

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**REL 3171 - SEX and RELIGION**

**Syllabus Fall 2009**

Mutatis Mutandis

**Instructor:** María Claudia Livini

Room: AI 228

M-W-F: from 12.00 to 12.50 p.m.

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Office Hours: M from 1 to 2/3 p.m.

**Course Description:**

Understanding this course: Gender issues. Gender roles. Sexual orientation. Masturbation. Menstruation. Abortion. Adultery. Celibacy. Pleasure.

This class is called Sex and Religion.

This is not a class in which we will just learn how different religious traditions view sexuality and what they allow or forbid regarding sexual matters.

We will learn that.

But that is the half of it.

We live in the XXI century. Therefore, we also need to define what sex is, to understand it in connection to current theories and insights outside religion, so we can plug this information into the religious views that we will be learning and discern their outgrown areas.

Religious traditions originating thousands of years ago may shed a light on some but not on all of the constitutive questions about sex/sexuality. Therefore, in order to fill those blanks we need the help of other disciplines.

Although many disciplines contribute to the understanding of sexuality today, in this course we seek the assistance of a few up-to-date theories provided by biology and philosophy, the latter with a focus on postmodern and feminist

thought.

Biology has valuably contributed to our present understanding of sex, gender and sexual orientation, which has challenged the validity of traditional religious teachings about sexuality, particularly within the monotheistic traditions, yet fueling the renewal of theological discussions.

Postmodern thought has critiqued religious views of sexuality, on ethical grounds, by disclosing the flaws of Western understandings of universal truths and justice based on an unequal dualistic model. Feminist thought carved into the foundational narratives of the world religions and denounced two major socially unjust components: patriarchy and sexism.

What is a woman? What is a man? Are they made for each other? What is the purpose of sexuality? Should sexuality be regulated? Is pleasure a friend or a foe to those who pursue a spiritual path?

In the first part of the semester, we will ask these questions to several Eastern religious traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism.

Then, in order to actualize and better understand the terms of our questions, we will ask actualized theories in biology whether they support or contradict what these religious traditions say.

With these biological theories in mind, we will start looking at the monotheistic traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, inviting postmodern and feminist critiques to our class discussion.

The purpose of this course is to have students establish an informed and fruitful dialogue between religious perspectives on sexuality in connection to current biological and philosophical perspectives in order to 1) Understand similarities and differences between the world religions regarding sexuality 2) Plug into religious discourses present views and insights on and about sexuality 3) Discern, analyze, and reach an educated stand on sexual/ethical/spiritual related matters in a globalized, inter-disciplinarian world.

During the semester, students are expected to discuss the validity and value of the three above-mentioned perspectives in a dialogical manner.

NOTE: This remains an experimental class. No audits are allowed. Articles in the syllabus are subject to change for didactic purposes.

DO NOT PRINT THIS SYLLABUS UNTIL PASSED THE FIRST WEEK OF CLASS.

**Course Format:** This course relies, in part, on the use of explicit visual teaching aids such as slides, films and video clips. These materials portray nudity, masturbation, and examples of sexual behavior. Every effort is made to present those materials in a mature and scientific manner. A person who would be offended by frank discussions and/ or visual portrayal of human sexual behavior is not a good candidate for this class.

**Note:** This will be a web-assisted course. Test quizzes may apply.

GRADING: **A:** 93 & +; **A- :** 90 – 92; **B + :** 87 – 89; **B :** 83 – 86; **B - :** 80 -82; **C+ :** 77 – 79; **C:** 73 – 76; **C - :** 70 – 72; **D+ :** 67 – 69; **D:** 63 – 66; **D - :** 60 – 62; **F:** < 60.

**Grade Distribution:**

- Attendance and Class Discussions/ Presentation: 40 %
- Midterm (online): 30 %
- Final (Non – cumulative (online): 30 %

**Midterm and Final:** The midterm and the final will be taken online and they will focus on the assigned readings and class lectures and discussions. They will consist of a multiple-choice part (65/100) and an essay part (35/100). Both can be taken separately within the time frame given for the exam.

During the days of the midterm and the final, students will not attend class.

