



RE 330: Queer Religion

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WF 12:20-2:10 pm
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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

A cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary approach to the question of how sexuality has been shaped by religious discourse, myth, doctrine and ritual. We begin by examining how, within the Christian tradition, particular forms of sexual expression come to be seen as normal, while others are seen as deviant or “queer.” Then, through case studies drawn from the US, India, Haiti and the Philippines, we examine how sexual minorities and non-gender conforming people across time and space have challenged (or embraced) social norms governing gender and sexuality by drawing on religion. In the process, we grapple with questions at the intersection of religious studies and queer studies: How has the religious and social meaning of virginity changed across time? How do you make an ex-gay? How have the lives of Indian hijras (eunuchs and transgender people, whose lifeways have been traditionally sanctioned within Hinduism) changed with greater legal recognition? Does global gay rights activism help or hurt sexual minorities and transgender people whose lifeways take shape within very different religious, cultural and historical contexts?

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course seeks to provide students with an introduction to the variety of forms that sexuality has taken across time and space, as well as to the diverse ways it has been made meaningful in the context of religious cosmologies. As a course in comparative religions, an important goal is to equip students with the critical tools to discern both commonalities and differences in the way that sexuality and religion intersect across cultures.

If all goes well, upon completing this course you will have:

- Acquired a familiarity with several theories of religion and sexuality, along with the ability to apply them to religious discourse across traditions and time.
- Acquired the ability to describe and analyze commonalities and differences across cultures in the way that religion and sexuality intersect
- Acquired an understanding of the role religious discourse plays in normalizing particular forms of sexual expression and identity
- Developed a richly nuanced conception of religion that recognizes both the social and the personal dimensions of religious belief and practice
- Examined, challenged and clarified your own self-understanding, worldview and fundamental values.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- A. Attendance and participation:** This is not a “distance-learning” course. Regular attendance is a must! A sign-in sheet will be passed around each class session. Attendance will be taken at each class session, either through a sign-in sheet, or by me. **Missing class more than four times will constitute grounds for failing the course.**

Participation in the classroom process is vital to your learning experience. You are expected to come to class having read the assignments so that you are prepared to offer your thoughtful questions, comments, comparisons and suggestions for further areas of exploration. This kind of participation benefits the class enormously, as does your attentive listening to the comments and questions of others. Your class participation grade will depend not only on the consistency of attendance, but also on how well you contribute positively to the overall class dynamic through your comments, questions, attentive listening, prompt arrival, leadership and cooperation in small group work, etc. Generally speaking, when an imbalance occurs in terms of who is speaking and how frequently, those who are shy need to exercise the virtue of courage and those who are loquacious need to exercise the virtue of restraint. I reserve the prerogative to call on students in order to even out the class dynamic.

In addition, at least twice during the semester, you will be asked to lead discussion for at least fifteen minutes. A good launching point for this will be the reading journal entries that you will be writing throughout the semester (see below). **Class participation will count for 15% of your grade.**

B. Reading

Books Required (available at Skidmore Bookstore)

- Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume One* (New York: Vintage 1990)
- Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement* (Berkeley: University of California, 2006)
- Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1990)

Additional readings will be handed out in class or made available through our Blackboard course.

C. Writing:

1. **Formal Papers:** All papers for this class will be evaluated for style--grammar, spelling, punctuation--as well as content. Since this is a writing intensive class, I urge you to visit the Writing Center for a 45-minute, one-on-one appointment early in the semester, to get the maximum benefit from their excellent services. Even the most accomplished writer may benefit from having a second pair of eyes look over his or her paper. <https://www.skidmore.edu/writingcenter/>
2. **Reading Journal:** Studies have shown that any written reflection on an assigned reading aids in comprehension. Therefore, I'm asking that for each reading for each class, you identify two key quotes from the reading, and write two or three sentences explaining each quote (that is, what do you understand the main point of the quote to be, in your own words). In addition, what further questions were raised by the quote? What do you find illuminating/perplexing/thought-provoking/personally moving, etc. about each quote? Occasionally, I will provide you with questions for your journal entry for the day, along the lines of a response paper prompt.

Your journals should be typed according to the format I provide, and be brought to class each day. I will collect them periodically throughout the semester and respond to your reflections.

