

Queer Theory Seminar

Fall 2008, Grinnell College
Soc 395-01
Meets T/Th 2:15-4:05pm in JRC 225
Course website on PioneerWeb

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Course Objectives:

This interdisciplinary seminar investigates queer theory and the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people as addressed in empirical studies, narratives, film and activism. We will explore how gender and sexual identities intersect with race, class, ethnicity, place, age and disability. Our areas of inquiry will include identity, community, embodiment, popular culture, violence and social movements. We will critically analyze which texts have been considered central to queer theory and which have been marginalized.

The course is designed to revolve around class discussion of theories, texts and ideas, supplemented by short lectures, small-group work, student and guest presentations, films, and other material. Our readings include three classic queer theory texts, a collection of essays on gender, sexuality, class, environment and disability, an eighty-year-old work of African American literature, and many supplemental readings posted on e-reserves. The design of the course assumes a working understanding of fundamental themes in social theory, feminist theory and gender studies. You may at times find the reading lengthy, demanding, and/or unfamiliar in tone or content, especially given the interdisciplinarity of queer studies as a field. By keeping up with reading assignments (which build upon one another cumulatively), reading the selections carefully, reflecting on theories in writing, discussing difficult concepts with classmates, and explaining complex theoretical ideas in presentations, you will strengthen your facility with many of the core concepts in queer theory.

Participant Responsibilities:

A seminar is by nature a collaborative learning effort, with lectures by the professor kept to a minimum. As such, each of you carries responsibility for the success of our scholarly collaboration this semester. As a participant in this upper-level theory seminar, you are responsible to:

- Come to every class meeting having read and reflected upon the assigned material, prepared questions and comments in advance, and ready to participate actively in discussion.
- Plan presentations and lead classroom discussion on two assigned theorists, as well as presenting your final project toward the end of the seminar.
- Spend time preparing the presentations you make, and when not presenting, spend time thinking about course material in order to most effectively contribute to productive class discussions and shared learning. (Last-minute reading will not serve us well here.)
- Complete writing assignments, including proposals and drafts, *on time*, and provide your classmates with thoughtful, meaningful feedback in the peer review process, in order to improve our writing and thinking about theory.

Some of the ideas discussed in the course may challenge your thinking about gender, sexuality, race, disability and other dimensions of identity and social life. If you are not comfortable with explicit discussions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, sexual behavior, race and racism, gay rights, queer politics, disability politics, feminism and other movements for social change, this may not be the class for you. We will operate under the assumption that learning involves openness to new ideas and willingness to struggle with intellectual and social contradictions.

Required Texts:

1. Butler, Judith (1993). *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge.
2. Clare, Eli (1999). *Exile and Pride*. Boston: South End Press.
3. Foucault, Michel (1990 [1976, trans. 1978]). *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*. NY: Vintage.
4. Larsen, Nella (2003 [1929]). *Passing*. Penguin Books.
5. Sedgwick, Eve Sokofsky (1990). *Epistemology of the Closet*. UC Press.
6. Articles and book excerpts posted on E-Reserves. Please notify me as soon as possible if an assigned reading is unavailable, missing pages, the assignment is not clear, etc. Thank you.

Coursework & Grading

Critical Response Assignments (2 x 15% each = 30%): You will complete two critical response assignments during the semester. I will provide guidelines for these assignments.

Midsem Exam (15%): The exam is designed to encourage absorption and synthesis of material covered during the first part of the semester. It will draw from readings, lectures, films, discussions, activities and other course material. Reading questions provided on the website and by you in class will be a good guide to exam preparation.

Project (25%): You will complete a project of your own design related to queer theory, gender and/or sexuality. You will have a range of options for carrying out this project (research, ethnography, alternatives to writing using a variety of media, etc.). There will be deadlines periodically throughout the semester for proposing your project, gathering sources, establishing your methodology and media, and creating a "scaffold" for the project, as well as the final product. A significant portion of your grade will depend upon satisfactory and timely completion of these steps. You will present your project in class during the final weeks of the course.

Presentations (10%): Twice during the semester you will present background information on a theorist or filmmaker and lead discussion on her/his work. Sign-up for theorists/filmmakers will be on a first come, first serve basis. I will distribute guidelines for these presentations.

Participation & other assignments (20%): Since this seminar is designed to revolve around discussion of theory, *your attendance, preparedness, and active participation are essential*. Constructive dialogue requires preparing for class, *respectfully* joining in discussions, and courteously listening to others. There are multiple ways of participating actively in class --

overall I expect you to be physically and psychically present and to interact critically with the material and your colleagues. I will periodically assign ad hoc in-class or take-home writing and fieldwork assignments that will contribute toward this part of your grade.

A note on reading: I trust in your seminar-level note-taking proficiency. I encourage you to use RefWorks, Endnote or other bibliographic software to keep track of, and make notes on, what you read. It will serve you well throughout your academic career -- it's never too soon to start organizing your research library, and the technology saves time and headaches in generating bibliographies for papers.

