

Introduction to Transgender Studies

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Course Description: Once called “queer theory’s evil twin,” transgender studies has since emerged as a vibrant new area of academic inquiry (Stryker 2004). As an academic discipline, transgender studies is chiefly concerned with denaturalizing the essentialized connections between biological models of sexual difference and social categories of gender identity. From its inception, transgender studies has questioned queer theory’s unrelenting emphasis on same-sex desire, instead contending that transgender phenomenon cannot be adequately explained by the object choice model of queer theory. Building off the poststructuralist turn in gender and sexuality studies, transgender studies primarily destabilizes the assumed naturalness of assigned sex and recognizes both embodiment and gender expression as iterative social processes.

This course offers an introduction to foundational and contemporary scholarship in transgender studies. Throughout the semester, we will focus on “de-subjugated knowledges,” or those that question the intelligibility of embodied subjectivity over time (Stryker 2006). In unit 1, we will delve into the history of trans-ing gender in the United States. We will thus question if the fact that term “transgender” did not exist in the nineteenth century indicates that the experience of transgender identity is exclusively a twentieth and twenty-first-century occurrence. In unit 2, we will investigate the coloniality of gender by contextualizing binary gender essentialism and heteronormativity as largely Western epistemologies. Unit 3 sees us diving more extensively into contemporary transmasculine and transfeminine gender expressions, and we finish the semester by bringing our attention to contemporary representations of transgender identity in popular media.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize transgender subjectivity as a unique mode of differing from compulsory heteronormativity
- Integrate historical scholarship on trans-ing gender with contemporary representations of transgender life and identity
- Critique understandings of gender identity based in biological determinism
- Identify the racial commitments of gender essentialism in terms of Western colonization and chattel slavery
- Evaluate the state of contemporary transgender representation in film and new media

Required Texts:

- J. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (1998)
- Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (2002)
- Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (2007)
- Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (2008)
- Susan Stryker & Aren Aizura, *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (2013) [selections]
- C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017)
- Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (2020)

Required Viewings:

- *Christine in the Cutting Room* (Susan Stryker, 2012)
- *Mala Mala* (Antonio Santini and Dan Sickles, 2014)
- *ContraPoints* (Natalie Wynn, 2017-present) [selected videos]
- *The L Word: Generation Q* (Ilene Chaiken, 2019-present) [selected episodes]
- *Disclosure* (Sam Feder, 2020)

Course Assignments:

- Midterm Paper: 20%
- Final Research Paper: 30%
- Key Term Definition and Resource Guide: 10%
- Class Presentation 10%
- Class Participation (synchronous and asynchronous): 15%
- Final exam: 15%

Midterm Paper (20%)

The midterm paper will be **3-4 double spaced pages** and will primarily feature a close reading and analysis of an assigned text. You will be expected to make an argument about some element of the text that interests you and provide extensive evidence drawn from your close readings to support your claims. Paper prompts, expectations, and due dates will be detailed in a separate handout. Overall, the purpose of this assignment is for students to critically and deeply engage with course content and make an argument regarding the significance of their particular insights and observations.

Final Research Paper (30%)

The final research paper will be **5-7 double spaced pages** and will also primarily feature a close reading of an assigned text. However, this paper will require you to complete outside research and integrate that information into your analysis. You must therefore find at least **two outside sources** that pertain to your topic. These may include outside fiction, non-fiction, poetry, performance, and film materials. Above all else, your papers must have a clear argument: state your argument explicitly within the opening paragraph of the paper. Then, use the main body of your paper to develop that claim, providing evidence drawn from your observations and reiterating your central thesis at various points. Your conclusion should bring together the various threads of your argument and offer closing meditations.

Key Term Definition and Resource Guide: (10%)

Every student will write a 300-word definition and resource guide for a concept that is central to our class. The definitions will include an explanation of the concept as well as how it relates back to at **least two texts** in our class. The resource guide will include at least **two scholarly sources** that engage with this key term as well as short summaries for each source.

Class Presentation (10%)

Over the course of the semester, each student will give a **6-8-minute** oral presentation on a course reading or film of their choice. The presentation should summarize the broad themes of the text as well as your own specific interests and observations. Although the presentation does not need to

contain a formal argument like your papers, it should still demonstrate an in-depth engagement with the text. You must also use some form of **visual aid** such as a printed handout, PowerPoint, Keynote presentation, website, etc.

