WOMEN’S STUDIES 2274 – FALL 2011

WOMEN AND SEXUALITY

Wednesday 6:30 pm – 9:20 pm

Instructor: Nancy Pollak  
Room: A118g  
Phone: 604-323-5370

Office hours: Wed. 5:20 pm – 6:20 pm  
(or call to make other arrangements)

Required Readings (available from Langara Bookstore)

1. Women & Sexuality Course Reader (WMST 2274)
2. Class handouts

Weekly Topics, Readings and Assignment Due Dates

Week 1 (Sept 7): Blending Theory and Experience

“When a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold.”

– Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own (1929)

An introduction to the topics and themes of this course. Core course concepts will be discussed, with an emphasis on the distinction between essentialist and constructionist views of sexuality. We’ll also look at how feminist theorists and activists have integrated theory and experience in their approaches to female sexuality.

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Week 2 (Sept 14): The Shaping of Female Desire: Uncovering the Questions Hidden by “The Answers”

An overview of human sexuality as a field of scientific enquiry, with particular attention to the classification and social construction of female sexual behaviors. We’ll review the work of prominent Western sexologists whose medical, psychological, and sociological discourses set the terms and beliefs that continue to influence language and practices about human sexuality. We begin to examine the institutional and economic regulation of sexuality and the intersections of gender, ‘race,’ and social class in traditional prescriptions of female sexualities.

Readings (Wk 2) (hand-out):


2.2  “Analysis of the sexual impulse” by Havelock Ellis (1903) in Sexualities ed. by Michael Kimmel and Rebecca Plante (NY: Oxford University Press, 2004)
2.3 *“Purity and pollution” by Nancy L. Fischer in “Introducing the New Sexuality Studies” ed. by Steven Seidman et al. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011) 38–44.


➔ Assignment: Article Comment Sheet (ACS), assigned the previous week

Week 3 (Sept 21): Sexual Stereotyping and the Symbolism of “The Natural”
We will examine the language, myths, images, and economic structures that define and describe certain female sexualities as “natural.” Attention will focus on the social and political construction of sexualities as either “normal” or “exotic” according to ‘race’, nationality, religion, colonization, class, and sexual orientation.

Readings (Wk 3):
3.2 *“Lovely Hula Hands” by Haunani-Kay Trask in From a Native Daughter (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1993).
3.4 *“The sexual politics of Black womanhood” by Patricia Hill Collins in Sexualities ed. by Michael Kimmel and Rebecca Plante (NY: Oxford University Press, 2004)
3.5 *“Fantasy Islands” by Julia O’Connell Davidson & Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor in Sexualities (ibid).

➔ Assignment: Two Article Comment Sheets. Everyone will submit an ACS for 3.1 as well as a second ACS, assigned the previous week.

Week 4: (Sept 28) Who’s Dictating Whose Desire?
This culture’s story about adolescent girl’s and sexuality goes like this: girls do not want sex; what girls really want is intimacy and relationship.”
– Deborah L. Tolman (1994)

This week we will consider mainstream and feminist beliefs about female desire – lust, passion, longing – with a focus on the pressures on adolescent girls and young women.

Readings (Wk 4):

4.2 **“Daring to desire: Culture and the bodies of adolescent girls” by Deborah L. Tolman. In The Politics of Women’s Bodies ed. by Rose Weitz (Oxford: OUP, 2003) 100-121.**

4.3 **“The sexual girl within: Breaking the feminist silence on desiring girlhoods” by Caitlin Fisher. In Jane Sexes It Up (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002). 53–63.**


➔ Assignment: Readings Comprehension Quiz

Week 5 (Oct. 5): Critical Visions, Women’s Resistance

This week we begin to examine the complex and sometimes contradictory ways that women resist, on both personal and political levels, the negative “story” about female sexualities: how women celebrate, perform, experiment with, and share their diverse experiences of sexual joy, embodied power, and loving relationships.

Readings (Wk 5):


5.2 **“Red hot to the touch: WRi[gh]ting indigenous erotica” by Kateri Akwenzie-Damm in Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality ed. by Drew Hayden Taylor (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2008).**

5.3 “Drag kings, sluts & goddesses” by Sue Katz in ColorLines (winter 2004).


5.5 **“Houses full of love: Bringing up children in polyamorous relationships” by Alessandra (Alex) lantaffi. In Who’s Your Daddy? And Other Writings on Queer Parenting ed. by Rachel Epstein (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2009) 346-359.**

Week 6 (Oct. 12): Challenging Dualistic Paradigms: Virgin or Whore?

This week and next, we will examine common dualisms about sexuality (e.g., good girl/bad girl; virgin/whore; pure/impure) and ask: How do these dualisms reflect and justify systems of power, ideologies, and socio-economic structures? How do women navigate and resist these dualisms?