Rationale: This exercise will help you be more organized in your daily preparation for class, will help to foster a useful habit that can aid you in all your classes and will foster comprehension especially for some of our more difficult readings. In addition, the journal is essential to quickly identifying a good place to begin on those days when you are asked to facilitate discussion of the reading.

3. Late paper policy, borrowed from IGR: I allow a 24-hour "grace" period after the deadline during which you may turn in a paper with no penalty, because...stuff happens. After that, though, I will deduct 1/3 of a grade for each day a paper is not turned in (e.g. a B+ would become a B, then a B-, then a C+, for each 24 hour interval it is turned in late).

IV. EVALUATION

A. Grading Summary

Assignment	Percentage
Short formal essay (2-3 pages)	15%
Take home midterm exam (5-6 pages)	20%
Reading Journal	15%
Book review and research presentation	20%
Final Paper	15%
Class participation	15%

B. Grading Standards: The following is designed to help you think about the level of participation you're prepared to give to this course, and the final grade you would like to shoot for. (Obviously, there are finer gradations for each of the grades discussed below, e.g. A-, B+, C+)

1. "A" signifies outstanding. To earn that, you need to (a) maintain regular attendance and demonstrate excellence in discussion; (b) lead the class discussion ably on the day you are picked to do so (e.g. be prepared with a question and quote to get us started, be familiar enough with the reading to navigate gracefully the questions and comments that other students raise)); (c) keep up with your reading journal outside of class, demonstrating consistent care and thoughtfulness in your reflections on the issues and questions raised by the class; (d) demonstrate in the quizzes a thorough understanding of the key terms, historical background and basic structural features of the religious traditions we are examining; (e) do a thorough, analytically acute job on the formal papers and get them in on time.

In addition, to merit an "A" your writing in the formal essays must reflect the following: a statement in the first paragraph of what you intend to accomplish; correct grammar and accurate spelling; depth and complexity in your engagement with the materials (readings, lectures, films, etc.); and an exceptionally creative original contribution--a new idea, a different way of thinking about the issue(s) you're discussing--that takes you beyond the accurate presentation of someone else's ideas.

2. "B" signifies good; it is a solid, good grade. To earn that, you need to (a) maintain regular attendance and participation in discussion; (b) lead the class discussion ably on the day you are picked to do so (e.g. be prepared with a question and quote to get us started, be familiar enough with the reading to navigate the questions and comments that other students raise); (c) keep up with your reading journal outside of class, demonstrating care and thoughtfulness in your reflections on the issues and questions raised by the class, though you may skip a day or so, or be less consistently excellent in your entries; (d) demonstrate in the quizzes a firm grasp of the key terms, historical background and basic structural features of the religions we are examining; (e) do a thorough job on the formal papers and get them in on time.

In addition, a "B" grade essay typically contains: a statement in the first paragraph of what you intend to accomplish; correct grammar and accurate spelling; solid engagement with the materials (readings, lectures, films, etc.); and an original contribution that takes you beyond the accurate presentation of someone else's ideas.

3. "C" stands for satisfactory. To earn that, you need to (a) maintain regular attendance and participation in discussion; (b) lead the class discussion ably on the day you are picked to do so (e.g. be prepared with a question and quote to get us started, be familiar enough with the reading to navigate the questions and comments that other students raise); (c) mostly keep up with your reading journal outside of class, but miss several days of the journal; (d) do a satisfactory job on the formal essays and quizzes that meets the requirements of the assignment, and get them in on time.

In addition, "C" level essays contain no statement of intent, or a confused one; occasionally lapse into bad grammar or incorrect spelling; replace full sentences with fragments; misconstrue or distort key ideas; display no clear development leading to a supportable conclusion.

4. To fall below satisfactory (i.e. C-, D), you could fall way behind in your reading journal and response papers, be consistently unable to lead the class discussion when picked due to lack of preparation, skip several response papers, turn in one of the formal papers several days past the deadline, and/or be very irregular in attendance and discussion.

In addition, below “C” level essays do not adequately meet the requirements of the assignment. They typically also contain no statement of intent, or a confused one; frequently lapse into bad grammar or incorrect spelling; replace full sentences with fragments; misconstrue or distort key ideas; display no clear development leading to a supportable conclusion.

