmates and arrange to be “study buddies” together, so that you can support one another in the event one of you misses class.

Class Cancellation

If our campus is closed due to inclement weather, then this class is also cancelled. If for any reason I must cancel class, I will try to notify you by email in advance.

Contacting Me

I am passionate about the subject we are studying, and I want you to be as well. Never refrain from approaching me about anything related to this class! You can talk with me personally before and after class, during my office hours, or by appointment. E-mail (jruhsam@umass.edu) is the best way to contact me, and I will make every effort to respond to you as promptly as possible, though weekends and holidays might be exceptions.

Course schedule

We will try to follow this schedule, but I may need to make some changes over the course of the semester. Rest assured that you will be given notification by me in advance if that occurs.

Week 1 **Course introduction: Theorizing Sex**

- 1/24: Introduction and review of syllabus
- 1/26: Read:
 - Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (1-36)
 - (M) Edelman, “Queer Theory: Unstating Desire;”
 - (M) Marcus, “Queer Theory for Everyone.”

Week 2 **Beginning the Canon of Queer Theory: First, Foucault**

- 1/31: Read:
 - Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1-49)
 - Wilchins, ““Homosexuality: Foucault and the Politics of Self” (47-57 in *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*)
- 2/2: Read:
 - Wilchins “Foucault and the Disciplinary Society” (59- 70 in *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*)
 - Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (81-114, 135-159)

Week 3 **The Closet**

- 2/7: Read:
 - (M) Eve Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet”
- 2/9: Read:
 - (M) Lee Edelman “Tearooms and Sympathy, or, the Epistemology of the Water Closet”

Reflection paper #1 due

Week 4 **Performativity**

- 2/14: Read:
 - (M) Butler, “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions” from *Gender Trouble*
 - Wilchins, “Butler and the Problem of Identity” (*Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, pp. 123-139)
- 2/16: Read
 - Sullivan, 81-89 in *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*
 - (M) Butler, “From Parody to Politics” from *Gender Trouble*

Week 5 **Bersani’s Rectal Lens**

- 2/21: Read:
 - (M) Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”
 - (M) Bersani “The Gay Presence.”
- 2/23: Read:
 - (M) Watkins, “The Spectacle of Aids.”

Week 6 **Coloring and Racing Queerness**

- 2/28: Read:
 - (M) Somerville “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body”
- 3/2: Read:
 - (M) Nagel, selections from “Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers.”

Policy Paper Due

Week 7 **Assuming Power: (Trans)Masculinity**

- 3/7: Read:
 - (M) Califia, “Manliness”
 - (M) Rubin, “Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender and Boundaries”
- 3/9:
 - (M) Halberstam, selections from *Female Masculinity*.

Week 8: **No Class: Spring Break**

Week 9: **Becoming a Woman: (Trans)Femininity**

- 3/21: Read:
 - (M) Wittig, “One is Not Born a Woman.”
 - (M) Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage.”
- 3/23: Read:
 - (M) Garber, “Spare Parts: The Surgical Construction of Gender.”

Week 10: **Trans Notions**

- 3/28: Read:
 - (M) Susan Stryker, 2004. “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin”
 - (M) Whitehead, “The Bow and the Burden Strap.”
- 3/30: **Mid-term exam**

Week 11: **Policing Gender and Sex**

- 4/04: Read:
 - (M) Namaste, “Genderbashing: Sexuality, Gender, and the Regulation of Public Space”
- 4/06: Read:
 - (M) Cavanagh, “Seeing Gender: Panopticism and the Mirrored Return” from *Queering Bathrooms* ***Reflection paper #2 due***

Week 12: **Compulsory Heterosexuality**

- 4/11: Read:
 - (M) Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.”

Research Paper Abstract Due

- 4/13: Read:
 - (M) De Laurentis, “Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation.”

Week 13 **Constructing Gender & Sex**

- 4/18: No class: Holiday make-up day
- 4/20: Read:
 - (M) Kessler and McKenna, *Toward a Theory of Gender*
 - (M) Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality.”

Week 14 **Queerness and Disability**

- 4/25: Read:
 - (M) McRuer “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence.”
 - (M) Siebers, “Sex, Shame, and Disability Identity”

Queer Threats Queried

- 4/27: Read:
 - (M) Jakobsen, “Can Homosexuals End Western Civilization as We Know It?” from *Queer Globalization: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*
 - (M) Luhmann, “Queering/Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing.”

Week 15 **Student Presentations**

- 5/02: Student presentations

***Final Paper Due* via Moodle or email by May 9 at 11:59 PM**