

Queerness & Normativity

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LAS 503, Sections 200 & TQ1
Spring Semester 2010

Office: Simpkins 115
Hours: TTh, 1:00-2:00
W, 3:00-5:00

Th, 5:30-8:00 p.m.
Waggoner 170
QC 60TH ST B17

Texts

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*.
Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.
Hwang, David Henry. *M Butterfly*.
The Judith Butler Reader. Ed. Sarah Salih and Judith Butler.
Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider*.
Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism. Ed.
Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan.
Sex, Gender, and Sexuality: The New Basics. (SGS) Ed. Abby L. Ferber,
Kimberly Holcomb, and Tre Wentling.
Warren, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of
Queer Life*.
Wojnarowicz, David. *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*.

Description

Queerness & Normativity interrogates the normal through a variety of related topics, including dissident sexuality, marriage, pop-cultural inclusion, globalization, and the imbrication of race and class in questions of gender and sexuality. This course not only rigorously introduces the discourse of queer theory and queer studies, but also asks students to apply theoretical concepts to specific sites of investigation in wide variety of media, including contemporary literature, visual art, film, television, and new media. Queerness & Normativity offers an overview of how queer studies operates in different academic disciplines, thereby introducing the field of cultural studies through intensive focus on the queer. At the same time that we examine relevant social, cultural, and political issues, we will work to develop the critical skills that heighten the appreciation of various art forms and that aid in understanding contemporary culture.

What are "Queer Studies"?

For cultural conservatives, these words signify at best the decline of humanistic study into the trivial and the obscene, and at worst the recruitment of innocent youth into a life of depravity, despair, and disease. Many self-identified lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgenders, moreover, object to the word, "queer." Some argue that it has an implicit masculine bias, like the word, "gay," before it; others find it an ugly term of derogation; still others see it as too inclusive, deeply uncomfortable with the fact that certain practicing heterosexuals have appropriated "queer" as the adjective of choice for their own activities. People outside of Anglo-American contexts object to the imposition of foreign identity terms, arguing that these names erase cultural specificity. Some critics also see "queer" as implicitly white. Often queer activists outside academia disparage "queer studies," along with its kissing cousin, "queer theory," as ivory tower mumbo-jumbo, useless to people's everyday struggles. Even "queer studies" supporters disagree about what this newly-emerging field should become.

There appears to be a broad consensus, nonetheless, that queer studies and queer theory engage in the critique of the normal in all of its political, cultural, moral, and scientific dynamics. "Queer" is used in the course title, rather than any other term, because long lists of identity terms can be tiresome. If the course were titled the unwieldy "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies & Normativity," someone would inevitably be excluded. What about, for instance, those who identify as "dykes," "bi-curious," "questioning," or "male lesbians"? And "Multiculturalism and Normativity" would be too broad and just too bland. So why not "queer"? A curt monosyllable with some edge, easily inflected with anger or curiosity, "queer" is versatile enough to serve as noun, adjective, or verb. Once the homophobe's favorite expletive, "queer" has become the watchword of radical sexual politics.

"Queer" implies a different sexual politics than the older identity terms do, in part because it entails the questioning of selfhood and its norms. Queer studies does not simply affirm non-normative sexuality and fight against oppression, but interrogates the meaning of human eroticism in all of its aspects. Part of the argument I hope to make during the course of the semester is that queer studies, beyond its usefulness for sexual minorities, has a lot to offer anyone who has an open mind and heart. Perhaps this conjunction of sex and study appears nonsensical, or silly. Allow me to interpose the words of Audre Lorde: "Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe."

Requirements

Every student will be responsible, at the end of the term, for 20+ page research essay that engages theoretical texts and a site of investigation of the student's own choosing. There will be several two-page assignments during the semester; and every student will give two in-class, 10-minute presentations. Presentation materials will be handed in at the end of class (or emailed). Ideally, at least one of the presentations will relate to the research essay. There are slots in the schedule for particular presentation topics, but students are also asked to design their own, second presentation. All writing must be typed in a standard 12-point font. Writing that exceeds one page of length must be stapled (unless emailed). As I will make local corrections on your work, I need to insist that you double-space everything.

Students will be responsible for bringing discussion questions for each week's readings. These will not be collected, but participation will be carefully measured. Everyone *must* participate. To participate actively means to keep up with the readings and to come to class every session prepared with insights, arguments, and questions. Thus, it is very much to your advantage to take notes as you read.

Please see <<http://www.wiu.edu/provost/student/>> for student rights and responsibilities.