Readings (Wk 6):


6.3 **“God, sex, and Pythagoras”** by Shelby Knox in *Click: When We First Knew We Were Feminists*” ed. by C.E. Martin and J. C. Sullivan. (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2010) 73–76.

6.4 **“Love clinic”** by Soyon Im. In *Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism* ed. by Daisy Herndández and Bushra Rehman. (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2002) 133–141.

➔ **Group #1 presents** (submit Attendance Record; Biblio.; Individual Process Paper)

**Week 7 (Oct. 19): Challenging Dualistic Paradigms: Sexual & Gender Identities**

This week focuses on sexual and gender identities and how such identities have served to both constrain and liberate women. We’ll look at how theorists and activists have analyzed “identity” and worked to create political and cultural spaces that offer increased autonomy, visibility, and self-determination. One important strategy for challenging this dualistic paradigm and its underlying power structure is “queering heteronormativity.”

**Readings (Wk 7):**

7.1 **“Questions of identity”** by Jeffrey Weeks in *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*


7.3 **“Does a lesbian need a vagina like a fish needs a bicycle?”** by Amber Dean in *Canadian Woman Studies* (vol. 24, #2,3, 2005).


7.5 **“The Seven Year Itch”** by Kate Bornstein in *Gender Outlaw* (NY: Routledge, 1994).

7.6 “No bikini” by Ivan Coyote in *Boys Like Her* by Taste This (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1998).

➔ **Assignment: Readings Comprehension Quiz**

➔ **Group #2 presents** (submit Attendance Record; Biblio.; Individual Process Paper)

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**Week 8 (Oct 26) : Pleasure and Danger:**

**Sexuality as a Site of Struggle between Oppression and Agency**

In the next two weeks we will explore debates regarding women’s efforts to limit danger and expand pleasure in the realm of sexuality. We will examine women’s efforts to claim sexual agency within societies that rigorously commodify and script their sexualities. Are women “buying into” their own sexual oppression or carving new ground for female sexual expression within contradictory systems of power?

**Readings (Wk 8):**
8.3 *“I want a twenty-four-hour truce during which there is no rape,”* by Andrea Dworkin (1983) in *Letters from a War Zone* (NY: E.P. Dutton, 1989).
8.4 *“A love letter from an anti-rape activist to her feminist sex-toy store”* by Lee Jacobs Riggs in *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World without Rape* ed. by Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008)

➔ Assignment Week 8: Readings Comprehension Quiz
➔ Group #3 presents (submit Attendance Record; Biblio.; Individual Process Paper)

**Week 9 (Nov. 2): Pleasure within Danger continues . . .**
This week we continue to examine women’s relationship to pleasure within danger, with a focus of women and sexual representation, public “performances” of sexuality, and the “pornification” of contemporary society.

**Readings (Wk 9):**

➔ MAJOR Assignment: Reflection/Critique of an Assigned Reading
➔ Group #4 presents (submit Attendance Record; Biblio.; Individual Process Paper)

**Week 10 (Nov. 9): Sexuality: What’s the Body Got to Do with It?**

“Open a textbook on human sexuality, and nine times out of ten it will begin with a chapter on anatomy and physiology .... You’ll find the physiology of arousal but not of pleasure, of performance but not of fantasy .... Why don’t music texts start with biology? 

– Leonore Tiefer in *Sex Is Not a Natural Act*

Historically, the female body has been viewed by ‘men of science’ (and philosophy) as fundamentally problematic: inferior to the male, weak and tempermental, and dangerous. Disparaging ideas about the female body in general, and female genitals in particular, contributed to negative beliefs about female sexuality and to women’s often troubled
relationship to their own bodies. This week, we’ll consider both the effects of and women’s resistance to these misogynist ideas.

Readings (Wk 10):
10.1 **“Draft essay”** by Saskia Wolsak (for a Sexual Ethics course at McGill University).

➔ Assignment: Article Comment Sheet
➔ Group #5 presents (submit Attendance Record; Biblio.; Individual Process Paper)

Week 11 (Nov. 16): Medicalizing Female Sexuality: Disordering Women’s Desires
“Disease-mongering” – the practice of labelling ordinary human experiences and conditions as diseases that require formal medical intervention – is commonplace in the 21st century. This week, we will examine the long history of medicalizing women’s sexuality, some contemporary trends (e.g., the pursuit of a female Viagra), and the feminist movement to challenge the corporate and professional “sickening” of female sexuality.