C. Accessibility: I strive to create an inclusive classroom that respects the fact that our eyes, ears, brains and bodies all work a little bit differently. If you have, or think you may have a learning disability, please work with the Office of Student Academic Services to determine what strategies and accommodations are appropriate for your situation, and then speak with me early on so that we may arrange appropriate accommodation.

http://cmsauthor.skidmore.edu/academic_services/accessibility/

D. Academic Honesty: Making references to the work of others strengthens your own work by granting you greater authority and by showing that you are part of a discussion located within a community. When you make references (by quotation or paraphrase) to the work of others, it is essential to provide proper attribution and citation. Failing to do so is considered academically dishonest, as is copying or paraphrasing someone else’s work. Please consult Appendix B for the citation format I recommend for your work in this class.

Any confirmed instances of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty (cheating, fabrication or facilitating academic dishonesty) in this course will result in the work in question receiving a zero. Assignments that receive a zero for this reason may not be rewritten or redone. As per the Skidmore College Honor Code, documentation of the infraction will be kept on file with Dean’s office and may impair eligibility for honor societies, study abroad, etc.

V. Title IX: Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

Schedule of Assignments (subject to change)

Week One

W 1/22 – Queer and Normal – Introduction to the Course

F 1/24 – Religion, Ritual and Community

Read): Edward R. Gray and Scott I. Thumma, “The Gospel Hour: Liminality, Identity and Religion in a Gay Bar,” pp. 79-98.

Homework: Please bring in the index card with a photograph and some information about yourself that will help me get to know you a little better.

Can Sexuality Have a History? Virginity in Pre- and Postmodern Christianities

Week Two

W 1/29 – Queer Studies and Religious Studies

Read: Michael Warner “Tongues Untied: Memoirs of a Pentecostal Boyhood.” pp. 215-224

Read: Gilbert Herdt, “Sexual Cultures and Sexual Lifeways,” 10-23

F 1/31 – Sexuality and Gender in Early Christianity

Read: Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, Genesis 1-2 (xi-xiv), chapter 1 (3-31)

Week Three

W 2/5 - Virginity and Asceticism in Early Christianity

Read: Peter Brown, “The Notion of Virginity in Early Church,” pp. 427-443

F 2/7 – Virginity and Asceticism in Early Christianity

Read: The Acts of Paul and Thecla (ER)

Week Four

W 2/12 - Virginity and Marriage in Conservative U.S. Protestant Christianity

View: *The Virgin Daughters* (2008, Dir. Jane Traeys)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mhez8t8IFs>

Browse: True Love Waits Website: <https://www.lifeway.com/en/product-family/true-love-waits>

Due: Short Paper (2-3 pages) on virginity and liminality

F 2/14 - Virginity and Marriage in Conservative U.S. Protestant Christianity

Read: Elizabeth Gish, “Are You a Trashable Styrofoam Cup? Harm and Damage Rhetoric in the American Sexual Purity Movement,” p. 5-22.

Week Five

W 2/19 – The History of Sexuality

Read: Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. One (Vintage 1990), 2-49

F 2/21 – The History of Sexuality

Read: Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. One (Vintage 1990), 53-73

Week Six

W 2/26 – The History of Sexuality

Read: Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. One (Vintage 1990), 77-114

F 2/28 – Power and (Self-)Discipline in the Ex-Gay Movement

Read: Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, 1-21

Read: Book reviews of Foucault and Erzen (ER)

Week Seven

M 3/2 DUE IN DROPBOX MIDTERM ESSAY

W 3/4 – Power and (Self-)Discipline in the Ex-Gay Movement

Read: Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, 22-51

View: *One Nation, Under God* (1993, Dir. Francine Rzeznik, Teodoro Maniaci, 83 min.)
(on Kanopy, accessible through library website)

F 3/6 – Read: Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, 52-84

Read: Lisa Duggan, “Making it Perfectly Queer,” 11-29

SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS!

Week Eight

W 3/18 – Read: Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, 85-125 (skim if necessary), 160-182 (read carefully)

F 3/20 - Homosexuality and the (end of?) the Culture Wars

Read: Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, 183-230

Read: <https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/20/us/exodus-international-shutdown/>

View: [Alan Chambers interview with Lisa Ling](#)

Read: *Christianity Today* editorials (ER)

Week Nine

W 3/25 - The Gay International

Read: Joseph Massad, “Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World,” pp. 361-385

Read: Maya Sharma, “She Has Come from the World of the Spirits: Life Stories of Working Class Lesbian Women in India,” pp. 243-264

F 3/27 – Sexual Cultures in India

Read: Wendy Doniger, “The Kama Sutra: It Isn’t All About Sex,” *The Kenyon Review*, 18-37.

