

Spring 2015, Rhodes College
Introduction to Queer Theory

Mark Behr

Tue/Thu 3.30 — 4.45

901-843 3979

Office Hours: Tue & Thu 9.00 — 11.00, or by appointment

The Course: The course aims to introduce students to the key debates and concepts that have arisen with the development of an academic field of inquiry called ‘queer theory.’ We will read various theoretical texts (queer theory) that we will attempt to apply to our own lives/sexual identities, gender identities, as well as to films, non-fiction texts as well as selections of fiction. We will be asking questions such as: What are the problems inherent in the concepts homosexual, gay, lesbian, straight and bisexual? What is the relationship of queer to feminist? What of transsexuals, transgenders, intersexed people and polysexualities? Does queer provide us with the possibility of a political program of action or is queering all a game? What assistance does Queer Theory offer to our grasp of the complexities of sexual and gender identity?

Course Outcomes: Students are knowledgeable on the history of the development of queer theory and are able to apply theoretical concepts in their daily lives, in other academic fields and to their reading of primary literary, cinematographic and cultural texts.

Required Books:

1. Wilchins, Riki: Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer
2. Winterson, Jeanette: Sexing the Cherry
3. Feinberg, Leslie: Stone Butch Blues
4. Cunningham, Michael: The Hours
5. Baldwin, James: Giovanni’s Room

Other Texts:

Various Articles on the File Server

Various Films on Moodle (watched before class IF YOU WISH unless otherwise noted.

Most movies are optional, again, unless noted for discussion):

1. The Celluloid Closet
2. Boys Don’t Cry
3. Tongues Untied
4. The Crying Game
5. The Hours
6. Kiss of the Spider Woman
7. Before Night Falls
8. The Kids Are Alright
9. Brokeback Mountain
10. Milk
11. Paris Is Burning
12. Fire (by Krishna Jhalani)

13. Philadelphia
14. Priscilla Queen of the Desert
15. After Sex (Eric Amadio)
16. Show me Love (Lukas Moodysson)
17. TransAmerica
18. Pariah
19. My Walk Down The Pink Carpet (Leslie Jordan)
20. Proteus

Quizzes, Tests & Exams: Other than (a) the mid-term take-home and (b) the final take-home exams there will be no scheduled tests during the course. However, if class discussion lags or if, in my opinion, preparation for class is not up to scratch, I shall include more frequent methods of assessment, at times without announcing them in advance. Scores for any such unscheduled assessment will be included in your grade. Should you miss any such tests for whatever reason, it is your responsibility to reschedule with me. *Mid-term exams are to be written as if each answer is a mini academic paper. This means the language and editing is of the same quality as that of a term paper, with the same expectations for a bibliography, citations and footnotes/endnotes.*

Term Paper: As part of this course you will write one *standardized academic* term paper of no less than eight and no more than ten pages in length. The paper includes a bibliography, citations, quotations and all standard forms of acknowledging secondary materials. The paper – a personal essay titled How Queer I Am: -- will make use of five secondary sources such as journal articles and books and is to be concerned with your own gender and sexuality. The paper will demonstrate/illustrate your grasp of the relevance of Queer Theory to your life or to an aspect of your own gender/sexuality. This means that you will construct a narrative of your own gender/sexuality (or an aspect of your gender/sexuality, or an emblematic event or occurrence in your life) and endeavour to *apply Queer Theory to your own biographical narrative*. No term paper or exam that is handed in after the deadline will be accepted. Format: Times New Roman, Twelve Point Font, Spaced at 1.5.

Attendance: You are allowed three excused absences and no unexcused absences. Absences are not excused unless you have offered me a reasonable motivation such as illness, disease or disaster before class. After three excused absences your grade will automatically go down by one third of a letter, for example, from a B+ to a B. I will penalize you a third of a letter-grade for each unexcused absence. Being late for class will be severely frowned upon. Three late arrivals will constitute an absence.

The Hours: This course requires a substantial amount of reading and watching films. I suggest you will have to do at the very least an hour of reading per day in addition to work on your term paper and your two take-home exams in order to complete the course with a reasonable grade.

Classroom Language and Culture: We will at times be working with provocative material, subject matter and language that may be uncomfortable to some of us. As a teacher I

will aim to maintain a safe and respectful space while also at times making use of provocative remarks and language aimed at stimulating debate and inquiry. You are free to come and discuss the classroom culture with me if you are experiencing problems in this regard.

Intellectual honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism may be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Clear evidence of plagiarism (failure to use quotation marks around verbatim or copied language, failure to adequately paraphrase, and failure to cite the source of quoted, paraphrased, or borrowed text and ideas), regardless of the Council hearing outcome, may likewise result in failure of the course. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult your teacher.

Disabilities: Rhodes College makes every effort to provide appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students may request accommodations by making an appointment to speak to Melissa Butler, the Coordinator of Disability Services.