## COURSE POLICY & ELSE

- . There are no make ups in this class, no extra credit work, and no extensions to the assessments will be given unless students present medical records certifying a grave physical or mental impediment that lasted for the whole week.
- . **Computers** are available on campus if your computer is down; many home computers using modems cannot receive all the video or audio presentations—leave time enough to get them on campus if your set-up at home does not work.
- . **Incompletes:** University policy allows incompletes only in cases where the student has completed the majority of work in the class and has a passing grade on all completed work. You must ask for an incomplete--they are not automatic for those who have not completed the course. All incompletes in this class will expire on the first day the student enrolls in another class, because the longer an I goes on, the worse the student does, the less he/she remembers, and the more unlikely the I is to be completed among the press of other work.
- . In order to mitigate any issues with your computer and online assessments, it is very important that you take the "Online Learning Practice Quiz" from each computer you will be using to take your graded quizzes and exams. It is your responsibility to make sure your computer is compatible with WebCT (<http://www.webct.com/tuneup>) and that it meets the minimum hardware requirements ([http://online.fiu.edu/future\\_whats\\_required.html](http://online.fiu.edu/future_whats_required.html)).

## DISABILITY NOTICE

- . If you have a disability and need assistance, please contact the Disability Resource Center (University Park : GC190; 305-348-3532) (North Campus: WUC139, 305-919-5345). Upon contact, the Disability Resource Center will review your request and contact your professors or other personnel to make arrangements for appropriate modification and/or assistance.
- . The University's policy on religious holy days as stated in the University Catalog and Student Handbook will be followed in this class. Any student may request to be excused from (on-line) class to observe a religious holy day of his or her faith.

- . It is imperative that each student reads and understands the Academic Honesty policies covered in class and described at: Academic Policy.
- **ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT**
- Statement of Understanding between Professor and Student: Every student must respect the right of all to have an equitable opportunity to learn and honestly demonstrate the quality of their learning. Therefore, all students must adhere to a standard of academic conduct, demonstrating respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University.
- . Failure to adhere to the guidelines stated above may result in one of the following: Expulsion: Permanent separation of the student from the University, preventing readmission to the institution. This sanction shall be recorded on the student's transcript. Suspension: Temporary separation of the student from the University for a specific period of time. Failure: The student will fail this course if he/she submits work not his/her own. By taking this online course I promise to adhere to FIU's Student Code of Academic Integrity. For details on the policy and procedure go to **ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT**. **NOTE: Intensive Auditing of the course will be conducted to prevent academic misconduct.**

## COURSE CALENDAR

### AUGUST

- **Monday 24:** Introduction to the course. Syllabus and Guidelines. In-class assignment (no reading required).
  - **Wednesday 26:** Perspectives on Sexuality. Our cultural Legacy. Male and Female gender roles. What is a Woman? What is a Man? Essentialism vs. Constructionism. Postmodern and Feminist Thought. Multiplicity of Discourses.
  - **Friday 28:** Introduction to Hindu Basic Classical Concepts and texts (*Sruti, Smirti*): The Vedas. The Law of Manu. *Kama. Artha. Dharma. Moksha*. Views on Women. Read online articles “Hinduism” by Rita Dasgupta Sherma. A historical overview of Hindu attitudes toward Sexuality and “A Hindu Perspective” by Anantanand Rambachan.
  - **Monday 31:** Hinduism. The Upanishads: *karma, samsara, Brahman. Yoga*. Ways of interpreting the role of the body.
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### SEPTEMBER

- **Wed. 2:** Hinduism. The Bhagavad-Gita; Puranas. Slide show: Hindu images.
  - **Fri. 4:** Hinduism: Sexuality in the context of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Understanding sexual diversity. Read online article “The Hijras.” The notion of *svadharma*. Class discussion on the difference between Vedic and Upanishadic views on sexuality and the body.
  - **Mon. 7: Labor Day (No School).**
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- **Wed. 9:** Hinduism. A very brief introduction to Tantra and Kundalini. Sexual union understood as a path to Enlightenment.
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- **Fri. 11:** Buddhism. Basic Buddhist Concepts. The Four Noble Truths. The Eightfold Path. Rejection of the Varna system. Rejection of the Vedas. *Ahimsa*. Read online article: “Buddhist views on Gender of Desire” by Liz Wilson and a “A Thai Perspective. **ONLINE QUIZ on Hindu basic concepts and texts.** (Mandatory); available from Friday 11 at 12: 30 a.m. to Monday 14 until 11:30 p.m.) Three attempts.

