Same-Sex, Gender, and Religion

RELG/SEMN 230 Spring 2011

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Course Description

This course explores the intersection of religions, same-sex affection/love/relations, and the category of gender. At the most basic level we examine what different religions have to say about sexuality, in particular, non-heterosexualities. We will look at the role that gender plays in these constructions of these sexualities, and we will return to our starting point to analyze the role of religions in these constructions of gender and sexualities. Throughout this term, students are introduced to the fundamental concerns of the academic study of religion, lesbian/gay/queer/trans/intersex studies, and approaches to the study of these topics within the body of post/anticolonial theories. Among the topics considered are the construction of normative religious and sexual ideals, reading across the grain of religious teachings about sexuality and gender, and the role of ritual and performance in religion and sexuality. We will pay particular attention to the questions of identity, voice, history, and emerging discourses found around the globe.

Course Goals

• learn and understand the fundamental categories of the academic study of religion and sexualities in cultures not our own;
• understand the genre of religious texts and discourses;
• to learn how think through and outside our own assumptions;
• conduct research and write up the results in a comprehensive paper; and
• learn how to extract central questions from the readings and contribute to class discussion based on students' own questions and curiosity.

Course Requirements

Required Texts  


On Reserve  
Reserve readings are available as .pdfs on the Moodle site for this course (moodle.kzoo.edu). Reserve readings are noted on the Schedule of Readings with an asterisk.
Responses

Students should work through the readings from the first to the last, finishing all of the material by Monday of the week that the reading is assigned. Students are required to turn in reading responses to the assigned material each week, according to the attached guidelines are due each Monday in class. Students will be expected to contribute to, if not lead, class discussion on a regular basis drawing on the questions they pose in these reading responses. These will be graded on a + / ✓ / - scale with clear instructions for improvement. Responses turned in by the end of the day will incur a 50% reduction in the grade, and responses turned in more than 24 hours late will receive a 75% reduction in the grade. Taken together, responses will be worth 50% of the final grade; ten responses will be due throughout the quarter for a total of 5% for each summary.

Preparedness

Based on the reading summaries, students are responsible for the material for class discussion. Overall, this component of your grade is based on students’ responses to impromptu questions, questions posed by peers and the professor alike. This is not a grade based on participation but on the degree of “preparedness” that you display in class, and your willingness to go find answers and contribute to the collective body of knowledge in this class. I will maintain a grade sheet that measures your (a) comprehension of the reading; (b) application of the readings to real-life situations; and (c) your willingness to “step up” and engage in the process of learning by volunteering to look up answers to questions, think with your peers, listen carefully to class discussion, and to ask interesting questions throughout the term. Students may come talk to me about this component of their grade at any point in the term. 10% of the final grade.

Research project

A paper detailing the work conducted in a research project of your choice is due on Friday of Week Nine. Details will be provided in a separate handout, but bibliography, drafts, and rewrites will be graded throughout the term. 40% of the final grade.

Honor code

Students are expected to abide by the Honor Code of Kalamazoo College. Collaborative work is encouraged on reading responses and class work, but the final papers turned in by each student should be her or his own work, unless explicit permission has been granted for a joint paper. Drafts of papers are almost always stronger when read by a few friends or a tutor in the Writing Center.

Disabilities

Any student with a disability who needs an accommodation or other assistance in completing this course successfully should make an appointment to speak with me as soon as possible. Please note that I have lost close to 70% of my hearing in my left ear, and require your willingness to work with this challenge.

Attendance

Students may miss no more than two class periods, including those classes for which prior arrangements have been made with the professor. The discussions in the course demand this requirement. If you have a persistent illness, please see me as soon as you are aware of the problem. If you are a senior and have interviews, we’ll need to work out some arrangements. Students who miss more than two classes will incur a grade reduction of their final grade without exception.

Final Grades

- Reading responses: 50%
- Research projects: 40%
- Preparedness: 10%
Schedule of Readings

Week One.  Defining the Territory
Readings:  Boswell, Christianity and Social Tolerance, chapters 1 and 2 in Part I, “Points of Departure” (3-59).
           Brooten, Love Between Women, Introduction (1-29).
Topics:  What tools do we need to understand same-sex, gender, and religion?
           Learning to be “religiously musical”

Week Two.  Examining Same-Sex in Christianity
Readings:  Boswell, Christianity and Social Tolerance, chapters 3-6 (61-168).
Topics:  Defining “homosexual,” “lesbian,” and “same-sex” in history
           Tough facts about studying women and lesbians

