

The Philosophy of Love and Sex¹
Phil 014, Section 201

Summer 2011
220 Thomas MTWRF 11:10A - 12:25P

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Office Hours: Schedule time and place by appointment during class and through email

NOTICE: This class will involve the description and discussion of sexually explicit material as well as non-normative sexual acts, identities, and bodies. If you cannot approach this material with an open mind, or if it offends you, **DO NOT TAKE THIS CLASS.**

General Course Description

This course will focus on contemporary Western attitudes on love, sex, and sexuality. We will consistently guide our readings and discussions by paying special attention to the connections between epistemology, experience, and sexuality. Throughout the course we will critically reflect on assumptions and views about sexed bodies, sexual intercourse, sexual pleasure, and sexual identities, and we will address both the normative and non-normative aspects of these topics through various lenses that are shaped by one's sexual desire, gender, race, class, and ability. Central questions will be: What do we "know" about sex? What even is "sex"? Who has knowledge about sex? How do we know, or from where do we get our knowledge? How does "knowledge about sex" affect our sexual experiences? How does experience affect what we know about sex? In addition to this epistemological framework, we will constantly refer to the political, social, and ethical implications that surround these issues and the cultural "sexual imaginary" of sexual activity, sexed and sexual bodies and/or body parts, and sexual people.

Goals and Objectives

The structure and assignments of this course are intended to improve students' abilities to do the following:

- closely read* a philosophical text and synthesize its contents with other philosophical ideas,
- critically engage* with philosophical material on a personal, social, ethical, and political level,
- write clear and coherent essays* that reflect one's understanding of an issue,
- articulate* theoretical positions clearly in front of a group,
- listen* attentively and openly to others,
- become aware* of one's own attitudes and assumptions.

In addition to being a goal and objective, it is an ***expectation*** that each student will be an active and attentive participant in a safe and supportive learning community.

Required Texts

¹ The contents of this syllabus are subject to change. Students are responsible to attend class and keep themselves informed of any changes that are made.

1. Ladelle McWhorter- *Bodies and Pleasures* (Indiana University Press, 1999)

All other reading materials will be made available online through Angel. Students are required to print them out and bring them to every class session of the week for which they are assigned.

Course Requirements

In addition to class attendance, thorough reading of the assignments, and active participation in discussions, you will be expected to do the following:

1. Weekly Reflections (3-4 pages) – 50% of grade (10 points each)
2. Weekly Response Paragraphs to Savage Love Podcast (300 words) – 15% (3 points each)
3. One Group Presentation – 10%
4. Final Paper (5-7) – 15%
5. Participation – 10%

Note: *Missed classes are the student's responsibility. Assignments, schedule changes, and other information is often communicated in class and not repeated. Late work will be accepted **only** under extreme circumstances and when the situation is discussed with me **in advance**. I will not respond to emails that inquire about information that is available on the syllabus.*

Course Details

Readings: Class sessions will be heavily focused on the material within the readings. Students are required to complete the assigned reading prior to the class period in which it will be discussed. Students must also bring their copy of the materials to class.

Weekly Reflections: Reflections on the entirety of each week's readings will be due on Mondays and are to be 3 pages long, double-spaced. I have reduced the amount of assigned readings per week so that you can finish them before the week begins. Since the reflections are short they must be focused and well-written. Reflection essays are not intended to be formal research essays nor are they intended to be personal diaries.

In each reflection you are to pick a topic from the week's readings, clearly explicate it, and then develop your reactions to it. You can briefly summarize an issue, problem, or theme (no more than a paragraph), but the majority of your grade will depend on your critical engagement with the ideas in the texts. References to specific pages will prevent you from needing to cite large quotes, but you must ground everything that you say in the material. Grades will be based on how accurately you explicate the chosen class/reading topic and identify relevant issues in previous readings and lectures, and how well you elaborate upon and support your reactions. In developing your reaction, don't just say that you agree with an idea or that you think an idea is wrong—*explain why you think that* using the concepts and ideas that we have discussed in the class. **Your grade is based not on what you believe, but on how well you have developed your reasons for your views in direct response to the arguments in the reading.** In short, don't simply write your opinions or what you already think about a topic—instead, demonstrate through your writing that you are thinking about the issues.

Weekly Response Paragraphs to Podcast: Each Tuesday, author and activist Dan Savage releases a popular podcast on love, sex, and relationships (This podcast will be give us material for discussing topics on love, marriage, relationships, monogamy, etc.). You are required to listen to this podcast before Wednesday’s class and write a paragraph that responds to **one** issue in the podcast so that we can discuss its contents as a group in class. ***The paragraph will be graded according to its thoughtfulness and critical engagement with relevant issues that relate to themes and topics from class.*** In your response you are expected to draw comparisons to other texts we have discussed, raise questions that might complicate or elucidate the issues at hand, and/or analyze your own reactions to the podcast. You can stream the podcast on Savage’s website, subscribe to it on iTunes, or if you have a smartphone you can look for the app. <http://podcasts.thestranger.com/savagelove/>

Presentations: Every student will sign up to give a group presentation for one Thursday of the summer semester. You will need to meet with the other members in your group outside of class and identify one aspect of that week’s readings that you will discuss. As a group, exchange your own varying perspectives and experiences on the topic that you have chosen to emphasize and try to reach a “group conclusion”—even if the conclusion is that there are unresolved disagreements in the group. The presentation itself should consist in a summary of your collective conversation and the “group conclusion” which notes new insights, leftover questions, and/or persisting confusions where you give the highlights of what you talked about—who asked what, how so-and-so responded, etc. The presentation itself should be around ten to fifteen minutes in length and the students in the presenting groups are expected to help facilitate the discussion that follows the presentation. You will be graded as a group on each person’s participation and involvement in the presentation and on how well it stimulates class discussion.

