

# WGST 195: Transgender Issues, Identities, and Politics

Monday, 4:00 – 7:00 PM, Fall 2008

104 Allen House

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“Office Hours”: By appointment only on Mondays, 1:00 - 3:30 PM

This course will examine some of the cultural and political issues gender variant, transgender, and transsexual peoples face in the U.S. We will look at these issues both as they appear today and as they have evolved over the last century. Topics to be addressed will include:

- Conceptual frameworks around gender, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation
- Medicalizing/pathologizing of trans identities and bodies
- Media representations of trans people
- Politics of trans liberation

## Required Reading

- *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*, Joanne Meyerowitz, Harvard University Press (2002) (referred to below as **HSC**)
- *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, Routledge (2006) (referred to below as **TSR**)
- *Trumpet: A Novel*, Jackie Kay, Vintage (2000) (referred to below as **TAN**)
- *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, Julia Serano, Seal (2007) (referred to below as **WG**)

Additional readings on E-reserve as listed below.

## Readings and Assignments by Week

Note: This class will center on discussion, and for our time together to work, please come prepared with your questions and thoughts about the readings. You are responsible for all the required reading and are strongly encouraged to do the recommended reading. Some weeks have heavier reading loads than others, and some of the material is dense. Pace yourself accordingly; in other words, don't assume you can do all the reading in two hours Sunday night before we meet.

For details about assignments, see “Assignments” below.

### September 8—Introductions

- No readings

**September 15—Conceptual Frameworks I—Current Understandings**

**Required Reading:**

- WG, Chapter 1, “Coming to Terms with Transgenderism and Transsexuality,” p. 23-34
- WG, Chapter 5, “Blind Spots: On Subconscious Sex and Gender Entitlement,” p. 77-93
- Qwo-Li Driskill, “Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirit/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic,” p. 1-15, on E-reserve—#8

**Recommended Reading:**

- WG, Chapter 4, “Boygasm and Girlgasm: A Frank Discussion About Hormones and Gender Differences,” p. 65-76

**In Class:**

- Sign up for your class presentation

**September 22—Conceptual Frameworks II—Historical Understandings & 1970’s Feminist Response**

**Required Reading:**

- HSC, Chapter 1, “Sex Change,” p. 14-50
- TSR, Janice Raymond, “Sappho by Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian-Feminist,” p. 131-143
- TSR, Carol Riddell, “Divided Sisterhood: A Critical Review of Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire*” p. 144-158

**Recommended Reading:**

- HSC, Introduction, p. 1-13
- TSR, Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” p. 221-235

**September 29—Conceptual Frameworks III—Early 1900s & Limits of Frameworks**

**Required Reading:**

- TSR, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, “Psychopathia Sexualis with Special Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct,” p. 21-27
- TSR, Magnus Hirschfeld, “The Transvestites,” p. 28-39
- TSR, David Valentine, “‘I Went to Bed with My Own Kind Once’: The Erasure of Desire in the Name of Identity,” p. 407-419
- Daisy Hernández, “Becoming a Black Man” from *Colorlines*, p. 1-6, on E-reserve—#1
- TSR, Heather Love, “Spoiled Identity: Stephen Gordon’s Loneliness and the Difficulties of Queer History,” p. 521-536

**Assignment Due:**

- Short reflection on Conceptual Frameworks

**October 6—Medicalizing/Pathologizing I—Current Understandings**

**Required Reading:**

- Arlene Lev, *Transgender Emergence*, “Diagnosis and Transgenderism: The Creation of Pathology,” p. 147-181, on E-reserve—#5
- John Colapinto, “The True Story of John/Joan” from *Rolling Stone*, p. 1-38, on E-reserve—#9
- Alice Dreger, *One of Us*, “Introduction,” p. 1-16, on E-reserve—#6