A note on writing: While what you write is essential, *how* you present your ideas in writing is also extremely important. The writing assignments will provide opportunities to exercise and strengthen your writing skills. I strongly recommend that you take advantage of the college Writing Lab for assistance with your assignments for this and other classes. As per Sociology Department protocol, you should include a line at the end of each paper acknowledging assistance of any kind that you received in producing the paper, including advice from Writing Lab staff or feedback from a fellow student, roommate, family member, etc.

Expectations & Policies

I will do everything I reasonably can to help you meet your goals in this course and to maintain a respectful classroom atmosphere. I expect you to do the same. Please see me or contact me by email to talk about any questions or problems you have with the material, my presentation of it, or classroom dynamics.

Accessibility: If you need any kind of accommodation in order to participate fully in the course, contact me and Joyce Stern in Academic Advising (ext. 3702) as soon as possible to make the necessary arrangements. "Grinnell is committed to making accommodations for students with physical, learning or psychological disabilities" (*Student Handbook*), and so am I.

Academic honesty & citing sources: As in every course, you are expected to abide by the college's standards of honesty in academic work as outlined in the *Student Handbook*. I am required to bring suspicious coursework to the attention of the Committee on Academic Standing. It has become quite easy to find out whether a student has copied sections of a text from written sources or from the internet – do not be tempted.

For citations of sources in papers, I will accept any disciplinary reference style (endnotes or footnotes) provided it is consistent throughout the paper. I recommend but do not require the American Sociological Association reference style.

Written work: Bring completed assignments to class or deliver them to my box in Carnegie 115 by 5pm on the due date. Please print double-sided whenever possible. NOTE: **All written work must be printed out and handed in; I do not accept emailed work.**

Deadlines: Your written work must be handed in **on time. I do not accept late work** unless you have spoken with me in office hours and obtained my permission for an extension *before* the day the assignment is due. *If you get an extension, send me an email summarizing our agreement,*

print it out and attach it to your late work. Even if you have been granted an extension, a late assignment may receive a grade penalty.

Classroom presence: I take attendance at the beginning of class. More than two unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade, as will cross-talk, sleeping in class, repeatedly arriving late, or leaving early without notifying me beforehand. An absence is counted as excused **only** when I receive an email or note from Academic Advising, the Health Center or the Athletics Office.

Please note that whether excused or not, **you are responsible** for any and all material missed due to absences. Get the emails and phone numbers of a couple of classmates and if you miss a class, ask them to review what was covered and/or lend you their notes. (Do not ask me to review what was covered, or if we did anything important. Please do not tell me you are skipping my class to study for another class.)

Contacting me: I expect to be in contact with students throughout the semester. Please come by during office hours to discuss course content, thoughts or concerns about assignments, or for extra explanation or assistance. My office hours are posted weekly outside my office (CARN 106). If you are not available during office hours, we can schedule another time to meet. I am online daily during the week, so email is the best way to reach me.

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Laura Sachiko Fugikawa at the University of Southern California and to Andrea L. Mays at the University of New Mexico for developing and co-teaching prior versions of this course with me at the University of New Mexico. Thank you to Karla Erickson for additional input on the syllabus.

Course Schedule:

Given that issues raised in class, socio-cultural developments, guest speaker availability and other factors may affect the pace of the course, the following is a tentative outline of the material we will cover. I reserve the right to (and no doubt will) make changes to reading assignments. You should complete the readings by class time on the dates specified.

FOUNDATIONS

Week 1

Th 8/28

Review syllabus, discuss course objectives & expectations

What is Queer? What is Theory?

Week 2

T 9/2

Feminist/Critical Race/Queer Theory; Intersectionality

Writing reflection on Queer/Theory due

Anzaldúa & Moraga, "Theory in the Flesh" (handout)

Anzaldúa, "Haciendo caras, una entrada." (handout)

Moraga, "Loving in the War Years" (poem)

Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" and "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference"

Anzaldúa, "Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan" and "To(o) Queer the Writer—Loca, escritora y chicana"

Th 9/4

Organization & Social Control of Bodies

Katz, "The Invention of Heterosexuality"

Somerville, Excerpts from *Queering the Color Line* (Intro & Ch. 1)

Clare, selections from *Exile & Pride*

Week 3

T 9/9

Power & Discourses of Sexuality

Foucault, selections from *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*

Th 9/11

Marriage, Privacy & Sodomy Law

Bowers v. Hardwick (excerpt)

Lawrence v. Texas (excerpt)

Cohen, "Privacy without the Closet"

Selection from *Social Text* 84-85, TBA

Bush, 2004 State of the Union Address (excerpt)

Duggan, "Holy Matrimony!"

Graff, "What is Marriage For?"