Read: Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (2008) *Same-Sex Love in India*, xiii-30

Week Ten

W 4/1 - Hijras: Third Sex/Transgendered People in India

Read: Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*

F 4/3 – Hijras: Third Sex/Transgendered People in India

Read: Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*

Week Eleven

W 4/8 – Hijras: Third Sex/Transgendered People in India

Read: Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*

F 4/10 - Culture, History and The Reading Down of Article 377

Read: Vivek Divan, “On the Verge of a Kind of Freedom,”

<http://arc-international.net/blog/on-the-verge-of-a-kind-of-freedom-ridding-india-of-section-377/>

Read: S.P. Shah, “Queering Critiques of Neoliberalism in India: Urbanism and Inequality in the Era of Transnational LGBTQ Rights,” 635-651.

Recommended: Alok Gupta, “Section 377 and the Dignity of Indian Homosexuals,” EPW, 4815-4823.

Week Twelve

W 4/15 – Gender and Sexuality in Haitian Vodou

Read: Elizabeth McCalister, “Love, Sex and Gender Embodied: The Spirits of Haitian Vodou,” in *Love, Sex and Gender in the World’s Religions*

View: *Of Men and Gods*, by Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire (52 minutes)

F 4/17 – Gender and Sexuality in Haitian Vodou

Read: Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola* [chapter on Ezili]

Week Thirteen

W 4/22 – Fluid genders

Read: Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, “Songs for Ezili: Vodou Epistemologies of (Trans)gender,” *Feminist Studies* 37, 2 (Summer 2011): 417-436.

F 4/24 – Gendered Religious Performance: Unfurling the Self

Read: Michael Sepidoza Campbell, “The *Bakla*: Gendered Religious Performance in Filipino Cultural Spaces,” 167-191

Appendix A Citation Format

You are welcome to use any kind of citation format for this course that you are confident you know well. For this class, I think the most appropriate is the APA in-text citation system. In this method of citation, you provide the reader with the name of the author in a signal phrase, along with the date of publication and the page number(s) numbers in parenthesis, if necessary. These references are keyed to a list of works cited, which is placed at the end of the paper. This list is arranged alphabetically and may bear the title “References,” or “Bibliography.” For a detailed explanation of this citation method, with examples, please consult Diane Hacker, *A Writer’s Reference* (2003), pp. 390-417. To get the swing of this method, try the electronic exercises on using APA documentation style on www.dianahacker.com/writersref (click on “Electronic Research Exercises”, E-ex APA 4-1 and APA 4-2).

If you want to comment on a citation but do not want to do so in the body of the paper, you may add a footnote, which is easily done with the footnote function of your word processing software.

CITATION EXAMPLE

In *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors*, Sudhir Kakar (1982) argues that Indian medical systems depend on a distinctive sense of “freedom.” He writes, “Human freedom in the traditional Indian context, then, seems to imply an increase in the potential to experience different inner states while limiting action in the outer world” (p. 272). This notion of freedom inhering in mental states rather than external conditions is corroborated by the philosophy of Yoga. Barbara Stoler Miller (1998) emphasizes this by titling the fourth section of Patanjali’s *Yoga-Sutras*, “Absolute Freedom” (p. 74). This is not to say that India lacks this-worldly thinkers who have worked hard to win political and social freedom by changing external conditions; rather, it is to emphasize the role that ascetic other-worldly thinkers have had in defining and shaping core Indian values (“Hinduism,” 2006).

[Note: It seems odd at first, but the concluding period or other punctuation mark must go *outside* the final quotation mark, and *after* the closing parenthesis].

References

- Dinnage, R. (1983, February 17). [Review of *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors*]. *The New York Review of Books* 30,15.
- Heesterman, J.C. (1985). *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hinduism. (2006). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved August 19, 2006, from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9105952>
- Kakar, S. (1982). *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors: A Psychological Inquiry into India and Its Healing Traditions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- _____. (1985, December). Psychoanalysis and Religious Healing: Siblings or Strangers? *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53: 841-53.
- Miller, B.S. (1998). *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*. New York: Bantam Books.