

Queer Theory

Britta Anderson

“Queer” is a contested label that shifts across time and social contexts. Our understanding of queerness this semester will similarly shift as we study it in relationship to theories of power and oppression, race and ethnicity, transgender studies, disability studies, and feminist theory. In this advanced, reading-intensive seminar, we will examine theorizations of queerness that encompass gender identities, sexualities, social practices, modes of belonging, and forms of analysis outside of majoritarian, normative groupings. Topics we will tackle as we hone our own queer analytical lens include queer bodies and queer desire; queer politics; queer activism; queer modes of understanding time; queer feeling; the institutionalization of queerness in politics, popular culture, and academia, and the erasures and exclusions performed by queer studies’ conceptualization of bodies, cultures, and sexuality.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation: Your active presence in class is essential to your success in this course. Your participation grade will be based not only on your contributions to discussions, but also on your ability to listen, make space for other voices, and thoughtfully respond to ideas that differ from your own. Each absence after your second will reduce your final grade by 5 percentage points.

Blog posts: Short response (less than 300 words) posted to our class blog, due every class by midnight the night before. Responses may include your reactions to the readings, questions and concerns you want to address in class, and responses to those who post before you.

Dialogue paper: You will pick a single reading or theorist from the course, identify specific points in their work that you disagree with or would like to discuss further, and imagine a discussion with that theorist. Taking on their voice and your own, you will produce a 5-page paper in dialogue form. See handout for details.

Contemporary issues paper: You will write a 4-6 page position paper on a contemporary political, social, or cultural issue, drawing on theory from this course to argue your case. See handout for details.

Final exam: In our two-hour final exam, you will need to be able to identify the central arguments of the texts covered through the semester, as well as perform a close reading of a previously unseen text using a queer analytical framework.

Grade Breakdown

Attendance and Participation: 20%

Blog posts: 20%

Dialogue paper: 20%

Contemporary issues paper: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Course schedule

Week 1: Defining queerness

Eve Sedgwick, “Queer and Now”

Judith Butler, “Critically Queer”

Annamarie Jagose, "Introduction" and "Contestations of Queer" in *Queer Theory: An Introduction*

Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex"

Warner and Berlant, "Sex in Public"

Week 2: Power

Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, excerpts.

Judith Butler, "Subversive Bodily Acts," *Gender Trouble*

Huffer, Lynne. *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory*, excerpts.

Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class and Sex," and "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider*

Week 3: Queer identifications: lesbian identities and performance

Amber Hollibaugh & Cherrie Moraga "What We're Rollin' Around in Bed with: Sexual Silences in Feminism: A Conversation Toward Ending Them" in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme/Butch Reader*

Lisa Duggan and Kathleen McHugh, "A Fem(me)inist Manifesto"

Sherrie Inness and Michele Lloyd "G.I. Joes in Barbie Land: Recontextualizing Butch in Twentieth-Century Lesbian Culture"

Jacquelyn Zita. "Male Lesbians and the Postmodern Body"

Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind"

Week 4: Queer identifications: bisexuality and heterosexuality

Tamara Bower, "Bisexual Women, Feminist Politics" in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries & Visions*

Calvin Thomas, "Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality"

Eve Sedgwick, "Is the Rectum Straight" and "Epistemology of the Closet"

Week 5: Disability and queer studies

Readings will be selected from the following:

Anna Mollow, "Introduction" and "Is Sex Disability? Queer Theory and the Disability Drive" in *Sex and Disability*

Robert McRuer, "Introduction" to *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*

Eli Clare, "Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies: Disability and Queerness" *Public Culture*

Kim Q. Hall, *Feminist Disability Studies*, excerpts

Jasbir Puar, "Prognosis Time: Towards a Geopolitics of Affect, Debility, and Capacity," *Women and Performance*

Lennard Davis, "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Disability Studies Reader*

Terry Galloway, *Mean Little Deaf Queer: A Memoir*

Week 6: Trans queer studies: transgender subjectivity

Readings will be selected from the following:

Leslie Feinberg, "To be or Not to Be" and *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*, excerpts.

Jason Cromwell, "Queering the Binaries: Transsituated Identities, Bodies and Sexualities"
in *Transmen and FTMs*

Susan Stryker, "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin"

Vi Namaste, "Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity"

Cressida J. Heyes, "Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender"

Emi Koyama, "Whose Feminism is it Anyway?" *The Transgender Studies Reader*

Julia Serrano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*

Week 7: Trans queer studies: transnational queers

Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality"

Jasbir Puar, "South Asian (Trans)nation(alisms) and Queer Diasporas" in *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*

Jose Quiroga, "Latino Cultures, Imperial Sexualities" in *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America*

Week 8: Queer Citizenship

Readings will be selected from the following:

Lisa Duggan, "Queering the State" *Social Text*

Jasbir Puar, "Mapping U.S. Homonormativities" in *Gender, Place and Culture*

Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, excerpts.

Eithne Luibheid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality At The Border*, excerpts

Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics" in *Precarious Life*

Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality"

Dean Spade and Craig Willse, "Marriage Will Never Set Us Free"

Cherrie Moraga, "Queer Aztlan: The Reformation of the Chicano Tribe" in *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry*

Week 9: Ethnicity and Excess

Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, "Gay Shame: Latina- and Latino- Style: A Critique of White Queer Performativity" in *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*

Juana María Rodríguez, "Introduction" and "Gesture in Mambo Time," *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*

Anzaldúa, Gloria "To(o) Queer the Writer-Loca, Escritora y Chicano in *Inversions: Writings from Dykes, Queers and Lesbians*

John Rechy, *City of Night*

Week 10: Commodity queers

Readings will be selected from the following:

John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity"

Rosemary Hennessey, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture"

Alexandra Chasin, "Introduction" to *Selling Out: The Gay & Lesbian Movement Goes to Market*

Dwight McBride, "Ellen's Coming Out: Media and Public Hype" in *Why I Hate Abercrombie and Fitch*

Jose Muñoz, "Pedro's Real World" in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*.

Jeff Maskovsky, "Do We All Reek of the Commodity?" *Out in Theory*

Alan Sears, "Queer Anti-Capitalism: What's Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?"

Katherine Sender, *Business, Not Politics: The Making of the Gay Market*, excerpts.

Week 11: Queer failures and achievements

Annemarie Jagose "Counterfeit Pleasures: Fake Orgasm and Queer Agency"

Judith Halberstam, "The Queer Art of Failure"

Mel Chen, "Queer Animacy"

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Week 12: Queer affect

Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, excerpts

Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, excerpts

Ann Cvetcovitch, *Depression: A Public Feeling*, excerpts

Week 13: Queer temporalities

Readings will be selected from the following:

Carla Freccero, "Queer Times"

Tavia Nyong'o, "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)?"

Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction" to *Time Binds*

Heather Love, "Introduction" to *Feeling Backward: Loss and The Politics of Queer History*

Judith Halberstam, "Queer Temporalities and Postmodern Geographies" in *In a Queer Time and Place*

Tom Boellstorff, "When Marriage Falls: Queer Coincidences in Straight Time" *GLQ*

Tim Dean, "Bareback Time" in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*

Week 14: Queer futures, queer horizons

Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?"

Lee Edelman, "The Future is Kid Stuff" and "No Future"

José Muñoz, "Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of a Gay Pragmatism" in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*

Michael O'Rourke, "The Afterlives of Queer Theory"