Class Participation (15 %)

Your final course participation grade will be based on three central elements: attendance, discussion, and preparation:

- *Attendance:* You are permitted **two absences**, no questions asked, without penalty. Absences may be excused only with timely, official documentation from the appropriate university office. For each subsequent absence, you will lose 1 percentage point from your class participation grade. Seven or more absences may be grounds for failure in this course. If you miss class for any reason, you are not excused from the assignments due or completed during that class period. Finally bear in mind that class will start on time each day; habitually entering the (virtual) classroom late is disruptive and will negatively impact your participation grade, as will repeated absences;
- *Preparation:* Preparation is not an abstract ideal but a series of concrete steps. Mark up your books: jot notes in the margin of the text, circle key words, look up words you do not know, scan interesting lines, brainstorm connections and questions. In other words, **read actively**, generating ideas for class discussion and your personal essays as you go. Adequate preparation means you can describe the situation, speaker, and basic argument for any given passage we cover in class; the basic plot and thematic developments in a segment of a novel or play; and the central cinematic devices and themes present in a film.
- *Meaningful Participation:* Active discussion in this classroom is absolutely dependent on adequate preparation. Coming to class with your books thoroughly marked and ideas/questions ready will help facilitate a more stimulating and intellectually exciting learning environment and assist you in confidently articulating your thoughts to a diverse audience. Everyone has 'off' days here and there, but I expect you to be ready and contribute to class each period.

Optional Asynchronous Participation: If you would prefer to participate asynchronously in class discussions, you have the option of completing **forum posts** on the assigned reading and submitting them by midnight before class. Each post should be roughly between **250-500 words** and offer your informal meditations on the assigned reading for that class period. Your forum post will then be integrated into class discussion during our regularly scheduled synchronous sessions.

Your participation in class is of utmost importance to me. If there are any issues I should be aware of in order to ensure your success in the class, please contact me at your earliest convenience so we can devise strategies to make the class accommodating for all.

Final Exam: (15 points)

The final exam will consist of three sections: analysis and identification of specific quotes, short answer questions, and a long essay. The final will be cumulative and will cover all texts discussed in class.

Classroom Environment

Creating a classroom environment that makes all students comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas is critical. I value the opinions and perspectives of individuals from all diverse backgrounds.

My goal is that all students' needs are addressed in this course and all perspectives are valued. I broadly define diversity to include race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation and physical and learning ability. I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all minority student groups. I value your input to improve the climate of my classroom.

Due Dates:

All papers and revisions are due by midnight on the assigned deadline and must be submitted to the proper place on Sakai. All class readings and screenings must be completed before the day they are listed on the course schedule, before the synchronous session. Finally, you are able to request one-**three-day extension** over the course of the semester, no questions asked. Students requesting multiple extensions will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Grading Scale:

A (93-100); 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).

I will use traditional rounding to determine grades that fall between whole values. Any mixed number with a decimal value of five tenths or higher will round up to the next whole number. (For example, 92.5 will round up to an A as a 93, but 92.4 will not.)

Unit 1: Transgender History in the United States

Week 1: Terminology and Historical Foundations

- Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (2008)
- Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, "Introduction" to the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (2014)

Week 2: Gender Non-Conformity, Same-Sex Desire, and the "Sapphic Paradigm"

- Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (2020) [selections]

Week 3: "Sexual Intermediaries": Tracing the Pre-History of Trans Identity

- Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (2002)

Week 4: Transsexuality and the Atomic Age

- Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (2002)
- *Christine in the Cutting Room* (Susan Stryker, 2012)

Unit 2: Race and Transgender

Week 5: “Doubly Trans-” and Double Consciousness

- C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017)
- W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) [selections]

Week 6: Blackness, Transness, and Fungibility

- C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017)
- Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” (1987)

Week 7: Theorizing the Transnormative Subject

- Jin Haritaworn and C. Riley Snorton, “Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (2013)
- Sarah Lamble, “Retelling Racialized Violence, Remaking White Innocence: The Politics of Interlocking Oppressions in Transgender Day of Remembrance” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (2013)
- Richard Juang, “Transgendering the Politics of Recognition” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006)

Week 8: Transgender Expression and the Global South

- *Mala Mala* (Antonio Santini and Dan Sickles, 2014)
- Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, “Translatinas/Os. *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 May 2014; 1 (1-2): 237–241

Unit 3: Transmasculine and Transfeminine Identities

Week 9: Inverts, Tomboys, and Drag Kings

- J. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (1998)
- Gayle Rubin, “Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries” in *Devotions: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (2011)

Week 10: Female Masculinity vs. Transmasculinity: Considering Terminology

- J. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (1998)

Week 11: Transfemininity and Transfeminisms

- Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (2007)

- Susan Stryker and Talia M. Bettcher, “Introduction: Trans/Feminisms: *TSQ* 1 May 2016; 3 (1-2): 5–14.

Week 12: Unpacking the “Dangerous Transsexual” Stereotype

- Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (2007)

Unit 4: Contemporary Transgender Representation

Week 13: Television

- *The L Word: Generation Q* episodes: “Let’s Do It Again” (2019), “Lose It All” (2020), “Late to the Party” (2021), and “Love Shack” (2021)

Week 14: New Media

- ContraPoints episodes: “Pronouns” (2019), “Gender Critical” (2019), and “J.K. Rowling” (2021)
- Philosophy Tube: “Identity: A Trans Coming Out Story” (2021)

Week 15: Hollywood

- *Disclosure* (Sam Feder, 2020)
- J. Jack Halberstam, “The Transgender Look” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (2013)