

# Sex Wars: Religion and Gender in the Public Sphere

## Course Description:

Religious traditions have always had a lot to say about sex, gender, and sexuality—be it eunuchs under Roman rule or reproductive autonomy in the US today. Many heated and long-standing public debates take place at this very intersection. While we tend to imagine religion as inherently sex, religious communities have diverse and diverging approaches to sex and sexuality. In this course, we turn to “Sex Wars” in the public imagination, including but not limited to: abortion, miscegenation, gay marriage, sodomy, contraception, trans life, child and sexual abuse, consent, and the AIDS crisis. Using resources from religious studies and gender studies, we will investigate the way such public debates appear and recur, deepening our understanding of the relationship between religion, racialized gender, and public discourse, and developing tools to both research on and intervene in these ongoing debates.

## Why Take It?

Think about how many times a day you see hotly-contested debates about, gender, and sexuality unfolding—on TV, in movies, on social media, at the family dinner table, and more. While we are not always prompted to think of these topics as intricately intertwined, they are—and once you start looking, you can see it everywhere. This course will teach you what you are looking at, how to talk about it, and focus your attention on intervening into long-standing public and private debates on these topics. Especially true when thinking about topics that are so close to home for so many, thinking and talking about religion, gender, and sexuality is not easy, and we may often be expected *not* to talk about this. Here, we will practice talking about these issues respectfully and convincingly, ready to make a difference in conversations about topics that impact how we live, love, work, and communicate.

## Learning Goals:

This course aims to provide students with a critical understanding of the relationships between religion, gender, and sexuality that emerge as key touchpoints in public discourse. We will learn through close reading; discursive, rhetorical and visual analysis; and class discussions of canonical and emerging works on gender, sexuality, and religion from fields including religious studies, queer and trans studies, Black studies, feminist thought, sociology, anthropology, and popular cultural material. In addition to learning key information on the history, formation, and current state of debates about religion, gender, and sexuality—and particularly how race, gender, and sexuality all interact with religion in public debates—students will develop their analytical writing and argumentative skills, the ability to write convincingly for public audiences, and how to make sense of the discourses of religion and sex that surround us.

## ASSIGNMENTS

<b>Grading:</b>	Letter graded.	
	Participation:	15%
	10 Reflection Posts:	20%
	2 Response Papers:	30%
	Discourse Analysis Presentation:	10%
	Final Public-Facing Project and Reflection:	25%

***Participation:*** Learning is an active undertaking! I ask that you come to our class each week having read and annotated the assigned readings and ready to join in conversation. **Participation includes both class attendance and contributing to the class discussion.** We will discuss a number of controversial and difficult topics over the semester, given the nature of this material: I expect students to engage each other in good faith and generosity, and to take part in the co-creation of a critical, questioning, and respectful classroom environment.

***Reflection Posts:*** Over the course of the semester, you are responsible for posting **ten (10) reflection posts to Canvas before 9 AM on Tuesdays and Thursdays.** **These posts should be 400 words or fewer.** These are graded as Complete/Incomplete.

***Response Papers:*** Students are required to submit **two (2) response papers that are 4-5 double-spaced pages in length. The first is due by February 23 at midnight, and the second by April 12 at midnight.** In these papers, put at least three and no more than five readings from the course into conversation with each other to make sense of a specific instance of a “Sex War.” What “war” or touchpoint you focus on is your choice, and can be represented by a piece of media, news article, social media post, film, or public discourse in another form, where ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality are being discussed in religious terms, or through religious ideas, or in relation to religious beliefs and practices. How do the texts from our class help you make sense of and analyze the issue? What strategies do the participants employ to communicate their ideas? How do they position themselves? How and where do religion, religious rhetoric, or religious ideas appear? Letter graded.

***Discourse Analysis Presentation:*** Throughout the semester, each student is responsible for a **fifteen-minute presentation and discussion facilitation about a news article** that discusses a conflict over gender, sex, and sexuality that is refracted through religious concerns, ideas, or beliefs. The article should come from a well-known and mainstream news organization. Think of questions to ask students, readings from the semester to put in conversation, and what you hope your peers will take away from your presentation. Letter graded.

