

American Studies 473

Sexual Orientations

Spring 2011

Code: 18046

EC 122

MW 1:00-2:15

Department website: <http://hss.fullerton.edu/amst/index.asp>

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Required Reading:

Edward Stein, *The Mismeasure of Desire: The Science, Theory, and Ethics of Sexual Orientation* (1999)

Thomas A. Foster, editor, *Long before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America* (2007)

Will Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture* (2004)

Lisa M. Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* (2008)

Rich C. Savin-Williams, *The New Gay Teenager* (2005)

Welcome to American Studies 473! This semester we'll examine the origins, manifestations, and consequences of one of the most widely and deeply held notions in American culture today: that we have a sexual identity, not just sexual activities; that this identity is determined by the sex of the people with whom we have (or yearn to have) sexual involvement; and that this identity may meaningfully be spoken of as an "orientation," as if it were a particular point on a sort of sexual compass.

There's a lively debate today over whether sexual orientation is essentially biological or cultural—whether it is, very simplistically put, a matter of choice or not, and whether it may be changed or not—but the notion of sexual identity or orientation itself is very rarely questioned. So firmly held is this notion of sexual identity nowadays, and so widespread is the interest in knowing people's sexual identity, that we often ignore the fact that some other societies—apparently including

our own society in earlier times—have not found it meaningful to employ a notion of sexual identity or sexual orientation. In the language of cultural studies, this course will *interrogate* and *historicize* the notion of sexual orientation and sexual identity.

Course Requirements:

Our class sessions will be devoted to my lectures, our discussions, and an occasional video. It is essential that you attend class regularly and that you complete reading by the day for which it is assigned. This class will require your active involvement—as listeners and, I hope, as speakers too—in our frequent discussions. **Reading assignments** are not light. Please try to take advantage of those occasions when no reading is assigned to do some reading ahead.

As we're concluding our coverage of the Foster book, I'll announce a topic on which you must write **a midterm essay** of about 2,000 words. I'll discuss the essay topic with you in class. Your essay should rely on what we have covered through the end of the week that we finish discussing Foster. The essay will be prepared outside of class; you will have one week to prepare it.

On the same day that the midterm essay is due, **graduate students** must also submit an **annotated bibliography** of at least ten works that examine an aspect of sexual orientation of interest to the student. Preparing this bibliography definitely doesn't require reading all of the sources listed, just discovering them and consulting them enough to discern their content and significance. The topic explored in this assignment may be related to *but should not be exactly the same as* the research project discussed below; the bibliography will count half as much as the midterm essay.

Next, all students must also conduct **independent research** for this class, culminating in a paper of at least 2,000 words if you are an undergraduate or at least 2,500 words if you are a graduate student. Your paper is to be a

comparative analysis of how sexual orientation figures in two different locations, events, or forms of expression. Whether you examine two places, two events, or two forms of expression, you must research and incorporate into your paper not only the particular places, events, or expressions themselves, but also the broader cultural context of the places, the events, or the expressions. The categories of this research are thus:

1. Places: Comparative ethnography: a comparison of two different yet interestingly analogous locations that you visit and study this semester—such as two clubs or bars or other commercial establishments, two beaches, or two churches. The sexual orientation of those who patronize or frequent these places must somehow seem significant, and your task is to analyze that significance.

2. Cultural events: a comparison of two different events in which the sexual orientation of those involved in the events is somehow relevant. These events may be historical or contemporary; they may each be from a different era or instead be contemporaneous. Two crimes, two “scandals,” or two political campaigns would, for example, be especially viable choices.

3. Cultural expression: a comparison of how sexual orientation figures in two comparable films, novels, television shows, or advertising campaigns; or else a comparison of the work of two individual humorists, singers, actors, writers, poets, photographers, or painters whose own sexual orientation, or whose audience’s sexual orientation, seems significant.

