

RELIGION & SEXUALITY

T/Th, 11:00-12:15

Denny 102

RELS 3050/WGST 3050

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Office Hours: Tue., 1:00-2:30 and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

If any generalization about religion and sexuality is true, it is that the relation between religious and sexual experiences is fraught with tension, complexity, contradiction and possibility. Although a single, semester-long course cannot possibly do justice to the depth and breadth of even *one* religious tradition's engagement with sexuality, this course will tease out some of the central themes and pose some of the relevant questions for thinking about this multifaceted field of inquiry.

The course consists of four units. The first briefly examines the major religious traditions to determine what resources each offers for thinking about sexuality. The second provides some theoretical tools for thinking about sexuality and its complexities. The third focuses on particular issues to grapple with the relation between religious discourses and sexual experiences. The fourth explores how a single religious tradition, Christianity, might be re-imagined taking erotic desire as the frame of reference for interpreting its texts, narratives and rituals.

Given the nature of the course, students will be required to read about, talk about and write about sexual identities, desires and practices. If such discussions are likely to make you uncomfortable, you should not be in this class. These discussions will focus on course materials. No student will be required to reveal their own sexual identity, orientation, desires or practices, but some students may choose to do so. If such revelations will make you uncomfortable, or if you will be unable to engage the fact of sexual diversity in a respectful, mature manner, you should not be in this class.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford, 1991)

Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye* (City Lights, 2001)

Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (Vintage, 1990)

Mark D. Jordan, *Ethics of Sex* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2002)

David Machacek and Melissa Wilcox, eds., *Sexuality and the World's Religions* (ABC-CLIO, 2003)

Additional readings will be made available through electronic reserve.

Please bring all relevant readings to class.

EXPECTATIONS

Students are expected to (1) attend, and be on-time for, all class meetings; (2) read attentively all assigned readings prior to class; (3) participate actively and productively in discussion of the assigned material; (4) familiarize themselves with the syllabus; (5) take responsibility for fulfilling the requirements of the course; and (6) check their 49er Express e-mail accounts regularly for course announcements and personal communications from the instructor.

Students are **NOT** expected to agree with the views espoused by the instructor, the course materials or other students, but are expected to manage any disagreement respectfully and productively.

ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to attend, and be on-time for, all class meetings. *Every absence after two, for whatever reason, will result in a three-point deduction from your final grade. Every two instances of arriving late or leaving early will count as one absence.* If you are absent from class, you are responsible for getting any course announcements, lecture notes, handouts or assignments.

E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

I will communicate with you as a class and as individuals using the 49er Express e-mail system. You are responsible for checking this e-mail account and responding promptly to any e-mail requests.

CLASS DECORUM

(1) Be on time for class. If you must arrive late or leave early, please do so as unobtrusively as possible. (2) Cell phones must be turned off prior to class. If your cell phone rings, or if I observe you text-messaging during class, it will result in a full letter deduction in your grade for the course. (3) Computers may not be used during class. If you have a disability-related need to use your computer, talk to me and we will work something out.

SCHEDULE

Tu/Aug 25 Introduction

Th/Aug 27 Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, 3-44 (1984) (electronic reserve)

UNIT ONE
(Whirlwind) Survey of Religious Traditions

- Tu/Sept 1** **Hinduism** – Guest Lecturer: Dan White
Machacek and Wilcox, 101-33
- Th/Sept 3** **Buddhism** – Guest Lecturers: Jeff Meyer and David Mozina
Machacek and Wilcox, 133-76
- Tu/Sept 8** **Judaism**
Machacek and Wilcox, 177-202
- Th/Sept 10** **Christianity**
Machacek and Wilcox, 203-54
- ***Autobiographical Reflection due (hard copy submitted in class)**
- Tu/Sept 15** **Islam**
Machacek and Wilcox, 255-92
- Th/Sept 17** Catch-up day for Unit One

UNIT TWO
Theoretical Frameworks

- Tu/Sept 22** Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, 13-31 (1991) (electronic reserve)
- ***Unit One paper due by 5PM**
- Th/Sept 24** Jordan, 1-46, 155-72
- Tu/Sept 29** Foucault, 1-49, 92-102
- Th/Oct 1** Catch-up day for Unit Two