Readings (Wk. 11):

➔ Assignment: Article Comment Sheet
➔ Group #6 presents (submit Attendance Record; Biblio.; Individual Process Paper)
Week 12 (Nov. 23):  **Working at Sex: Sorting through Stigma & Stereotypes**
This week we will look at some basics about the social, economic, and legal status of “sex as work,” with a particular look at prostitution and stripping. We will examine some of the complexities of women’s vulnerability and power within these spheres, along with some contemporary debates within feminist circles.

**Readings (Wk. 12):**


12.2  [Handout]: “All dressed up & nowhere to go” by Lindalee Tracey in *Growing Up Naked* 1997.

Week 13 (Nov. 30):  **Desire for the Future**
A week to summarize and highlight the major issues raised throughout this course. How do we increase pleasure and limit danger? What do sexualities that respect women’s diverse situations and desires look like?

**Reading:**

** ASSIGNMENTS **

**WOMEN & SEXUALITY 2274**

**WEDNESDAY – FALL 2011**

**Instructor:** Nancy Pollak  
**Rm.:** A – 118G  
**Phone:** 604-323-5370

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<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
<th>DUE DATE</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Readings Comprehension Quiz (9%)</td>
<td>See outline for dates</td>
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<td>In-class writing on questions about the week’s assigned readings. 3 times; each worth 3 points.</td>
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<td>2. Article Comment Sheet (15%)</td>
<td>See outline for dates</td>
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<td>Brief, thoughtful statements about assigned articles. 5 times; each worth 3 points.</td>
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<td>3. Critique &amp; Reflection on Assigned Reading (20%)</td>
<td>Week 9 (Nov. 2)</td>
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<td>1,400 – 1,500 words</td>
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<td>4. Group Project (20%)</td>
<td>Presentation date assigned in class</td>
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<td>Participate in a group research project, including a class presentation.</td>
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<td>On presentation day, hand in Attendance Record, Bibliography, and Personal Process Paper.</td>
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<td>4. Class participation (11%)</td>
<td>Each class</td>
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<td>Attend and participate in classroom learning activities.</td>
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<td>5. Final Exam (take-home) (25%)</td>
<td>Finals</td>
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<td>To receive course credit you <strong>must</strong> write and submit this take-home essay exam.</td>
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**GRADING**

A+  To receive an A grade, complete all the **required** assignments with consistently excellent standard.

A-  To receive a B grade, complete the required assignments with a consistently high standard.

B+  To receive a C grade, complete the required assignments with a satisfactory standard.

B-  D  Marginal performance. Credit granted but insufficient to proceed to next level.

C-  F  Insufficient completion of assignments and/or unsatisfactory standards.

**GUIDELINES for ASSIGNMENTS**

1. **Readings Comprehension Quiz**

**Purpose:**
You are expected to do all the Course Readings every week. The Readings Comprehension Quiz has 3 purposes:

- to get you in the habit of **identifying the key points in an article**, which will help you to focus on the subject matter and the author’s perspective;
- to increase the usefulness of the Course Readings in class discussions and other assignments, and in your own thinking about the course;
- to ensure that you do all the readings!

**Guidelines:**
1) To prepare for this assignment, you will need to read the weekly articles in the Course Reader. While reading, make notes about the author’s key points: their main ideas and insights, their distinctive point of view, their own discoveries and concerns. **Bring your notes to class.**

2) At the beginning of designated classes, you will complete a Readings Comprehension Quiz. The Quiz will ask about **1 article** in the week’s assigned readings. You will need:
   - to **identify 3 key points** (ideas, issues, themes) made by the author(s);
   - to answer a **specific question** about the article’s content.

**This is a closed book exercise – but you can use your own notes.**
3) Your answers will be in point form, not essay-style. Avoid being too general or simplistic; get at the author’s distinct ideas.

4) Each Quiz is worth 3 points. The assignment is worth 9 points in total. If you miss class or arrive late, you will not be able to make up the assignment.
2. Article Comment Sheets

Purpose:
You are expected to do all the Course Readings every week. The Article Comment Sheets are intended:

• to get you in the habit of identifying the key themes (ideas) in an article, which will help you to grasp the author’s intention and perspective;
• to give you opportunities to articulate your own responses to articles;
• to enhance your ability to participate in class discussions and to prepare for other course assignments;
• to sharpen your understanding of the themes in this course.

Guidelines:
1) This is an open-book assignment that you do before class.
2) In designated weeks, you will turn in a completed Article Comment Sheet (ACS). See Course Outline for due dates. (The blank sheet will be handed out the previous week; if you are absent that week, be sure to get a blank sheet from the instructor before the next class.)
3) The ACS asks questions about a Course Reading assigned that week. You are asked:
   • to identify a major theme(s) or idea(s) in the article
   • to present evidence that the author uses to explain or illustrate this idea(s)
   • to describe your own reaction to the article and to reflect on your relationship to the issue.
   • to pose some substantial questions that arise from your reading of the article
4) Your write-up can be in point form (not essay-style) – brief but clear answers are required.
5) Each ACS is worth 3 points (total assignment is worth 15 points). Marks will be assigned on the basis of accuracy, thoroughness, and depth.