Final Paper: The final paper is your opportunity to reflect on the most important topic, concept, or idea *for you* from the 6 weeks of class reading, discussion, and the Savage Love podcast.

The format of the paper will be a hybrid between a critical response paper and a research paper (using only the texts from class). You must choose your topic, clearly explain what is at stake surrounding your chosen idea, and *explain how your thought process has changed or developed regarding the issue.* In addition to identifying the idea and explaining its significance in general and in particular for your own thinking, you must refer to specific texts from the class material and use them to develop and strengthen the points that you make. In total, the paper is to be at least 5 pages in length, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, etc. We will use the final exam period to discuss your paper with the whole class. A rough proposal for your final paper will be due **Friday, July 22nd.**

Participation: Attendance is **required.** If you miss **three** class sessions you will lose 5 points (half a letter grade), and if you miss **five** or more absences your final score for the class will be lowered a total of 10 points (a whole letter grade). Thursday and Friday classes will be dedicated to group presentations and discussions on the major themes and connections for that week. Attentive listening and engagement is expected of those who are not presenting and will be taken into consideration when determining your final participation grade. In other words, full attendance does not guarantee a full participation grade.

Grading Policy: Your final grade will be based on a 100 point scale. The point value of individual assignments directly reflects their relative weight in the final grade. To check your own progress in the course, simply add up the amount of points you have earned.

94-100: A
90-93: A-
87-89: B+
84-86: B
80-83: B-
77-79: C+
70-76: C
60-69: D
0-59: F

Academic Integrity

Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course, whether intentional or unintentional. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fraud, and any failure to cite all materials and sources in your work. Failure to uphold academic standards of integrity will result in academic disciplinary sanctions and will be reported to the University's Judicial Affairs office. (see Section 49-20 Academic Integrity, <http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/>).

Anti-Discrimination Policy

This class will adhere to Penn State's prohibition of discrimination and harassment against any person because of age, ancestry, disability or handicap, color, national origin, race, religion, gender, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status (see <http://guru.psu.edu/policies/AD42.html>).

Disability Accommodations

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible. You may also contact the Office for Disability Services which is located in 116 Boucke (see also http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/pros_students.asp).

Reading Schedule

Week 1: Introduction, Sex and Knowledge

Readings:

-Foucault, excerpt from *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Scientia Sexualis
-McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures* Ch. 1

W (6/29): Introduction to Class

R (6/30): Lecture

F (7/1): Lecture

****Sign Up For Group Presentations****

Week 2: Foucault and the Genealogical Approach to Sexuality

Readings:

-Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures* Ch. 2

M (7/4): No Class

T (7/5): Lecture

****Reflection 1 Due on Foucault and McWhorter****

W (7/6): Discuss Savage Love Podcast

****Response Paragraph Due****

R (7/7): Group Presentations and Discussion

F (7/8): Week-in-Review

Week 3: Sexed Bodies and Sexed Parts

Readings:

-Susan Bordo, "Hard and Soft"

- Nancy Tuana, "Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance"

- Iris Marion Young, "Breasted Experience"

M (7/11): Lecture

****Reflection 2 Due on Bordo, Young, and Tuana****

T (7/12): Lecture

W (7/13): Discuss Savage Love Podcast

****Response Paragraph Due****

R (7/14): Group Presentations and Discussion

F (7/15): Week-in-Review

Week 4: Heterosexuality, Heteronormativity, and Women's Pleasure

Readings:

-Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"

-Celia Kitzinger, "Problematizing Pleasure: Radical Feminist Deconstructions of Sexuality and Power"

-Nikki Sullivan, Ch. 7 "Queering 'Straight' Sex"

-Ruth Gibian, "Refusing Certainty: Toward a Bisexuality of Wholeness"

M (7/18): Lecture

****Reflection 3 Due on Sullivan, Kitzinger, Sullivan, and Gibian****

T (7/19): Lecture

W (7/20): Discuss Savage Love Podcast

****Response Paragraph Due****

R (7/21): Group Presentations and Discussion

F (7/22): Week-in-Review

****Proposal for Final Paper Due****

Week 5: Sexuality, Race, and Disability

Readings:

-Alexa Schriempf, "(Re)fusing the Amputated Body: An Interactionist Bridge for Feminism and Disability"

- Tomás Almaguer, “Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior”
- Angela Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist”

M (7/25): Lecture

****Reflection 4 Due on Schriempf, Almaguer, and Davis****

T (7/26): Lecture

W (7/27): Discuss Savage Love Podcast

****Response Paragraph Due****

R (7/28): Group Presentations and Discussion

F (7/29): Week-in-Review

Week 6: Intersexual and Transgendered Embodiment

Readings:

-Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes” (1993), and “The Five Sexes Revisited” (2000)

-Talia Mae Bettcher, “Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion”

M (8/1): Lecture

****Reflection 5 Due on Fausto-Sterling and Bettcher****

T (8/2): Lecture

W (8/3): Discuss Savage Love Podcast

****Response Paragraph Due****

R (8/4): Group Presentations and Discussion

F (8/5): Week-in-Review

Week 7: Pleasure, Ethics, and Politics

Readings:

-Ladelle McWhorter, Ch. 6 and Ch. 7

M (8/9): Lecture

T (8/10): Lecture

W (8/11): Wrap-up

R (8/12): No class

F (8/13): ****Final Paper Due****