If you do an ethnography, you obviously will not have to account for historical change, but you may or may not introduce that factor into a study of events or cultural expression; that is, you may or may not study contemporaneous events or expressions. Similarly, be sure, as appropriate, to confront factors of generation, race, gender,

region, and social class in your work. Beginning your research, you shouldn't assume that sexual orientation will turn out to be, or not to be, highly significant. Rather, your task is to gauge its significance, to reach a conclusion about how much it matters.

You must have **selected your research topic** and have notified me of your choice in writing, along with a tentative title and a preliminary bibliography for your paper, no later than **Monday March 7**, the beginning of the seventh week of class. Your paper is due no later than **Wednesday, May 4**.

Please see me in my office as often as you like to talk about your research. I also welcome your phone calls or e-mails. I refuse to assign a topic, but I'll be happy to make suggestions that might help you select a subject for your research.

Your completed paper must include a bibliography that lists all sources consulted in your research, not just the sources that are actually cited in the text. (There's no need for a separate "works cited" section.) You may use either footnotes or endnotes, whichever you prefer. You may use any research paper format guide that you like; just be consistent in the way that you cite sources.

Lastly, the **final exam** will be an essay of around 2,500 words. The essay will require that you review all of the material covered throughout the semester. To be prepared outside of class, the essay will be due on **Monday, May 16, at 4:00 pm**. Graduate students must also submit a **critical review** of around 1,000 words of one work selected from the annotated bibliography that was prepared at the time of the midterm essay; this review will count half as much as the final essay.

Grading:

In determining your **grade for written work**, I will count your midterm work (an essay from undergraduates, an essay

and a bibliography from graduate students) as 20%; your independent research project as 40%; and your final work (an essay from undergraduates, an essay *and* a critical review from graduate students) as 40%. My criteria in evaluating the midterm essay, the research project, and the final essay are: understanding, originality, evidence, clarity, and organization. For graduate students, I'll use the same criteria in evaluating the critical review that's due along with the final essay; for their annotated bibliography due early in the semester, I'll look for creativity in topic selection and for succinctness in describing a source.

As I then determine your course grade, the quality and extent of your class participation will raise or lower your grade for written work as much as one full letter. I use the university's plus/minus grading system.

I do not make or accept **extra credit** assignments. I will extend deadlines for written work only for compelling reasons.

Academic dishonesty is a very serious matter. Depending on the severity of the offense, the penalty will range from failure on a particular assignment to failure in the course. I might report an especially severe instance of dishonesty to the Dean of Students, and this might result in an even more serious penalty. As the University Catalog aptly puts it, academic dishonesty "usually involves an attempt by a student to show possession of a level of knowledge or skill which he or she does not possess." Further information on academic dishonesty is contained in the University Catalog's section on "Grading Policies."

Working with the Office of Disabled Student Services, I'll make accommodations appropriate to the needs of **students with disabilities**.

COURSE OUTLINE

A. ORIENTING OURSELVES

- M 1/24** Introducing Ourselves and the Course
- W 1/26** Disorientation: Sexual Identity in Cross Cultural
M 1/31 Perspective
Video: From “Middle Sexes: Redefining He and She” (HBO)
- W 2/2** Sexual Orientation in Contemporary American
 Culture: A Preliminary Discussion
Video: Clips from “The Bachelor” (ABC), “Boy Meets Boy” (Bravo), and “Straight Eye for the Queer Guy” (Spike)

B. EITHER ONE OR THE OTHER? EXAMINING THE BINARY VIEW OF SEXUAL IDENTITY

- M 2/7** Stein, Introduction; Chapter 1, Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation; Chapter 2, What Is a Sexual Orientation?, pp. 3-70.
- W 2/9** Chapter 3, Human Kinds; Chapter 4, Essentialism and Constructionism about Sexual Orientation; Chapter 5, The Emerging Scientific Program for the Study of Sexual Orientation, pp. 71-163.
- M 2/14** Chapter 6, Animal Models and Evolutionary Accounts in the Emerging Research Program; Chapter 7, Critique of the Emerging Research Program; Chapter 8, Experiential Theories of Sexual Orientation, pp. 164-257.
- W 2/16** Chapter 9, Sexual Orientation and Choice; Chapter 10, Lesbian and Gay Rights and the Science of Sexual Orientation, pp. 258-304.

