

**American Studies 401
Sexual Orientations
Fall 2006
Thursday 7:00-9:45
Code: 10200
H 513**

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Required Reading:

Edward Stein, *The Mismeasure of Desire: The Science, Theory, and Ethics of Sexual Orientation* (1999)

Marjorie Garber, *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (2000)

Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (1991)

William D. Fellows, *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest* (2001)

J.L. King, *On the Down Low: A Journey into the Lives of "Straight" Black Men Who Sleep with Men* (2005)

Annie Proulx, Larry McMurtry, and Diana Ossana, *Brokeback Mountain: Story to Screenplay* (2005)

John Ibson, "Lessons Learned on Brokeback Mountain: Expanding the Possibilities of American Manhood"

We will use the six books extensively in class. They are all available at The Little Professor Book Center. The article will be passed out in class.

Course Requirements:

As befits a seminar, there will be no lectures or professor's monologues in this class. Instead, our class meetings will be devoted to discussions of the reading that we will do together and of the films that I will be showing. It is essential that you read and carefully consider the material assigned for a particular session. On **each Thursday** that has reading assigned, you are to bring **a list of three questions** prompted by that week's reading. I will collect your questions and use them to enhance our discussions. The questions you devise, then, should be ones that you think would be good to talk about.

Because a good seminar depends on widespread student involvement, **attendance at each class meeting is required**. If you must miss a class, please inform the group ahead of time, if possible, when you will be missing.

You must also conduct **independent research** for this class, culminating in a paper of at least 20 pages if you are an undergraduate or at least 25 pages if you are a graduate student. Your paper is to be a comparative analysis of how different **sexual relationships or attachments**, as defined by the sex of the participants, and/or how **individual persons**, defined as having different sexual orientations, figure in two particular **settings, events, or forms of expression**. Whether you examine two places, two events, or two forms of expression, you must research and incorporate into your

paper not only the places, the events, or the expressions themselves, but also the broad cultural context of the places, the events, or the expressions. General examples would include:

1. Comparative ethnography: a comparison of the cultural workings of two different yet roughly analogous places that you visit and study this semester--such as two clubs or bars, two beaches, or two churches--with one place catering to persons of a different sexual orientation than those who frequent the other place.

2. Cultural events: a comparison of two different yet roughly analogous events, historical or contemporary, in which the differing sexual orientation of the participants has been noted or in which the law's treatment and/or protection of sexual minorities has been contested. Two crimes (perhaps but not necessarily culminating in trials) or two political campaigns would be especially viable choices.

3. Cultural expression: a comparison how same-sex and different-sex orientations figure in two films, two novels, two television series, or two sets of advertisements, or else a comparison of the work of two humorists, photographers, or painters of differing sexual orientation.

If you do an ethnography, you obviously will not have to account for historical change, but you may or may not introduce a historical dimension into a study of events or cultural expression; that is, you may study contemporaneous events or expressions or else events or expressions from two different eras. Be sure, as appropriate, to address factors apart from sexual orientation—issues of generation, race, gender, region, and social class—in your work.

You must have selected your **research topic**, and have notified me of your choice in writing, no later than **Thursday, October 19**. This notification, which need not exceed 3 pages, must include a discussion of your planned procedures and goals and a tentative title for your paper. We will devote our last three meetings to **presentations**, each lasting 15-20 minutes, of these student research projects. (Those who present earlier will, of course, not be expected to be as conclusive in their findings as those who present later on.) Your **paper's final version** is due at our last meeting, during Finals Week, on **Thursday, December 14**. Please see me in my office as often as you like to talk about your research. I also welcome your phone calls or e-mails. I refuse to assign a topic, but I'll be happy to make suggestions that might help you select a subject for your research.

Your paper must include a bibliography that lists all sources consulted in your research, not just the sources that are actually cited in the text. You may use either footnotes or endnotes, whichever you prefer. You may use any research paper format guide that you like; just be consistent in the way that you cite sources, etc.

Grading:

The grade on your research paper—the paper itself, the presentation, and the research proposal—will constitute 50% of your course grade. The quality and extent of your participation in our discussions, including the several lists of discussion questions you'll prepare, will constitute the other 50%. I use the university's plus/minus grading system.

COURSE OUTLINE

8/24 Introduction to the seminar
 Film: "Middle Sexes: Redefining He and She," a documentary by Anthony Thomas

I ASSESSING THE CONCEPT ITSELF: SEXUAL DESIRE AS A MATTER OF "ORIENTATION"

Reading: Edward Stein, *The Mismeasure of Desire: The Science, Theory, and Ethics of Sexual Orientation*

8/31 Stein, Introduction, Chapters 1-6, pp. 3-189.

9/7 Stein, Chapters 7-12, pp. 190-348.

II DESIRE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES? THE "PROBLEM" OF BISEXUALITY

Reading: from Garber, *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*

9/14 Garber, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 5, & 10.

9/21 Garber, Chapters 11, 15, 17, & 21.

III SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: LESBIANISM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

Reading: Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*

9/28 Film & discussion in class: "Kissing Jessica Stein" (2001)

10/5 Faderman, entire book.

IV SEXUAL DIFFERENTNESS IN UNEXPECTED PLACES: GAY MEN IN RURAL AMERICA

Reading: Will Fellows, *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest*

10/12 Film & discussion in class: "The Mudge Boy" (2003)

10/19 Fellows, entire book.

Research project topic and tentative title due.

V SAME-SEX INVOLVEMENT WITHOUT A LABEL: INNOVATION OR DENIAL ?

Reading: J.L. King, *On the Down Low: A Journey into the Lives of “Straight” Black Men Who Sleep with Men*

10/26 King, Introduction, Chapters 1-9, pp. ix-104.

11/2 King, Chapters 10-18, pp. 105-186.

VI ENNIS, JACK, AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE: MAKING SENSE OF THE “ ‘BROKEBACK’ PHENOMENON”

Reading: Annie Proulx, Larry McMurtry, and Diana Ossana, *Brokeback Mountain: Story to Screenplay*; John Ibson, “Lessons Learned on Brokeback Mountain: Expanding the Possibilities of American Manhood”

11/9 Film & discussion in class: “Brokeback Mountain” (2005)

11/16 Proulx *et al.*, entire book; Ibson article.

FALL RECESS

VII PRESENTATIONS OF STUDENT RESEARCH

11/30 Presentations of Student Research

11/7 Presentations of Student Research

11/14 Presentations of Student Research