Week 4

T 9/16

Social Constructions: The Closet, Sex & Gender

Sedgwick, selections from *Epistemology of the Closet*

CONSTRUCTING & PERFORMING SEX, GENDER & SEXUALITY

- Th 9/18 **Gender as Process, Stratification, Structure**
Review: Lorber, "The Social Construction of Gender"
West & Zimmerman, "Doing Gender"
Deutsch, "Undoing Gender"
Pratt, "Gender Quiz" (from *S/HE*)
Selection from *Biological Exuberance*, TBA
- Week 5**
T 9/23 **The Politics of Heteronormativity/Heterosexism**
Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"
Rich, "Credo of a Passionate Skeptic," "Why I Refused the National Medal for the Arts," & letter to NEH/Pres. Clinton
Wittig, "The Straight Mind"
- Th 9/25 *11am: Adrienne Rich gives Scholars' Convocation in Herrick Chapel
- Intersex Identities and Movements**
Fausto-Sterling, "Dueling Dualisms" (from *Sexing the Body*)
Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes" & "Five Sexes Revisited"
Preves, "Sexing the Intersexed"
Chase, "What is the Agenda of the Intersex Patient Advocacy Movement?"
ISNA website: <http://www.isna.org/>
ISNA, "Suggestions for Writing about Intersex" and "Shifting the Paradigm..." (handouts)
- Week 6**
T 9/30 **Performativity**
Butler, "Preface" and "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" (from *Gender Trouble*)
Film: *Paris is Burning*
- Th 10/2 hooks, "Is Paris Burning?" (from *Black Looks*)
Butler, "Gender is Burning" (in *Bodies That Matter*)
- Week 7**
T 10/7 **Trans (-gender, -sexuality, -cending...)**
Halberstam, Intro to *Female Masculinity*
Prosser, Intro to *Second Skins*
Pratt, "Bathroom" and "Border"
- Th 10/9 Bornstein, excerpts from *Gender Outlaw*
Stryker, "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin" (w/ brief intro by Jagose & Kulick)
Stryker, "(De)Subjugated Knowledges"
Jones, "Gender without Genitals"
Koyama, "Whose Feminism is it Anyway?"

Week 8
T 10/14 **Popular Culture & Spectatorship**
Sullivan, "Queering Popular Culture"
McFadden, "America's Boyfriend Who Can't Get a Date"
Hollinger, "Theorizing Mainstream Female Spectatorship"

Th 10/16 Exam

Oct. 18-26 FALL BREAK

IDENTITIES, COMMUNITIES & RESISTING VIOLENCE

Week 9
T 10/28 **Passing**
Davis, "Introduction" (*Passing* pp. vii-xxix.
Attn: watch out for spoilers on p. xxx)
Larsen, *Passing*, entire

Th 10/30 Butler, "Passing, Queering" (*Bodies That Matter* Ch. 6)

Week 10
T 11/4 **Queer Community?/Queer Movements**
Gamson, "Must identity movements self destruct?"
Halberstam, "What's that Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives"
Hutchins, "Bisexuality: Politics & Community"
Clausen, "My Interesting Condition"
Ward, "White Normativity... in a Racially Diverse LGBT Organization"

Th 11/6 Russo, "Lesbian & Bisexual Women's Battering"
Erbaugh, "Queering Approaches to Intimate Partner Violence"
Butler, "Beside Oneself"
Juang, "Transgendering the Politics of Recognition"

Week 11
T 11/11 **Queer of Color Theory/Surviving Violence & Racism**
Riggs, "Notes of a Signifyin' Snap! Queen"
Harper, "Marlon Riggs: The Subjective Position of Documentary Video"
Johnson, "The Pot is Brewing"
Ferguson, Intro to *Aberrations in Black*
Marlon Riggs Film: *Tongues Untied*

Th 11/13 **Queer Studies/Disability Studies**
Clare, selections from *Exile & Pride*
McRuer, "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness & Queer/Disabled Existence"
Sherry, "Overlaps & Contradictions between Queer Theory & Disability Studies"
Trahan, "Queen of the Girls"

- Week 12**
 T 11/18 **Queer Liberalism, Critiques & Alternatives**
 Eng et al, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?"
 Puar, "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages"
 Alexander, selection from *Pedagogies of Crossing*
- Th 11/20 **Queering Sex/Phun with the Phallus**
 Stoltenberg, "How Men Have (a) Sex"
 Butler, "The Lesbian Phallus & the Morphological Imaginary" (*Bodies That Matter* Ch. 2)
 Rubin, "Thinking Sex" & "Afterword"
 Fung, "Looking for My Penis"
- Week 13**
 T 11/25 Review/Catch-up/Project presentations
- Nov. 27-30 THANKSGIVING RECESS
- Week 14**
 T 12/2 Project presentations
- Th 12/4 Project presentations
- Week 15**
 T 12/9 Project presentations
- Th 12/11 Project presentations

FINAL PROJECT (all parts) DUE Friday 12/19 at 5pm in Carnegie 106 or 115.

Congratulations: You have completed Queer Theory Seminar! Go forth & queer/theorize.