Grading

Participation:	20%
First Presentation:	10%
Second Presentation:	10%
Homework:	10%
Research Essay:	50%

Up to two absences will be excused with proper documentation or advance warning (i.e., the student presents a compelling reason not to come to particular class *before* the session meets). However, *a student who misses three sessions for any reason will fail the course*. Plagiarism will also result in an F for the course, and I will report the student for academic discipline. Unexcused absences, or arriving late, will affect the participation grade.

Visiting My Office

Please take the opportunity to meet with me during my office hours, or by appointment, to talk about the readings, or about your writing. I can help you locate research texts that may be valuable for your research project. *I very much appreciate any kind of feedback about the course, too.*

Students with Disabilities

In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I will make academic accommodations for any student who notifies me of the need. For me to provide the proper accommodation(s), you must provide me documentation from Disability Support Services. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention, as I am not legally permitted to ask. Students who require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e., fire, tornado, etc.) should tell me the most appropriate procedures to follow. Please contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512.

Schedule

Week 1: January 21

Introduction to the course.

Film: *Tough Guise*.

Homework: *Two-page response to the movie.*

Week 2: January 28

Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, I.

SGS, "Masculinity as Homophobia."

Student presentation: Hegemonic Images of Masculinity: _____

On Screen: David Wojnarowicz's artwork.

Homework: *Two-page analysis of a single image of femininity.*

Week 3: February 4

Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, II & III.

SGS, "Heterosexism in Research."

SGS, "Privileges Held by Non-Trans People."

Student Presentation: Questionnaire _____

On Screen: Tobaron Waxman.

Week 4: February 11

History of Sexuality: Volume I.

SGS, "Dueling Dualisms."

Student presentation: Intersexuality _____

Film: TBA.

Week 5: February 18

The Judith Butler Reader, "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault" & "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions."

SGS, "Sexuality, Heterosexuality, and Gender Hierarchy."

Student presentation: Butler's reception: _____

On-Screen: Del LaGrace Volcano.

Homework: *Two-page response to Del LaGrace Volcano's artwork.*

Week 6: February 25

The Judith Butler Reader, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination,"
 "Melancholy Gender / Refused Identification," & "Competing
 Universalities."

SGS, "Gender Shock" & "Am I Obsessed?"

Student presentation: Gender Identity Disorder _____

On Screen: TBA.

Week 7: March 4

The Trouble with Normal, Chapters One through Three.

SGS, "Whose Gay Community?"

Student presentation: Media Images of Gay Men _____

On Screen: TBA.

Homework: TBA.

Week 8: March 11

The Trouble with Normal, Chapter Four & Conclusion.

SGS, "A Young Man from Chelm."

Student presentation: LGBT K-12 Teachers _____

In-Class Artist: Dave Kube

Spring Break**Week 9: March 25**

Sister Outsider, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," "The Transformation of Silence into
 Language and Action," "The Uses of the Erotic," & "Man Child."

SGS, "Snow White and the Seven 'Dwarfs.'"

Student presentation: Fairy Tales & Cultural Myths _____

On Screen: TBA.

Week 10: April 1

No class.

Week 11: April 8

Close to the Knives, "Self-Portrait in Twenty-Three Rounds" through "Do Not
 Doubt the Dangerousness of the 12-Inch Tall Politician."

SGS, "Doing Gender and Doing Gender Inappropriately."

Student presentation: Gendered Violence _____

On Screen: TBA.

Week 12: April 15

Close to the Knives, The Suicide of a Guy . . . "

Film: TBA.

Week 13: April 22

M Butterfly.

Queer Globalizations, "Dissident Globalizations."

SGS, "Walk like a Man."

Student presentation: Drag Queens or Kings

Homework: *Two-Page Personal Narrative.*

On Screen: TBA.

Week 14: April 29

Queer Globalizations, "Can Homosexuals End Western Civilization as We Know It?" "Family Affairs," & Consuming Lifestyle."

SGS, "Loose Lips Sink Ships."

SGS, "Loving Outside Simple Lines."

Student presentation: F to M Surgeries

Week 15: May 6

Queer Globalizations, "Dancing La Vida Loca" & "Stealth Bombers of Desire."

SGS, "We Are All Works in Progress."

Student presentation: Trans Politics

On Screen: TBA.

Final Exam Week

Research Essay due on Monday, May 10 by 5:00 p.m. (MS Word email submissions also accepted).



Keith Haring,
Untitled,
1982

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