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- **Mon. 14:** Sexuality in the context of Theravada Buddhism. Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. The path of celibacy.
  - **Wed. 16:** Sexuality in the context of Mahayana Buddhism.
  - **Fri. 18:** Sexuality in the context of Vajrayana Buddhism.
  - **Mon. 21:** Video: Chinese Religions. Read online article “Harmony of Yin and Yang: Cosmology and Sexuality in Daoism, by Xinzhong Yao.
  - **Wed. 23:** Basic Daoist Concepts. *Ying-Yang*.
  - **Fri. 25:** Sexuality in the Context of Daoism.
  - **Mon. 28:** Back to the Future. Current theories of Sex and Gender. Biological formation of Sex. Facts. Read online article “Gender Issues” by Crooks and Baur. Power Point Presentation.
  - **Wed. 30:** Video on Transgenderism: “Southern Comfort.”
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## OCTOBER

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- **Fri.2:** Class Discussion of the video “Southern Comfort” in the light of the facts presented in “Gender Issues.” How do these facts relate to the religious notions on sexual diversity covered so far?
- **Mon.5:** Video: Self-Loving. Exploring female way to orgasm.
- **Wed. 7:** Class Discussion. Masturbation: Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist approach in dialogue with current psychological views.
- **Fri. 9:** Class Discussion: Positive and Negative notions contributed by the

religions covered. Review for the Midterm.

- **Mon. 12: MIDTERM (Available from Mon.12 from 12:30 a.m. to Tue. 13, until 11:55 p.m.).** The exam will be online. Students will be tested on the content of the online articles and class lectures. **Columbus Day (No School).**
  - **Wed. 14:** Introduction to Monotheistic Religions. Common Characteristics.
  - **Fri.16:** Sex and Social Order by Design. Judaism. Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative Judaism. Read online article: “Sex in Jewish Law and Culture” by Rebecca Alpert.
  - **Mon. 19:** Read online article for class discussion: “Jewish Memory from a Feminist Perspective” by Judith Plaskow.
  - **Wed. 21:** Class discussion: Judaism understanding of social design, and gender roles. Ancient perspectives in dialogue with Modernity. Is there an essence to masculinity and femininity? Tradition says yes.
  - **Fri. 23:** Video: A Look into Kabbalah (or Guest Lecturer on Male and female Soul). Masculinity and Femininity from a spiritual point of view.
  - **Mon.26:** Christianity. Basic Concepts in Christianity: The Cross. Sin, Heaven, Hell, Grace, Resurrection. Read online article: “The Vatican and the Laity: Diverging Paths in Catholic Understanding of Sexuality” by James C. Cavendish and “The Religious Suppression of Eros.”
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**Wed. 28:** Sexuality in the context of Catholicism and the main critiques by Rosemary Ruether and Mary Daly. Presentation and class discussion.

**Fri. 30:** Student Presentation: “Gender Variance and the Scriptures” and “Sexual Orientations” by Crooks and Baur (online article).

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## NOVEMBER

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**Mon.2:** Class Discussion on Sexual diversity.

**Wed. 4:** Video: The Future of Christianity.

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- **Fri. 6:** Class Discussion on the Video.
- **Mon.9:** Islam. Read online “Islamic Conceptions of Sexuality. Video: Inside Mecca. Read online chapter on Women from the Qur’an.
- **Wed. 11: Veteran’s Day (No School).**
- **Fri. 13:** Basic Islamic Concepts and texts: Shar’ia, Fiqh, Allah’s Ideal Society, Fitnah; the Qur’an, and Hadith. Sunnis and Shi’as. Polygamy. Homosexuality. Sufism.
- **Mon. 16:** Sexuality in the context of Islam. Class Discussion on Islam and Sexuality. Video: “Submission” – one extreme view on Islamic treatment of women.
- **Wed. 18:** Class discussion: Sexuality and Submission in the context of Monotheistic Religious traditions. Comparing beliefs; discussing facts.
- **Fri. 20:** Read “The Erosion of Sexual Dimorphism” by Christine Gudorf.
- **Mon. 23:** Read online article: “No Girls Allowed” by Rita Gross. Presentation and class discussion.

**Wed. 25:** Discussing women from a female perspective. Video: “The Vagina Monologues.”

- **Fri. 27:** Discussing men from a male perspective. For class discussion read “Explaining Men” by Philip Culbertson and “Embracing Masculinity” by James Nelson. Response of the students.

- **Mon. 30:** Discussing sexuality and spirituality today. Women; men; gender roles; sexual diversity. Postmodern Thought. Presentation of ideas and class discussion.

## DECEMBER

- **Wed. 2:** Beyond Postmodern ideas: Introduction to Integral Theory.
- **Fri. 4:** Class Discussion. Review for the Final. Class attendance ends here.
- **Mon 7: Study at HOME.**

- **Wed 9: Study at HOME.**
- **Fri. 11: FINAL EXAM (online) From Fri.11 at 12:30 a.m. to Saturday 12 until 11:55 p.m.).**