**In Class Film:**

- *Southern Comfort*

**October 13— Medicalizing/Pathologizing II—Historical Contexts**

**Required Reading:**

- HSC, Chapter 3, “From Sex to Gender,” p. 98-129
- HSC, Chapter 4, “A ‘Fierce and Demanding’ Drive,” p. 130-167

**Recommended Reading:**

- TSR, Harry Benjamin, “Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-Somatic and Somato-Psychic Syndromes,” p. 45-52
- TSR, Robert Stoller, “Biological Substrates of Sexual Behavior,” p. 53-57

**Assignment Due:**

- Personal gender narrative in pictures with captions

**October 20— Medicalizing/Pathologizing III--Resistance**

**Required Reading:**

- WG, “Pathological Science: Debunking Sexological and Sociological Models of Transgenderism,” p. 115-160
- TSR, Dean Spade, “Mutilating Gender,” p. 315-332
- Eli Clare, “Body Shame, Body Pride: Lessons from the Disability Rights Movement,” p. 1-13, on E-reserve—#2

**Assignment Due:**

- Short reflection on Medicalizing / Pathologizing

**October 27—Media Representations I—Reflecting Through Fiction**

**Required Reading:**

- Diane Middlebrook, *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton*, “Born Naked,” p. 3-11, on E-reserve—#3
- TAN, p. 1-151

**In Class:**

- Choose topic for paper

**November 3—Media Representations II--Reflecting Through Fiction cont.**

**Required Reading:**

- TAN, p. 152-278

**November 10—Media Representations III—Historical Context & Analysis**

**Required Reading:**

- HSC, Chapter 2, "Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty," p. 51-97
- WG, Skirt Chasers: Why the Media Depicts the Trans Revolution in Lipstick and Heels," p. 35-52

**Recommended Reading:**

- Monica Roberts, "The Destruction of the Black Transwoman Image," <http://transgriot.blogspot.com/2008/05/destruction-of-black-transwoman-image.html>

**Assignment Due:**

- 4-5 page paper
- Short reflection on Media Representations

**November 17—Trans Liberation I—Politics of the Last 15 Years**

**Required Reading:**

- Susan Stryker, *Transgender History*, "The Current Wave," p. 121-153, on E-reserve—#4
- TSR, Kate Bornstein, "Gender Terror, Gender Rage," p. 236-243
- TSR, Cheryl Chase, "Hermaphrodites with Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism," p. 300-314

**In Class Film:**

- *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*

**November 24**

- No class, Thanksgiving Break

**December 1—Trans Liberation II—1960s to 1980s**

**Required Reading:**

- HSC, Chapter 5, "Sexual Revolutions," p. 168-207
- HSC, Chapter 6, "The Liberal Moment," p. 208-254

**Assignment Due:**

- Reflection on community experience

**December 8—Trans Liberation III—Current Critiques**

**Required Reading:**

- WG, "The Future of Queer/Trans Activism," p. 345-362
- TSR, Richard Juang, "Transgendering the Politics of Recognition," p. 706-718
- TSR, Emi Koyama "Whose Feminism Is It Anyway? The Unspoken Racism of the Trans Inclusion Debate," p. 698-705

**Recommended Reading:**

- Sarah Lamble, "Retelling Racialized Violence, Remaking White Innocence: The Politics of Interlocking Oppressions in Transgender Day of Remembrance" from *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, p. 24-42, on E-reserve—#7

**Assignment Due:**

- Short reflection on Trans Liberation

**December 19, Exam Day, 11:45 – 2:45 PM**

**Assignment Due:**

- Small Group Projects

## Assignments

### Short Reflection on Each Topic

**Description:** Write/draw/paint/photograph a **short reflection** on the readings in each of the four topic areas—1) conceptual frameworks, 2) medicalizing/pathologizing, 3) media representations, and 4) trans liberation politics. If in writing, the reflections should be 1-2 pages long; however you are encouraged to use other media for this assignment: photos, drawing, video, audio-recording, etc. Your reflections can include analysis of the readings, questions you have, connections between readings, and/or other thoughts/feelings about the material we're studying.