Phone: 843 3944.

E-Mail: mbutler@rhodes.edu

Final Grades:

20%: Participation

20%: Mid-Term Take-Home Exam

20%: In Class Tests

20%: Final Paper: Personal Essay

20%: Final Take-Home Exam

Participation: Because this is a seminar class in which we will be discussing theory, preparing to engage about the readings, stories and films, your active participation is key. Coming to class, and coming to class on time, creates the best environment for enthusiastic and thoughtful conversation. Your participation grade counts 20% of your final grade.

Letters of Recommendation: Students frequently request letters from professors to assist them in being selected for graduate schools and/or into careers in later life. To write an honest, thorough, sincere and appropriate letter of recommendation takes time, effort and focus. In addition to the most basic gesture of respect such as giving your referee ample advance warning and therefore time to compose a meaningful letter and make submissions, you may consider the use of an occasional note of thanks, or, of keeping

your referee abreast of the outcomes of whatever you have applied for. (I turn fifty this year and I'm still occasionally asking former colleagues and teachers for letters of recommendation). As you may be requesting letters for years to come, it may stand you in good stead to keep your referees abreast of major developments in your professional life.

Schedule:

- Week 1: 01/15 Introduction: Syllabus
- Week 2: 01/20 *Gayle S Rubin: Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory
Of the Politics of Sexuality
*We Discuss: The Celluloid Closet (Film)
- 01/22 *Judith Butler: Imitation and Gender Insubordination
*Jamaica Kincaid: Girl
*Mark Behr: Boy
- Week 3: 01/27 *Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: Epistemology of the Closet
- 01/29 *Adrienne Rich: Compulsory Heterosexuality and Contemporary
Lesbian Existence
- Week 4: 02/03 *In Class Test on Rubin, Butler, Sedgwick and Rich
- 02/05 *Ricki Wilchins: Queer Theory, Gender Theory, pp 1-82
- Week 5: 02/10 *Ricki Wilchens: Queer Theory, Gender Theory, pp 82-157
- 02/12 *We Discuss: Boys Don't Cry (Film)
- Week 6: 02/17 *Leo Bersani: Is The Rectum A Grave?
- 02/19 *Eve Sedgwick: How to Bring Up Your Kids Gay
*We Discuss: Tongues Untied (Film)
*We Discuss: Thomas Glave: The Final Inning (short story)
- Week 7: 02/24 *James Baldwin: Giovanni's Room
*I hand out questions for Mid-Term Take-home exam
- 02/26 *James Baldwin: Giovanni's Room
- Week 8: 03/03 *Jeanette Winterson: Sexing The Cherry
- 03/05 *Jeanette Winterson: Sexing The Cherry
You hand me your Mid-Term exam answers: *by noon, hard copy
in my door box, and email copy too.*

- Week 9: 03/10 *Spring Break
- 03/12 *Spring Break
- Week 10: 3/17 *Leslie Feinberg: Stonebutch Blues
- 03/19 *Leslie Feinberg: Stonebutch Blues
- Week 11: 03/24 *Leslie Feinberg: Stonebutch Blues
* Marjorie Garber: The Surgical Construction of Gender
- 03/26 * TransAmerica (Movie)
*Stella Nyanzi: Unpacking Governmentality of African Sexualities
- Week 12: 04/31 * O’Keefe & Fox: Finding The Real Me (Fileserve)
* Serena Nanda: Hijras as Neither Man Nor Woman
* We discuss: Paris Is Burning (Film)
- 04/02 *Easter Break
- Week 13: 04/07 *Michael Cunningham: The Hours
- 04/09 *Michael Cunningham: The Hours
- Week 14: 04/14 *Michael Cunningham: The Hours
*We Discuss: Brokeback Mountain (Film)
*We Discuss: Pariah (Film)
- 04/16 *Harriet Whitehead: The Bow and the Burden Strap: A New Look
At Institutionalized Homosexuality in Native America
- Week 15: 04/21 *Mouhamadou Tidiane Kasse: Mounting Homophobic Violence in
Senegal
*Keguro Macharia: Queer Kenya in Law and Policy
*Richard T. Rodriguez: Making Queer Familia
- 04/23 *Cornell West: The New Cultural Politics of Difference
*Helen Hok-Sze Leung: Archiving Queer Feelings in Hong Kong
*Mandatory: Attend Paul Giollary Lecture
- Week 16: 04/28 *Julian Barnes: The Stowaway
*Isabella Matambanadzo: The Gold Rush
*We discuss Proteus (Film)

04/30 *Final Class: Drag and Overview

Week 17: 05/08 Hand in Take-Home Exam, by noon, *hard copy in my door box
and another copy by email*

05/11 Hand in Personal Essay, *hard copy in my door box
and another copy by email*

End ...