Course Description

Is “lesbian” a category that can be appropriately applied to people across cultural and historical contexts? What criteria or characteristics are critical in determining whether a subject is lesbian? When we look across cultures and times, what characteristics matter? Equally important, what interests are at stake in applying or refraining from applying this category?

This course explores many ways in which people in various times and places have understood sex, love, and intimacies among people who—at least at some time and in some way—identify or are identified as women. While the category “woman” seems connected to the category “lesbian,” we will also have occasion to complicate this notion as well. We will seek to place the category of lesbian in historical context (when did it emerge? how have its meanings changed over time?), while also gaining an appreciation for the varied significance accorded to intimate same-sex and/or same-gender relations. At the same time, we will examine the ways that people have created diverse social identities through which to enact culturally non-normative intimacies (such as lesbian, passing, butch fem, tom, dee, T, Po, dyke, zami, tribade, marimacha, trans, trans guy, boy dyke, stud, lady, queer, etc). Throughout, we will examine concepts such as sex, gender, and sexual orientation, and the social/political uses to which they have been put.

Our sources in include historical monographs, autobiography, fiction, feminist and queer theory, manifesto, and film. Examples are drawn from the US, England, China, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, Surinam, Lesotho, and Greece, ranging from the 18th century to the present.

Course Books are available for purchase at Room of One’s Own, and on 3-hour loan from Reserves at College Library; they are also at the Gender and Women’s Studies Library on the 8th floor of Social Sciences.

Patricia Sieber, ed., Red Is Not the Only Color: Contemporary Chinese Fiction on Love and Sex Between Women (collected stories)
Megan Sinnott, Toms and Dees: Transgender Identity and Female Same-Sex Relationships in Thailand
Lisa Duggan, Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence and American Modernity
Leslie Feinberg, Stone Butch Blues

Required Course Reader is available for purchase at Student Copy in Memorial Union. It is also on Reserve at College Library.
Lesbian(?) Cultures and Contexts, Fall 09

**Course Requirements**

*You must complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade.*

*Attendance Policy: Attendance is required, and it is important that you come to class prepared to discuss the day’s readings. You are allowed one absence during the semester; each additional absence will lower your semester grade by ½ letter.*

*Paper Policy: All papers should have titles, your name, and the date. NO TITLE PAGE PLEASE. Papers that are multiple pages should be STAPLED or PAPERCLIPPED. You may use double, single, or 1½ space; assume page-length guidelines refer to double-spaced and adjust your length accordingly. I encourage you to print on both sides or use any method of conserving paper, provided you leave margins free for my comments.*

**Participation 20%:** Participation includes active, verbal, and respectful involvement in class discussion and in small group work. It usually takes an entire room full of people to gain perspective, so all we depend on you to share your questions and insights, and to encourage your classmates to do so as well.

**Scholar’s Question and Vocabulary Word 15%:** Each week, you must bring to class a note card on which you write your name, and one question (any question) that the reading leaves you pondering. You will also include a vocabulary word drawn from the reading. We will begin each class by sharing what we have written on our cards.

**9 Scholar’s Dialogues (5% each):** 2 pages. Dialogues should respond to two or more of our required readings for a given week, and should be handed in at the beginning of the class period. You should include: 1. a brief statement of the topic (e.g. “this article is about…”); 2. a brief statement of the author’s thesis (e.g. “the author argues that…”); 3. a discussion of what you find most compelling in the reading. Your dialogues will be graded on your effort to understand the author’s arguments, and on the depth of your engagement with the material. 5 dialogues have specific due dates (see schedule); 4 have self-selected due dates.

**Final Paper/Project (20%):**
This assignment asks you to delve into an issue raised in the course of the semester using (at a minimum) relevant sources from class. You will receive an assignment sheet with requirements and criteria by week 5; due the last week of classes.

**Accessibility:** Everyone, regardless of disabilities or special needs, is welcome in this course. Please let me know if you need any accommodations in the instruction or evaluation procedures in order to facilitate your full participation. The McBurney Center provides useful assistance and documentation.

**Computers and cell phones:** I ask that you do not use laptops in class unless, for reasons of accessibility, you need one to fully participate (let me know if this is the case). I also ask that you turn off cell phones before class starts, and keep them in your bag for the duration.
Lesbian(?) Cultures and Contexts, Fall 09

**Course Schedule**

**I Making a Usable Past, Part I**

Sept 8
Introduction

Sept 15  **Scholar’s Dialogue Due**
Judith Halberstam, “Perverse Presentism”
Martha Vicinus, “Lesbian History: All Facts and No Theory or All Theory...”
Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Bodies in Motion: Lesbian and Transsexual Histories”
Anne Lister Diaries, selections (in class)

Sept 22
Robert Reid-Pharr, “Living as a Lesbian”
Cheryl Dunye, *Watermelon Woman* (film in class)

**II Making Usable Places**

Sept 29  **Scholar’s Dialogue Due**
Venetia Kantsia, “'Certain Places Have Different Energy': Eresos, Lesvos”
Kendall, “Women in Lesotho and the (Western) Construction of Homophobia”
Gloria Anzaldua, selections from *Borderlands*

Oct 6
Y. Antonia Chao, “Drink, Stories, Penis, and Breasts: Lesbian Tomboys in Taiwan from the 1960s to the 1990s”

**III Locally Lesbian or Globally Gay?**

Oct 13  **Scholar’s Dialogue Due**
Blackwood and Wieringa, “Sapphic Shadows”
Gloria Wekker, “What’s Identity Got to Do With It? Rethinking Identity in Light of Mati Work in Surinam”
Antonia Chao, “Global Metaphors and Local Strategies in the Construction of Taiwan’s Lesbian Identities”

Oct 20
Sieber, ed., *Red Is Not the Only Color*

Oct 27
*Drifting Flowers* (film, in class)
IV Using the Past, Part II

Nov 3 Scholar’s Dialogue Due
Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers*

Nov 10
Hazel Carby, “It Jus Be’s Dat Way Sometime”
Siobhan Somerville, “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body”
Evelynn Hammonds, “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality”

Nov 17
Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*
Brice Smith, “Identity Matters: Toward a Trans- Historical Analysis of Identity Construction”

V Constructing the Political Lesbian

Nov 24
Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman”
Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”
Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement”
Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born a Woman”

VI Sex/Gender/Identity

Dec 1 Scholar’s Dialogue Due
Megan Sinnott, *Toms and Dees: Transgender Identity and Female Same-Sex Relationships in Thailand*, entire

Dec 8
Antonia Chao, ‘How come I can’t stand guarantee for my own life?’: Taiwan citizenship and the cultural logic of queer identity”
*Shinjuko Boys* (film, in class)

Dec 15
Judith Halberstam, selections from the *Drag King Book*