**Due Dates:**

- September 29—Reflection on Conceptual Frameworks
- October 20—Reflection on Medicalizing/Pathologizing
- November 10—Reflection on Media Representations
- December 8—Reflection on Trans Liberation Politics

**Grading:** The content of your Reflections will not be graded. You will automatically get full credit if you turn them in, and no credit if you don't.

**% of Grade:** 15% for all four reflections

### Classroom Presentation

**Description:** Each of us comes to this class with differing levels of knowledge about and experiences with trans issues, identities, and/or politics. However, whether you're brand new to these ideas or have lived in trans community for many years, there are going to be places, people, theories, history, and activism that are new and/or challenging. Find a book, article, movie, TV show, website, or some other material related to this class that is NOT already on the syllabus and that challenges you in some way. There is a lot of material in *The Transgender Studies Reader* that we are not reading for class. Feel free to use any of this material. I'm happy to recommend possible material. Based upon whatever you choose, design and deliver a **10-15 minute classroom presentation** about it. Include: 1) what you learned, 2) questions for the class, and 3) a sample from the material (a clip from the film, an excerpt from the book, etc.).

**Due Date:** September 15—sign up for the day you're going to make your presentation

**% of Grade:** 15%

### **Personal Gender Narrative (in pictures with captions)**

**Description:** Because we all have genders (not just trans people) and many of us experience both joy and difficulty around our genders (not just trans people), some of what we read, view, and talk about in class will probably feel connected to some part of your personal gender story. Make a **booklet/zine (6-15 pages)** that tells a gender narrative from your life. Use images (photos of yourself, media images, drawing, etc.) and captions. Include a reflection of how your story is connected to the material we're studying.

**Due Date:** October 13

**% of Grade:** 15%

### **Paper**

**Description:** 4-5 page paper on a topic of your choosing in consultation with me. Paper should include references to at least four pieces we've read or viewed in class.

**Due Date:**

- October 27—pick topic
- November 10—paper due

**% of Grade:** 15%

### **Experience in Trans Community**

**Description:** Most of the ideas we explore in this class aren't simply theory but have impact on people's daily lives. Spend some time in trans community. I strongly suggest that you attend the Translating Identity Conference (TIC) on November 8 at UVM ([www.uvm.edu/~tic](http://www.uvm.edu/~tic)). (TIC is a free, student-run, trans conference that has happened on-campus every year since 2003 and is attended by upwards of 600 people.) If you can't attend TIC, find some other trans event to attend. (See me for suggestions if you don't know where to go.) At the event, observe and participate. Pay attention to how you're feeling, where you're comfortable, where you're challenged, and what you learn. Based on your community experience, write a **3-4 page reflection paper** about what you observed and learned and how it connects to the frameworks and ideas we're studying in class.

- Note to students who have attended, volunteered at, or organized TIC in previous years: If you choose to use TIC for this assignment, attend an unfamiliar workshop, go to an event you disagree with, find trans people you wouldn't typically meet. In other words, challenge yourself.

**Due Date:** December 1

**% of Grade:** 15%

### **Small Group Project**

**Description:** To be discussed in class

**Due Date:** Presentation in class on Exam Day, December 19

**% of Grade:** 15%

## Grading

- Reflections (4) 15%
- Classroom presentation 15%
- Gender narrative 15%
- 4-5 page paper 15%
- Trans community experience 15%
- Small group project 15%
- Class participation 10%

## Attendance

You are expected to attend all sessions of the class. Attendance and participation count for 10% of the final grade. If you have to miss a session, you must e-mail me with as much notice as possible and discuss options for making up what has been missed.

## Late Assignments

Late assignment will NOT be accepted without prior approval from me, barring extraordinary circumstances (death in the family, major illness). If you need an extension on a deadline, e-mail me at least 24 hours BEFORE the due date. I won't negotiate extensions after the due date, except in the above-mentioned extraordinary circumstances.