WOMEN’S STUDIES PROGRAM
SUMMER 1991
EVENING/HARBOUR CENTRE

DEBORRAH DUNNE
Lec. Wed. 18:30-20:20
Tut. Wed. 20:30-21:20

W.S. 302-3
WOMEN’S SEXUALITIES:
Deconstruction, Reconstruction and
Strategies for Change

White malestream culture defines and describes women’s sexuality as, and requires that it be: heterosexual; phallocentric; monogamous; dependent/masochistic; bodily-managed; age-regulated; white; constrained by the virgin/whore dichotomy (which is often drawn along the lines of race and/or class); regulated by the state; available to men at all times and in a variety of capacities (i.e., available for everything from verbal harassment to rape); welcoming of manipulation, violence, and enslavement; and circumscribed by pornographic images. In the first half of the course, we will examine feminist deconstructions of these elements of "female sexuality," as constructed by white heteropatriarchy.

Having engaged in this deconstructive work, feminists are prepared for two additional tasks. One task is to devise strategies for dealing with social, political, and legal problems which grow out of patriarchal constructions of female (and male) sexuality. The second task is to reconstruct women’s sexuality. In response to both tasks, we explore sexual meanings, experiences, and practices as these are described by women, and articulate our own theories of women’s sexuality, as well as strategies for change.

Interestingly and importantly, though, internal political problems arise in the context of sharing and debating this work. For the objection immediately arises that one cannot justifiably speak, in general terms, of "women’s sexuality." There are many differences among women with respect to sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, age, class, physical and/or psychological disabilities, religious or spiritual background, politics, unique bodily shapes and sizes, and degree of personal political empowerment. To ignore these differences is to reproduce many of the problems with heteropatriarchy’s construction of women’s sexuality, including its heterosexism, racism, classism, ageism, ethnocentrism, and discrimination against the disabled.

Fortunately, recognition of this problem has led to a rich outpouring of discussions of lesbianism, bisexuality, celibacy, heterosexuality, sexual experiences of women of colour and of various ethnicities, sexual experiences of women of various ages and socioeconomic classes, sexual experiences of the disabled, clitoral and other gyno-centered sexualities, nonmonogamy, female friendship, feminist ethics, and so on. Our second major task in the course will be then, to examine feminist reconstructions of women’s sexualities, proposed strategies for change, and the internal political issues that arise for women engaged in these efforts.

*** This course will be taught from an interdisciplinary perspective; readings have been drawn from the fields of philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, and literature. Assignments will be flexible in the sense that papers can be written in the style of the discipline in which each student is most comfortable (e.g., philosophy, history, psychology).