

American Studies 473
Sexual Orientations & American Culture
Spring 2008
Code: 18675
University Hall 333
TR 1:00-2:15

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2:30-3:30 & by appointment
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Required Reading:

Leila Rupp, *A Desired Past: A History of Same-Sex Love in America* (2002).
Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communication and Community, 1940s-1970s* (2006).
David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (2006).
Ted Gidonse and Robert Williams, *From Boys to Men: Gay Men Write about Growing Up* (2006).
Bert (Peter) Archer, *The End of Gay: And the Death of Heterosexuality* (2004).
Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault of Our Civil Rights* (2007).

Welcome to American Studies 473. This semester we'll examine the origins, manifestations, and consequences of one of the most widely and deeply held notions in American culture today: that we have a sexual identity, not just sexual activities; that this identity is determined by the sex of the people with whom we have (or yearn to have) sexual involvement; and that this identity may meaningfully be spoken of as an "orientation," as if it were a particular point on a sort of sexual compass. A debate exists over whether sexual orientation is essentially biological or cultural—whether it is, simplistically put, a matter of choice or not, and hence whether it may be changed or not—but the notion of sexual identity or orientation itself is very rarely questioned. So firmly held is this notion of sexual identity nowadays, and so widespread is the interest in knowing people's sexual identity, that we often ignore the fact that some other societies—apparently including our own society in earlier times—have not found it meaningful to employ a notion of sexual identity or sexual orientation. In the language of cultural studies, this course will *interrogate* and *historicize* the notion of sexual orientation and sexual identity.

Course Requirements:

Our class sessions will be devoted to my lectures, our discussions, an occasional film, and, finally, your informal reports about your research projects. It is essential that you attend class regularly and that you complete reading by the day for which it is assigned. This class will require your active involvement—as listeners and, I hope, as speakers too—in our frequent discussions.

As we are concluding our coverage of the Johnson book, I will announce a topic on which you must write **an essay** of about 2,000 words. I'll discuss the essay topic with you in class. Your essay should rely on what we have covered through the end of the week we will finish discussing Johnson. The essay will be prepared outside of class; you will have two weeks to prepare it. On the same day the essay is due, graduate students must also submit an **annotated bibliography** of at least ten works that examine an aspect of sexual orientation of interest to the student. Preparing this bibliography definitely doesn't require reading all of the sources listed, just discovering them and consulting them thoroughly enough to discern their content and significance. The topic explored in this assignment may be related to but is not to be exactly the same as the research project discussed below; the bibliography will count half as much as the midterm essay.

Next, all students must also conduct **independent research** for this class, culminating in a paper of at least 2,000 words if you are an undergraduate or at least 2,500 words if you are a graduate student. Your paper is to be a comparative analysis of how sexual orientation figures in two different locations, 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. The categories of this research are thus:

- 1. Places: Comparative ethnography:** a comparison of two different yet roughly analogous locations that you visit and study this semester—such as two clubs or bars, two beaches, or two churches—with one place primarily catering to persons of a sexual orientation different than that of those who frequent the other place.
- 2. Cultural events:** a comparison of two different yet roughly analogous events, historical or contemporary, which highlight different sexual orientations. Two crimes, two “scandals,” or two political campaigns would be especially viable choices.
- 3. Cultural expression:** a comparison how same-sex and different-sex orientations figure in two roughly analogous films, novels, television series, or advertising campaigns; or else a comparison of the roughly analogous work of two humorists, photographers, or painters of different sexual orientations.

If you do an ethnography, you obviously will not have to account for historical change, but you may or may not introduce that factor into a study of events or cultural expression; that is, you may or may not study contemporaneous events or expressions. Similarly, be sure, as appropriate, to confront factors of generation, race, gender, region, and social class in your work. Beginning your research, you shouldn't assume that sexual orientation will turn out to be, or not to be, highly significant. Your task is to gauge its significance.

You must have selected your research topic and have notified me of your choice in writing, along with a tentative title and a preliminary bibliography for your paper, no later than **Thursday, February 28**, the end of the sixth week of class. Your paper is due

at **our last regular class meeting**. 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 completed 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.

Lastly, the **final exam** will be an essay of around 2,500 words. The essay will require that you review all of the material covered throughout the semester. To be prepared outside of class, the essay will be due on **Tuesday, May 13, at 12 Noon**. Graduate students must also submit a **critical review** of around 1,000 words of one work selected from the annotated bibliography prepared at the time of the midterm essay; it will count half as much as the final essay.

Grading:

In determining your **grade for written work**, I will count your midterm work as 20%, your independent research project as 40%, and your final work as 40%. My criteria in evaluating the midterm essay, the research project, and the final essay are: understanding, originality, evidence, clarity, and organization. For graduate students, I'll use the same criteria in evaluating the critical review that's due along with the final essay; for their annotated bibliography due early in the semester, I'll look for creativity in topic selection and for succinctness in describing a source.

As I then determine your course grade, the quality and extent of your class participation will raise or lower your grade for written work as much as one full letter. I use the university's plus/minus grading system. Numerical equivalents of grades are: 4.3=A+; 4.0=A; 3.7=A-; 3.3=B+; 3.0=B; 2.7=B-; 2.3=C+; 2.0=C; 1.7=C-; 1.3=D+; 1.0=D; .7=D-; below .7=F.

I do not make or accept **extra credit** assignments. I will extend deadlines for written work for compelling reasons.