***Final Public-Facing Project and Reflection:***

Students are responsible for a **final project that focuses on writing for a public audience**. Think about the topic or “war” where you hope to intervene. This can be an op-ed for a major newspaper, a long-form nonfiction piece for a public audience, a podcast or video, a website, or something else of your choice. **Alongside the piece itself, include a five-page formal reflection:** think about the process of writing, what your goals are for the piece, who you imagine as your conversation partners, and who your intended audience is. **Include an annotated bibliography** with at least three sources from class readings and three sources from your own research. **Due May 14 by midnight.** Letter graded.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

Thursday, Jan 25	<i>Introduction</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No reading</li> </ul>
Tuesday, Jan 30	<i>What Sex Wars?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foucault, <i>History of Sexuality</i> Volume 1 “Part One: We “Other Victorians”” and “Part Two: The Repressive Hypothesis” (1-50)</li> <li>Janet Jakobsen, “Because Religion” (33-65) in <i>The Sex Obsession: Perversity and Possibility in American Politics</i></li> </ul>
Thursday, Feb 1	<i>Example 1: Abortion</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R. Marie Griffith, “The Battle over Birth Control in the Roaring Twenties” (1-48) and “The Abortion War Before and After <i>Roe v. Wade</i>” (201-240) in <i>Moral Combat</i></li> <li>Bev Harrison, “The Morality of Procreative Choice” (32-56) in <i>Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion</i></li> </ul>
Tuesday, Feb 6	<i>Whose Sex Wars?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”</li> <li>Dorothy Roberts, “The Dark Side of Birth Control” (56-103) in <i>Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty</i></li> </ul>
Thursday, Feb 8	<i>Example 2: Miscegenation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fay Botham, “States’ Rights and the Southern White Protestant Theology of Race in Antimiscegenation Laws and Cases, 1867–1964” in <i>Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law</i></li> <li>Max S. Hering Torres, “Purity of Blood: Problems of Interpretation”</li> </ul>
Tuesday, Feb 13	<i>Why Sex Wars?</i>

- Benedicta Ward, “The Theme of Repentance” and “St Mary Magdalene; the Biblical Model of Repentance” in *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (1-25)
- Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, “Why Religion, Why Sex” (1-18) in *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*
- Judith Butler, “What Threat? The Campaign Against “Gender Ideology.”” *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics, and Innovation* (1-12)

Thursday, Feb 15

*Example 3: Chastity, Celibacy, and Sexual Renunciation*

- Peter Brown, “From Apostle to Apologist: Sexual Order and Sexual Renunciation in the Early Church” in *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*
- Joan Cadden, “Is Sex Necessary? The Problem of Sexual Abstinence” (259-278) in *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*
- Amy DeRogatis, “Sex and the Single Evangelical” (10-41) from *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism*

Thursday, Feb 22

*Power*

- Colleen M Conway, “Introduction: Jesus and Gender” and “How to Be a Man in the Greco-Roman World” in *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (1-34)
- Foucault, “Part Three: Scientia Sexualis,” “Part Four: The Deployment of Sexuality,” and “Part Five: Right of Death and Power over Life” in *History of Sexuality Volume 1* (51-160)

Tuesday, Feb 27

*Power II*

- Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics”
- Jasbir Puar, “Introduction: The Cost of Getting Better” and ““Will Not Let Die”: Debilitation and Inhuman Biopolitics in Palestine”” (1-32, 127-154)

Thursday, Feb 29

*Example 4: Consent*

- Wendy Mallette, “Beverly Smith’s Notes on This Mess”: The Affective Politics of the Lesbian Feminist Killjoy in Queer Progress Narratives” (250-266)
- Susan Brownmiller, “The Mass Psychology of Rape: An Introduction” and “In the Beginning Was the Law” in *Men, Women, and Rape* (11-30)

Tuesday, Mar 5

*The Body*

- Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body”
- Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex”
- Gayle Rubin with Judith Butler, “Sexual Traffic”