Note:
• Not everyone will be assigned the same article.
• We may hold small group discussions about the assigned articles. You will use your ACS in this discussion – so be prepared to talk about the article too.
3. Critique & Reflections on an Assigned Reading

You will select one eligible article from WMST 2274 assigned readings and write a critical response to it. (Eligible is signified by an asterisk on course outline).

**Length:** 1,400 – 1,500 words (typed, double-spaced).

Please put your **full name on the first page only**, upper right-hand corner (no need for title page).

**Purpose:**
This assignment gives you the chance to examine an article on women and sexuality in depth: to briefly summarize the key ideas/messages, reflect on their meaning, and critically appraise the article’s content and style.

**Guidelines for writing:**
At the beginning:
- Clearly identify the article (full title, author, date of initial publication).
- Succinctly say why you have chosen this article: What is it about the theme, style, or substance of the article that attracted you to it?
- Briefly summarize the main ideas, questions, conclusions, and/or theoretical perspectives of the article (about 1/4 of your paper can be devoted to this). Use your own words to convey the author’s ideas. You can quote the author (include page number) but do not use long quotes to convey the author’s ideas.

In the middle:
Critique and reflect on the article. Critique means to examine the article using analytical tools (e.g., course concepts, feminist theories). Reflect means to offer your own response or interpretation of what the author is saying. So rather than simply condemning or praising the article, discuss your responses, do some analysis, and pose some questions. Consider these matters:
- What did you find most interesting or thought provoking – and why? Did the article give you any new insights or ideas to ponder? Did it upset, inspire, or confuse you?
- How does this article **relate to other articles** in this course, or to our class discussions, films, etc.?
- How did the author’s writing style, language, and analysis of the issues affect your response?
- What questions arise for you from this article?

Be sure to identify your own biases or beliefs as you respond to those presented by the author. You may write in the ‘I’ voice, but ground your opinions in analysis and ideas.

At the end:
In a concluding paragraph, summarize the core question(s) that you explored. Avoid ending with a catch-all sentence that expresses whether you liked or disliked the article.

**Evaluation:**
Your personal response will not be evaluated, but rather the manner and degree to which you investigate the article with **reference to WMST 2274 course concepts and themes**.
- Be sure to proof your paper for organization, clarity, spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
4. Group Research Project

You and several other students will form a group to research, develop, and design a presentation based on a WMST 2274 theme (assigned in class).

**Purpose:** The Group Project gives you the opportunity:

- to apply *feminist analyses and theoretical perspectives* to an issue relating to women and sexuality
- to apply *WMST 2274 course concepts* to your analysis
- to consider how women *have resisted normative prescriptions* about female sexuality and *claimed space* for non-oppressive expressions of sexualities.
- to work collectively in conceiving and delivering a creative class presentation.

**Guidelines:**

- Schedule and participate in at least 3 substantial face-to-face meetings as a group.
- Pay attention to each person’s ideas, show respect for each other, and create room for each person to contribute.
- Commit yourselves to *substantial research*: a minimum of 4 books or scholarly articles. You may also use popular Internet sources, but do not rely on them exclusively.
- Aim to deliver a presentation that *engages the class*. Choose an interactive format (i.e., interact with each other and with the class) and avoid a static format (e.g., a bland power-point presentation).

**Presentation:**

Create a classroom presentation that illuminates what you have learned together. The presentation should be about 30-35 minutes long, followed by a class discussion (guided in part by questions you pose in your presentation).

**Evaluation:** The group will be evaluated on the basis of:

- the *depth and clarity* of your research and presentation;
- your *analysis* of the issue (e.g., social, cultural, economic, and political factors at play);
- your application of *WMST 2274 course concepts*;
- your *reflections* on what you learned about your own attitudes and beliefs;
- your ability to *engage your classmates*.

• Each group must submit 1) *Attendance Record* of meetings; and 2) *Bibliography* of research sources.

• Each individual will submit a 300-word *Learning Process Paper* about your experiences working on this project. Consider these kinds of questions: • What stood out for you in your research (what did you learn)? • How have your beliefs or attitudes changed (if at all)? • What are you curious to learn more about?

• The group will receive one mark. Points will be deducted from an individual’s mark if she or he did not attend the substantial meetings or did not contribute fully to the group’s efforts.