UNIT THREE
Specific Issues

- Tu/Oct 6** **Marriage**
Jordan, 107-30
Mark Jordan, *Blessing Same-Sex Unions*, 1-22, 100-27 (electronic reserve)
Don Browning, *Sex, Family, Marriage and World Religions* (selections)
(electronic reserve)
- ***Unit Two paper due by 5PM**
- Wed., Oct 7: OUTSpoken Speaker Series**
Keith Boykin, “One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America”
7PM, McKnight Hall
You are not required to attend this event. If you do attend, and participate in the program assessment, you will receive 5 points of extra credit toward your final grade.
- Th/Oct 8** **Marriage (cont’d)**
- Tu/Oct 13** **Fall Recess—No Class**
- Th/Oct 15** **Asceticism/Chastity**
Jordan, *Ethics of Sex*, 47-75
Juanita Bynum, *No More Sheets*, 19-33, 137-59 (electronic reserve)
Articles on purity balls to be distributed in class
Review discussion of purity balls at GenerationsofLight.myicontrol.com/generationsoflight
- Tu/Oct 20** **Asceticism/Chastity (cont’d)**
- Th/Oct 22** **Ex-Gay Ministries**
Machacek and Wilcox, 323-58
Jordan, 76-106
Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, 85-125 (electronic reserve)
- Tu/Oct 27** **Ex-Gay Ministries (cont’d)**
- Th/Oct 29** **Gender Identity**
Genesis 1-3 (to be distributed in class)
Ken Stone, “Food, Sex and the Garden of Eden,” in *Practicing Safer Texts*, 23-45
(electronic reserve)
Justin Tanis, *Trans-gendered*, 146-60 (electronic reserve)
Will Roscoe, “How to Become a Berdache,” in *Third Sex/Third Gender*, 329-72
(electronic reserve)
Serena Nanda, “Hijras,” in *Third Sex/Third Gender*, 373-417 (electronic reserve)

Tu/Nov 3 **Gender Identity** (cont'd)
Th/Nov 5 **Gender Identity** (cont'd)

UNIT FOUR
Sexuality and/as Religion

Tu/Nov 10 **The Sexuality of Jesus**
Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 91-102 (electronic reserve)
Mark Jordan, *Telling Truths in Church*, 79-98 (electronic reserve)

*****Unit Three paper due by 5PM**

Th/Nov 12 **Classic Texts**
Augustine, *Confessions* (Books I-IV, VI, VIII)

Recommended: Karmen MacKendrick, "Carthage Didn't Burn Hot Enough,"
in *Toward a Theology of Eros*, 205-17 (electronic reserve)

Tu/Nov 17 Amy Hollywood, "Sexual Desire, Divine Desire," in *Toward a Theology of Eros*, 119-33 (electronic reserve)
Martín Hugo Córdova Quero, "Friendship with Benefits," in *The Sexual Theologian*, 26-46 (electronic reserve)

Th/Nov 19 **Contemporary Texts**
Stephen Moore, *God's Gym*, 75-138 (electronic reserve)

Tu/Nov 24 Marcella Althaus-Reid, "Queer I Stand: Lifting the Skirts of God," in *The Sexual Theologian*, 99-109 (electronic reserve)
Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 47-86 (electronic reserve)

Th/Nov 26 **Thanksgiving Recess—No Class**

Tu/Dec 1 Bataille, *Story of the Eye*
Th/Dec 3

Tu/Dec 8 Concluding Thoughts

*****Unit Four paper due by 5PM**

*****Revised Autobiographical Reflection due (hard copy submitted in class)**

ASSIGNMENTS

With the single exception noted below, you must submit your assignments by e-mail (kbrintna@uncc.edu). *You must submit them as “.doc” files (Word documents), not “.docx” files.* Assignments submitted in formats I cannot open will be graded at my discretion.

You should familiarize yourself with and conform your papers to the Department of Religious Studies’ writing guidelines (www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/research/writingguide.htm). Failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.

You should also familiarize yourself with and conform your conduct to the University’s Code of Student Academic Integrity. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.

All papers should be typed, double-spaced, using a 12-point font, with one-inch margins.

(1) **Autobiographical Reflection** (10%)

At the beginning of the semester, students must submit a 2-3 page, *anonymous* essay commenting on their religious and sexual experiences and identities. This is an opportunity to reflect on how your life experience intersects with and prepares you for the questions to be explored in the course. *To maintain anonymity*, you will not put your name anywhere on the essay and will use a blank sheet of paper as a cover sheet. I will check your name off as you submit the assignments. You will not receive a letter grade for this essay, but will receive credit for doing it. This essay is due on **Thursday, September 10.**

At the conclusion of the semester, students must submit a revised version of this reflection—again, 2-3 pages, and anonymous. This revised essay is an opportunity to revisit the earlier version in light of the materials of the course. This essay is due on **Tuesday, December 8.**

Unlike all other assignments for the course, these essays must be submitted in class. No late papers will be accepted.