Week Three.  “Women with Masculine Desires,” Sappho, and Paul
Readings:  Brooten, chapters 2, 3, 5, and 6 (29-113 and 143-188).
Topics:  Reading religious texts
           Reading sacred texts across the grain

Week Four.  Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism
Readings:  Brooten, chapters 7-11 (189-362)
Topics:  Bible and Interpretations of Homosexuality
           Sex and Same-Sex in Early Christianity

Week Five.  Early Middle Ages:  Shifting Fortunes
Readings:  Boswell, Parts III and IV (169-334).
Topics:  Celibacy, male-male homoeroticism, and the Church
           Impact of Boswell’s work

THESIS AND SIX SOURCES FOR RESEARCH PROJECT DUE FRIDAY IN CLASS.  WORTH 10% OF PROJECT GRADE.

Week Six.  Same-Sex Love in South Asian Religions
Readings:  Vanita and Kidwai, Part I (1-54) and Part II (55-106)
Topics:  Reading myths
           Reading the fine print

STATUS REPORT ON RESEARCH PROJECT DUE ON THURSDAY, IN CLASS--WORTH 25% OF PROJECT GRADE.
Week Seven.  Same-Sex, Trans, and Sex Change

Readings: Vanita and Kidwai, Part III (107-190)

Topics: Understanding rituals and monastic life
Continuity of interpretations

Week Eight. Same-Sex in Western Asia

Samar Habib, Female Homosexuality in the Middle East: Histories and Representations, selections TBA*

Topics: Mapping Asia
Orientalism, same-sex, and gender

Drafts of research projects are due Friday in class, worth 25% of project grade.

Week Nine. Gender, Feminism, and Same-sex

Readings: Najmabadi, chapters 1-4 (11-131)

Topics: Analyzing symbols, institutions, and gender
Role of the nation

Final drafts of research project due Friday in class. Final draft is worth 40% of project grade.

Week Ten. Sex, Gender, and Cultural Labor

Readings: Najmabadi, chapters 5-8 and epilogue (132-244)

Topics: Religion, Culture, and Sex
What did we learn?
Guidelines for Responses

Mechanics.

- Due on Monday of each week in class, beginning the first week (covering the reading for that week; i.e., the reading summary due on Tuesday Week 2 should cover Week 2’s readings). For Week One and Week Ten, responses are due on Wednesday.
- 2-4 pages for all readings, single-spaced, 11 or 12 point font.
- Bring two hard copies to class: one to use in class and one to turn in (until further notice).

Format: Three sections.

- **Section I.** Extract the main points of the reading using direct quotes, with page numbers. Feel free to include minor points that you found intriguing. Provide page numbers for each citation; failing to provide page numbers is plagiarism (if you have done the assignment properly). The intent behind this is to be sure that you understand what the author has actually said (instead of what you think she has said). If there is reading from more than one source, separate the citations by author and title within section I.

- **Section II.** Provide a one-page single spaced response to the week’s readings as a whole (i.e., not a response paragraph for each reading if there is more than one for the week). Engage the main points and arguments, but don’t do a summary of the material. The purpose of this is to get the author’s words into your vocabulary and into your thoughts so that you can fully digest the material. This is the opportunity to engage your intellectual curiosity. Use the first person, raise your own questions, and tell me and the class what you think of the weeks’ readings. Feel free to apply the readings to your personal experiences, or to use your own life as the basis for a critique of the material as relevant.

- **Section III.** Write two good questions that link the reading to other readings, lectures, or class discussions. The questions may be on each reading, or may be on the readings as a whole where that is appropriate. The goal of this portion of the assignment is to synthesize the material you extract from the main points of the reading. If these questions are perfunctory, I’ll comment on that and will expect improvement in future questions.

Grading

- The rationale for doing this exercise is twofold. First, it keeps all of us on the same track and literally on the same page. Second, learning how to think with authors is a critical skill in learning new material and new concepts. Low-key, regular, and informal writing is the best way to accomplish this.

- These will be graded informally each week on a + / ✓ / - scale. If there are problems, and you improve over the course of the term and turn in your responses on time, you should have few worries about your final grade. If there is no improvement, however, you will be evaluated accordingly.

- To be fair to all students, summaries received by 5 p.m. or later will receive only partial credit (50%). Summaries that are more than 24 hours late will receive only 25% credit. I will not accept submissions by e-mail under any circumstances.
BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR SAME-SEX LOVE AND RELIGION


Dunne, Bruce W. “Homosexuality in the Middle East: An Agenda for Historical Research.” Arab Studies Quarterly 12 no. 3-4 (1990): 55-82.