M 2/21 Presidents' Day: No Class Meeting

W 2/23 Chapter 11, Selecting and Changing the Sexual Orientation of Children; Chapter 12, Should scientific research on Sexual orientation Be Done?; Conclusion, pp, 305-348.

B. WAS THERE A GAY PAST? THE MEANING OF SAME-SEX INVOLVEMENTS IN EARLIER TIMES

M 2/28 **Video & Discussion:** "Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community" (2004)
W 3/2

***M 3/7** From Foster: Foster, Introduction: Long before Stonewall; Chapter 1, Ramón Gutierrez, "Warfare, Homosexuality, and Gender Status Among American Indian Men in the Southwest" ; pp. 1-31.

***Research Paper Topics Due**

W 3/9 Chapter 4, Richard Godbeer, " 'The Cry of Sodom': Discourse, Intercourse, and Desire in Colonial New England"; pp. 81-113.

M 3/14 Chapter 8, Lillian Faderman, "An Excerpt from *Surpassing the Love of Men*"; pp. 207-216.

W 3/16 Chapter 11, Mark E. Kann, "Sexual Desire, Crime, and Punishment in the Early Republic"; pp. 279-302; John D'Emilio, Afterword; pp. 384-390.

*****Midterm Exam Covers Material to This Point**
 Due in One Week**

**C. FUNCTION & SYMBOLISM--THE GOOD OF BEING GAY:
THE ROLE OF GAY MALES IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA**

M 3/21 **Video and Discussion:** "The Celluloid Closet"
***W 3/23** (1996)

***Midterm Essay Due, Annotated Bibliography from
Graduate Students Due**

*****SPRING RECESS*****

M 4/4 Fellows, Preface; Charlotte and Me: Preservation-Minded from Childhood; In Search of Gay Preservationists; What These Gay Men's Lives Reveal; Saving Old New England; pp. ix, 3-56; Demophiles Out West; California Conservative; pp. 107-159.

W 4/6 Fellows, Toward a Larger View of Gay Men; Conclusion; pp. 243-264.

**D. HOW DIFFERENT? DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF
FEMALE SEXUAL IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCE**

M 4/11 **Video and Discussion,** "Kissing Jessica Stein"
W 4/13 (2001)

M 4/18 Diamond, Chapter 1, "Will the Real Lesbians Please Stand Up?"; Chapter 2, Gender Differences in Same-Sex Sexuality; Chapter 3, Sexual Fluidity in Action; Chapter 4, Nonexclusive Attractions and Behaviors; Chapter 5, Change in Sexual Attractions; pp. 1-170.

W 4/20 Chapter 6, Attractions to "the Person, Not the Gender"; Chapter 7, How Does Fluidity Work?; Chapter 8, Implications of female Sexual Fluidity; pp. 171-259.

E. WELCOME TO POST-GAY AMERICA? BEING YOUNG AND GAY NOWADAYS

M 4/25 Savin-Williams, Preface; Chapter 1, Why the *New Gay Teenager*?; Chapter 2, Who's Gay?; pp. *ix-xi*; 1-48.

W 4/27 Chapter 3, In the Beginning . . . Was Gay Youth; Chapter 4, Models or Trajectories?; Chapter 5, Feeling Different; pp. 49-112.

M 5/2 Chapter 6, Same-Sex Attractions; Chapter 7, First Sex; Chapter 8, Identity; pp. 113-177.

***W 5/4** Chapter 9, Resilience and Diversity; Chapter 10, Refusing and Resisting Sexual Identity Labels; pp. 178-223.

***Research Papers Due**

M 5/9 Discussion of your research

W 5/11 **Conclusions and Course Evaluations**

M 5/16 **Final Examination Essay and Critical Review for Graduate Students Due at 4:00 pm**