(2) **Unit Analysis Papers** (90%)

UNIT ONE. Students must write a 4-6 page paper about some perspective on an issue related to sexuality (for example, marriage, procreation, abortion, homosexuality, birth control) from a single religious tradition covered in Unit One. The essay should clearly and fairly represent the tradition under examination as well as the opinions on the issue under consideration. Students are expected to consult materials outside those presented in class for this essay. This essay is due **by 5PM, on Tuesday, September 22.**

UNIT TWO. Students must write a 4-6 page paper on the theoretical materials considered in Unit Two and/or Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex." How have these materials challenged your thinking? What questions are you now able to answer—or to ask? What in these materials is limited or problematic? How might they be extended or amended to overcome these problems? Students are encouraged, but not required, to place the theoretical readings into conversation with each other. At the same time, you should not try to discuss everything read during this unit, but should focus on some issue, question or theme. The essay should accurately summarize the relevant argument(s) and contain some evaluation of the materials as well. This essay need not consider materials outside those considered for class, but may do so. This essay is due **by 5PM, on Tuesday, October 6.**

UNIT THREE. Students must write a 4-6 page paper on the range of religious opinions on some issue relating to sexuality. The essay may cover an issue discussed in class or an issue of the student's own choosing. (If you choose to write about an issue not covered in class, check in with me first.) It should provide a clear, accurate and fair assessment of the materials under discussion. Students are expected to consider materials outside those discussed in class. This essay is due **by 5PM, on Tuesday, November 10.**

UNIT FOUR. Students must write a 4-6 page paper on some issue, question or theme related to the materials considered in unit four. Students may consider materials from the course or analogous, outside materials from either the Christian or another tradition. (If you choose to write about materials not considered in class, check in with me first.) The essay should demonstrate an understanding of the issues, themes and questions explored in this unit and the course as a whole. Students need not consider materials outside those considered for class, but may do so. This essay is due **by 5PM, on Tuesday, December 8.**

Papers submitted after the due date will receive a full letter-grade deduction for each day they are late.

GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

- A** Exceptional work. Careful, accurate, complete, sympathetic interpretation of the text(s). General observations supported by specific detail from the text(s) under analysis. Contains a strong and clear thesis. Contributes something particularly interesting, unique or creative above and beyond class materials and discussion. Clear and well-organized writing free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- B** Strong work. Attentive to the most significant details of the text(s). Conversant with the themes, questions and issues of the course. Has an obvious main point. Presents a reasonable interpretation supported by sufficient evidence. Clear and well-organized writing free of serious grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- C** Acceptable work with some problems. Fails to understand the text(s) on some points, or presents an incomplete explanation of them. Fails to show comprehension of the themes, questions and issues of the course. Has an unclear or unsupported thesis. Analysis may proceed at too general a level. Writing unclear in places, lacks a clear structure or has numerous grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. Fails to show a progressive improvement in analytic precision over previous assignments.
- D** Work with serious problems. Analysis proceeds at a very general level. Analysis gets significant details wrong or ignores issues that are inconsistent with the paper's main point. Discussion fails to engage the course materials. Significant problems with the clarity or organization of the writing. Significant issues with grammar, spelling or style. Repetition of writing errors noted in prior papers.
- F** Unacceptable work.

Given these standards, most students get B-range grades on most of their papers, especially those submitted near the beginning of the course. A handful of students will do A work, and another handful of students will do C work. Only rarely do students submit work that merits a D or F. *If you show up to class, work hard on your assignments and improve your work over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration when translating your individual assignment grades into a course grade.*

Please note: (1) All assignments are evaluated, in part, on the quality of your writing. Your writing needs to be clear, well-organized, free of spelling and grammatical mistakes with accurate and adequate citations. Failure to correct writing mistakes I note in one assignment in subsequent assignments will negatively influence my evaluation of your work. (2) In a 4-6 page essay, you can make one point—or, *possibly*, two closely related points. You *cannot*, for example, write an essay on “Religious Views on Birth Control” or “Mahatma Gandhi’s Ideas on Sexuality” in 4-6 pages. Keep your argument narrow, focused and precise. ***It is always better to address a small point, and do it well, than to try something quite grand, and do it superficially.*** I am not asking you to be *comprehensive* and *exhaustive*, but I expect you to be *clear, accurate, and thoughtful*.

