On Love in the 20th Century: the Politics of Sexuality and Intimacy in the Age of the Self

Course description

This course examines the main theoretical approaches and identifies key historical transformations of some interrelated concepts such as love, sexuality and intimacy. The 20th Century more than any other period in human history defined “love” as a fundamental object of scrutiny, reform, preoccupation and anxiety. Love and sexuality have also been area of human existence of extreme interest to movements of social emancipation. Such movements proposed and experimented with redefinitions of love, family, sex and intimacy hoping to change a constraining social order. This course combines feminist theory with historical analysis in order to underline not only the changing nature of love but also the wider historical contexts that shaped such redefinitions. As feminist activism and feminist theory engaged systematically and in a transformative manner with the above objects (love, romance, sex, family), the course also aims to place those debates and forms of activism in a broader historical context. From a methodological point of view, this course approaches love, sexuality and intimacy from the perspective of history of sexuality but also engages texts from other disciplines. Readings are meant to encourage a comparative approach, especially across the main dividing line of the 20th Century, that between the capitalist West and the socialist East. Topics that will be discussed in class include psychoanalysis, history of sexuality, the global “sexual” revolution, and movements for sexual rights, socialist sexualities, and contemporary philosophy reflecting on love.

Students are invited to contribute with additional examples and issues that have marked the 20th Century understanding of “love” during class presentations and thus help enrich and broaden the cultural/geographical areas under discussion. As part of class activities students should develop an original research project based on secondary source documentation and present their topics in week 11. An outline of the research paper (title+ 3 title bibliography and 250 words abstract) is due week 7 in print in class.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this class, after the readings and class discussions as well as after the reaction papers students should be able to:

- Identify and place in context key concepts discussed
- Have a broader understanding over the historical transformations of the 20th Century, more specifically over those connected to love, sexuality and intimacy,
- Critically assess and compare class readings according to the theoretical arguments put forward and the methods used to construct those arguments
- Identify and research a topic of theoretical relevance to the themes of the course through primary sources found on the internet or other resources accessible to the student during the semester
- Present critical written analysis that is backed up by arguments and evidence from class readings and/or primary research materials
- Demonstrate abilities to analyze, assess and compare class materials through oral participation in class

Main Readings and Suggested Documentaries:


Documentary movies:

BBC Love and Marriage: A 20th Century Romance, 3 episodes

Do Communists Have Better Sex? Director André Meier 2006.


Class Requirements:

This a discussion based class and therefore it will require that all students do their weekly readings and come to class prepared to critically engage with the texts, to express opinions, analyze and debate the assigned materials. At the beginning of each class I will give an introduction of theme addressed by the weeks readings, which will then be followed by a number of questions to be discussed by the class.

Student requirements:

- Class presentation

After the first week of class, each student is expected to choose a reading and give a short presentation summarizing the main argument of the text and raise 2-3 questions for discussion. **The presentation should be approx. 5 minutes.** This presentation will count as 10% of your final grade.

Final Research Paper (10-12 double spaced pages)
A final research paper is required for this class. As part of class activities students should develop an original research project based on secondary source documentation and present their topics in week 11. The paper should critically engage with one or several of the themes addressed in class and should be based on class readings as well as additional sources. It is expected that students will use at least 2 readings from the syllabus. An outline of the research paper (title+ 3 title bibliography and 250 words abstract) is due week 7 in print in class. Students can meet with me to discuss their paper ideas at all times so that by week 11 all students are able and confident to do a 5 min. presentation of their paper and receive feedback from colleagues.

Papers are due in print one week after the term ends. No late papers will be accepted.

Grading: 10% reading presentation; 10% research paper presentation; 40% class discussion; 40% research paper.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Week 1. Modernity and its sexed self

Week 2. A brief history of love
- Michel Foucault – History of sexuality, Volume 1, Pantheon Books, Part Three Scientia Sexualis,

Week 3. The dawn of new morals: human sexuality in the open
**Week 4. In Love and War...**

- Pyong Gap Min, Korean “Comfort Women”: the Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender and Class in Gender & Society Vol. 17 (6), 2003, p.938 -957

**Additional Readings:**


**Week 5. Married with Children**


**Additional Readings:**

- Antu Sorainen, The Power of Confession: The Role of the Criminal Law and Court practices in the Production of Knowledge Concerning Sexuality Between Women: Finland in the 1950s in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 35:3-4, 117-138

**Week 6 Socialist sexualities**

- Joise McLellan Even under socialism, we don’t want to do without love”: East German Erotica in David Crowley and Susan Reid (eds,) *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxuary in the Eastern Bloc*.p.49-65.

**Additional Readings:**
- [Free access link]: ‘Glad to be gay behind the Wall: gay and lesbian activism in East Germany’, *History Workshop Journal* (Autumn 2012)

**Week 7. The sexual revolution revisited**

- Eric Hobsbown, Chapter 24 Revolution and Sex and Chapter 26 May 68 in *Revolutionaries* Orion 2011.

**Additional Readings:**

**Week 8 Same – Sex Love: New rights, New families**


**Week 9. Love for sale**


Additional Readings

Week 10. For or Against: contemporary feminist readings of love
- Laura Kipnis Against Love: A Polemic, Vintage 2004 Chapter 2 Domestic Gulagas, p.52-105.

Additional Reading
- Uses of the Erotic: The Erotics as Power, Audrey Lourde in SisterOutside
- Lauren Berlant Desire/Love, Punctum Books, NY 2012. Chapter Introduction, Chapter 4 Desire, Narrative, Commodity, Therapy ( p. 130-158)

Week 11. Student Presentations - students will present their research project to the group including source material to be analyzed in the research paper – student presentation of 10 minutes

Week 12. Post Love