GSWS 316-4 Disciplining Sex: Feminist Science Studies and Socio-Biology
Breadth-Humanities/Social Sciences/Science

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Lecture: Wednesdays 17:30 to 21:20; Harbour Centre 2205

Course Description:
What makes sex sexy? Must one always be a sexual subject? Why are some sorts of sex thinkable, whereas others (such as homosexuality, asexuality or female sexuality) can remain closeted within the ‘unknowable’ or the unthinkable? What is the role of science in our understanding, knowledge and practice of sex?

Like other forms of intellectual activity, science is produced within historical circumstances, with corresponding societal beliefs and accepted norms that vary across time and place. In this respect, the values and concepts used to understand human sexuality, particularly concepts of gender, maleness and femaleness, influence scientific scholarship and practice.

This course investigates those conceptual and epistemological (or knowledge) premises that support the practice of modern biological sciences within the West. In this respect, it looks at how scientific practice may reproduce androcentric conventions in its research and practice. But it also closely examines the numerous avenues by which ideologies of sex and gender act to form, as they are informed by, our bodies; in which we not only ‘have’ sex and have bodies, but we ‘are’ sexed bodies and are mindful of that conundrum. In sum, this class examines the various ways in which scientific knowledge, social life, sexual life and the life of the human body overlap and interpenetrate. As a third-year class, this course is theoretical in orientation, focusing upon ideas from critical science studies, philosophy and sociology. Students need to be prepared to read theoretical texts and to present a critically engaged research paper at the end of the term.

Educational Goals:
Students will learn to think critically about key premises from bio-science, sociology, psychology and philosophy that guide common understandings of the body, sexual difference and sexuality and which support intersecting relations of human identity and subjectivity. Students will also learn about the biology and anatomy of the body, especially as both the biological body and the social body combine to produce human identity and subjectivity.

Course Texts and Courseware:
A courseware package will be made available. Many academic articles assigned for this class are available online through the library.

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
Class Participation: 10%  
Seminar Presentation – The Body Parts Project: 20%  
2 Tests on Key Terms in Disciplining Sex: 15% each
Annotated Bibliography: 15%  
Term Paper: 25%

Prerequisite: Prerequisite: 30 units. Breadth-Humanities/Social Sciences/Science.
Assignments and Evaluation Details:

Class Participation: (10%)
Based upon attendance, productive engagement in class discussion and active reading of the course material.

Seminar Presentation – The Body Parts Project: (20%)
Each week, a maximum of 3 students will be responsible for presenting an informative discussion on one aspect of the body (e.g., genitals, brain, skin, etc.). This ‘body part’ is assigned on a weekly basis in conjunction with the topic of that date’s reading and lecture. Mindful of the creative tensions between body and sexual / social self, the presentation will include both physiological and sociological analysis. In other words, (and as an example), it will not only describe how eyes see, but will offer answers as to why they are so important as gendered social communicators or as “windows on the soul”. Each presentation will be accompanied by a bibliography and an outline that clearly indicates the responsibilities of each participant. The contributions of each participant will be stated by that person at the beginning of the seminar presentation. Unless disparities in contribution are evident and noted, the evaluation of this assignment will be based upon the individual efforts which produce the greater whole.

2 Tests on Key Terms in Disciplining Sex: (15% each).

Annotated Bibliography: (15%)
This annotated bibliography is intended as preparation for the term paper. Choosing a topic central to the concerns of the course, you will research the field in order to discover the most valuable sources pertinent to its analysis. You will then prepare an annotated bibliography of the 6-10 most relevant books or articles on the subject. This specialized bibliography will contain an annotation of approximately a paragraph for each entry. The entry will briefly describe the thesis (or arguments) of the article, book or book chapter, the methodologies used in determining the validity of the thesis, and the work’s conclusion. Students should also attempt to describe the utility of the work for their own research. The annotated bibliography will begin with a short description of your research topic and its analytic aims.

Term Paper: (25%):
While the choice of topic of this paper is open (as long as it’s visibly relevant to the concerns of the course), this essay is held to the expectations of an academic research paper. In this respect, it shall have a clear argumentative structure, with introductory exposition, a well-developed thesis statement (which includes the methodology as well as the aims and objectives of the paper), and it will include substantial reference to scholarly writing on the body. I expect this paper to be analytic, rather than descriptive. (It will investigate a problematic, rather than describe an existing social phenomenon). The paper will be 10-12 double-spaced pages in length, be written in 12 pt. Font, and confirm to APA style of citation. (For example, see http://webster.comment.edu/apa/apa_index.htm).