Academic dishonesty is a very serious matter. Depending on the severity of the offense, the penalty will range from failure on a particular assignment to failure in the course. I might report an especially severe instance of dishonesty to the Dean of Students, and this might result in an even more serious penalty. As the University Catalog aptly puts it, academic dishonesty "usually involves an attempt by a student to show possession of a level of knowledge or skill which he or she does not possess." Further information on academic dishonesty is contained in the University Catalog's section on "Grading Policies."

COURSE OUTLINE

- Tu 1/22** Introducing Ourselves and the Course
- Th 1/24** Disorientation: Sexuality in Cross Cultural Perspective
Film: “Middle Sexes: Redefining He and She” (HBO)
- Tu 1/29** Sexual Orientation in Contemporary American Culture: An Introductory Discussion
Video: Clips from “The Bachelor” (ABC), “Boy Meets Boy” (Bravo), and “Straight Eye for the Queer Guy” (Spike)

A. ACCEPTING THE BINARY: AMERICAN HISTORY AND THE INVENTION OF THE HOMOSEXUAL

Reading: Rupp, *A Desired Past*

- Th 1/31** One Introduction: Thinking about Aunt Leila; Two, In the Beginning: Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America, pp. 1-36
- Tu 2/5** Three, Worlds of Men, Worlds of Women: Sex and Romantic Friendship in an Industrializing and Expanding Nation; Four, Definitions and Deviance: Sexual Transformations at the Turn of the Century, pp. 37-100
- Th 2/7** Five, Coming Together: Contested Identities and the Emergence of Communities; Six, Becoming a People: Lesbian and Gay Worlds and the Organization of Resistance; Seven, Conclusion: Something Old, Something New, pp. 101-199

B. FINDING OTHERS, DEFINING YOURSELF: FORMATION OF THE GAY IDENTITY IN MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

Reading: Meeker, *Contacts Desired*

Tu 2/12 A Closet or Just Another Room? American Homosexuality before the
Th 2/14 1970s

Film: “Before Stonewall” (1985)

Tu 2/19 Introduction, “The Sexual Communication Network as an Agent of
Change; Part 1, *Homosexuals Today—The 1950s*, pp. 1-108

Th 2/21 Part 2, *The Homosexual Revolution in the 1960s*, pp. 109-195

Tu 2/26 Part 3, Do-It-Yourself into the 1970s; Epilogue, The Study of
Th 2/28 Sexuality in the Internet Age, pp. 197-258

*****Paper Topics Due*****

C. UNHAPPY DAYS, A LASTING LEGACY: THE STIGMA OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN POSTWAR AMERICA

Reading: Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*

Tu 3/4 Introduction, “Panic on the Potomac,” Chapter 1, Peurifoy’s
Revelation: *The Politics of the Purges*; Chapter 2, “This Used to Be a
Very Gay City”: *Lafayette Park and the Sex Crime Panic*,” pp. 1-64

Th 3/6 Chapter 3, “Cookie Pushers in Striped Pants”: *The Lavender Lads in the
State Department*; Chapter 4, Fairies and Fair Dealers: *The Immoral
Bureaucracy*, pp. 65-99

Tu 3/11 Chapter 5, The Hoey Investigation: *Searching for a Homosexual Spy*;
Chapter 6, “Let’s Clean House”: *The Eisenhower Security Program*,
pp. 101-146

Th 3/13 Chapter 7, Interrogations and Disappearances: *Gay and Lesbian
Subculture in 1950s Washington*; Chapter 8, “Homosexual Citizens”:
The Mattachine Society of Washington; Epilogue, pp. 147-214

Midterm Exam (Two Weeks to Prepare)

D. BECOMING: GAY MEN REMINISCE

Reading: Gideonse and Williams, *From Boys to Men*

Tu 3/18 The Coming-Out Narrative in Contemporary American Culture
Th 3/20 Film: "Dorian Blues" (2004)

Tu 3/25 "Sleeping Eros," "The Story I Told Myself," "Preppies Are My Weakness," "Barbie Girls," Signs," pp. 1-68

Th 3/27 "No Matter What Happens," "The Lives and Deaths of Buffalo Butt," "Dick," "The Upshot," Guide," pp. 69-141

Spring Recess

Tu 4/8 "Terrence," "The Boy with the Questions and the Kid with the Answers," "A Brief History of Industrial Music," "The Competitive Lives of Gay Twins," "Five Stories about Francis," pp. 143-222.

Th 4/10 "Mom-Voice," "Growing Up in Horror," "Inheritance," "Whatever Happened to. . .," "Peristalis," "Aplysia California," pp. 223-301

E. THE SUBTLETIES OF SEXUALITY: THE DESIRABILITY AND LIKLIHOOD OF LEAVING THE BINARY BEHIND

Reading: Archer, *The End of Gay*

Tu 4/15 Introduction, Part One, pp. 1-60

Th 4/17 Part Two, pp. 61-149

Tu 4/22 Part Three, pp. 153-233

F. THE PRICE OF ACCEPTANCE: BEYOND MERE TOLERATION OF DIFFERENCE

Reading: Yoshino, *Covering*

Th 4/24 An Uncovered Self; Part One, pp. 3-107

Tu 4/29 Part Two, pp. 111-164

Th 5/1 Part Three; Epilogue, pp. 167-201

Tu 5/6 Discussion of your research projects

Th 5/8 Conclusions, Course Evaluations
*******Research Projects Due*******

Tu 5/13 **Final Exam Essay Due: 12 Noon**