Thursday, Mar 7	<p><i>Example 5: Contraception</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul Preciado, “Pharmacopower” (144-235) in <i>Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era</i></li> <li>• Barbara Johnson, “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion” (28-47)</li> </ul>
Tuesday, Mar 12	<p><i>Reproduction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”</li> <li>• Jennifer L Morgan, ““Hannah and Hir Children”: Reproduction and Creolization Among Enslaved Women (107-143) in <i>Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery</i></li> </ul>
Thursday, Mar 14	<p><i>Example 6: The Child</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Max Weber, <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i></li> <li>• Lee Edelman, “The Future is Kid Stuff” and “No Future” from <i>No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive</i> (1-32, 111-154)</li> </ul>
Tuesday, Mar 19	<p><i>(Social) Reproduction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Karl Marx, “Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret”</li> <li>• M.E. O’Brian, “Introduction: The Oaxaca Commune,” “Part I: The Impossible Family,” and “Chapter 11: Communist Social Reproduction” (1-60, 181-202)</li> </ul>
Thursday, Mar 21	<p><i>Example 7: The Family</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laura Kipnis, “Adultery” (289-327)</li> <li>• Peter Coviello, “Prologue: Winter Quarters” and “Gods in Subjection: Women, Polygamy, and the Eternity of Sex” (1-22, 89-134) in <i>Make Yourself Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism</i></li> </ul>
Tuesday, Apr 2	<p><i>Submission</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R. Marie Griffith, “Introduction” (1-24), “For Such a Time as This: Aglow and American Culture” (24-54), and “Free to Submit: Discipline, Authority, and Sacrifice” (139-168) in <i>God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission</i></li> <li>• Niklaus Largier, “Part 1: Asceticism” in <i>In Praise of the Whip: A Cultural History of Arousal</i></li> </ul>
Thursday, Apr 4	<p><i>Example 8: Homosexuality</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zeb Tortorici, “Introduction: Archiving the Unnatural” in <i>Sins Against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain</i></li> <li>• Mark Jordan, “Church Lives” (Chapters 4-7) in <i>The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism</i> (83-208)</li> </ul>
Tuesday, Apr 9	<p><i>Contagion</i></p>

- Gil Anidjar, “Introduction: Red Mythology” in *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*
- Anthony Petro, “Introduction: AIDS, Sexuality, and Moral Citizenship,” “Ecclesiastical Authority: AIDS, Sexuality, and the American Catholic Church,” and “Protest Religion! ACT UP, Religious Freedom, and the Ethics of Sex” in *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, & American Religion*

Thursday, Apr 11

*Example 9: The AIDS Crisis*

- Dominic Johnson, ““Does a bloody towel represent the ideals of the American people?”: Ron Athey and the Culture Wars”
- Lynne Gerber, “‘We Who Must Die Demand a Miracle’: Christmas 1989 at the Metropolitan Community Church of San Francisco,” in *Devotions and Desires*, ed. Gillian Frank, Bethany Moreton, and Heather White

Tuesday, Apr 16

*(Social) Contagion*

- Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures and the Habitus” and “Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power” in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*
- Michael Cobb, “Introduction: The Last Safe Group to Hate” in *God Hates Fags: The Rhetorics of Religious Violence*

Thursday, Apr 18

*Example 10: Conversion Therapy*

- Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America*
- Watch *But I’m a Cheerleader* (dir. Jamie Babbitt)

Tuesday, Apr 23

*Resistance?*

- Mayanthi Fernando, “Introduction,” “Reconfiguring Freedom,” and “Asymmetries of Tolerance” in *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*
- Saba Mahmood, “The Subject of Freedom” (1-39) and “Agency, Gender, and Embodiment” (153-188) in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*

Thursday, Apr 25

*Example 11: Feminism*

- SKIM Andrea Dworkin, “Intercourse in a Man-made World” (3-82) in *Intercourse*
- Nan D. Hunter, “Contextualizing the Sexuality Debates: A Chronology” in *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (16-29) – skim this for context
- Sara Ahmed, “An Affinity of Hammers”

Tuesday, Apr 30

*Sex*

- Niklaus Largier, “Part 3: Therapeutics” in *In Praise of the Whip*

Thursday, May 2

*Example 12: Gender Normativity*

- C Libby, “Sympathy, Fear, Hate: Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism and Evangelical Christianity” (425-442)
- SJ Crasnow, “ “I Want to Look Transgender”: Anti-Assimilation, Gender Self-Determination, and Confronting White Supremacy in the Creation of a Just Judaism” (1026-1048)
- Judith Butler, “Anti-Gender Ideology and Mahmood’s Critique of the Secular Age” (955-967)

Tuesday, May 7

*Conclusion*

- Janet Jakobsen, “Conclusion: Melancholy Utopias” in *The Sex Obsession: Perversity and Possibility in American Politics*
- Amy Hollywood, “The Unspeakability of Trauma, the Unspeakability of Joy”