

The University of Western Ontario  
Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research

Fall 2018

Women's Studies 3173F: Queer Theory

The department would like to recognize that we are located on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples.

*Course Information*

Lectures and seminar: Thursdays, 10:30-1:30

Instructor: Prof. Wendy Pearson

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Office hours: Wednesdays 2:00-4:00

*Course Description*

What is queer theory, where did it come from, how is it changing? Examining key foundational texts in queer theory, the contexts for its emergence, and debates over its contemporary usefulness and direction, students in this course will trace the development of queer theory from Foucault to the present day. Questions to be investigated might include: how queer theory relates to and challenges gay and lesbian studies; how queer theory disrupts hetero/homo binaries; how non-normative genders and sexualities are themselves regulated; how queer identities might be co-opted within mainstream neo-liberal politics; and how queer politics can strengthen anti-racist, anti-capitalist struggle.

*Learning Objectives*

This course will enable students to

- understand concepts in queer theory and their historical emergence and more recent development
- understand the context for the invention and development of queer theory, particularly the importance of both feminist and postmodern theory
- identify historical and cultural factors which have shaped contemporary issues in sexuality and which can be addressed using the tools of queer theory
- consider the ways in which queer theory addresses questions of intersectionality
- apply queer theoretical perspectives in a variety of different contexts and media

The course will also facilitate the student's development in

- critical and analytical thinking skills by requiring them to engage with the topic of sexuality using different epistemological, methodological and theoretical frameworks
- oral and written communications skills
- research and analytical skills (including close reading of both primary and secondary texts)

*Course Format*

This class will be comprised of short lectures and seminar style discussions; you should be prepared to contribute in a productive and respectful manner.

## *Textbooks*

### **Required**

Meg-John Barker and Julia Scheele. *Queer: A Graphic History*. 2016.

Alison Bechdel. *Fun Home*. 2006.

Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. 1976.

Library course pack via OWL.

### **Recommended**

Tamsin Spargo. *Foucault and Queer Theory*. 1999.

Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*. 2004.

All texts other than the online course pack and the Spargo “book” (seriously, it’s 60 large print pages) are available from the Western bookstore. Most of them are also available as ebooks and can be purchased from any online bookstore. Spargo’s book is out of print and only available on library reserve.

## *Evaluation*

### **Participation (20%)**

Participation means exactly that: each student’s participation in, and contribution to, in-class discussion. The overall goal is to have good classroom conversations and to learn about the history and origins of queer theory, the kinds of work that queer theory does and can do, and the way queer theory is being taken up today; there are many ways to go about achieving these aims. Participation is essential and should be respectful of others’ opinions, but also analytical, particularly in relation to the weekly readings. Students are encouraged to engage in debate, ask questions, and work through difficult issues. Theoretical language is often hard, so it is important to ask questions and to seek clarification about things you’re struggling to understand.

As part of your participation grade, you will be required to write a discussion question based on the required readings (although you are more than welcome to also refer to the recommended readings). Ideally, your questions should get at some central idea of the article or book chapter; even more ideally, it should connect to material and concepts we have already discussed. Your questions should not be too broad (for example, “What do you think about this reading?” or “Do you agree with Foucault?”); they should also not be too speculative (e.g., “Do you think people will still oppose same sex marriage in the future?”). These types of questions do not stimulate deep thought nor do they make for good discussion. Good questions are both specific (relating to some major point in the reading) and connective (connecting either to the reading itself, to other readings, to past classes, or to things going on in the world today).

Handing your question in at the end of the class will constitute proof of attendance. However, you may also be asked to read your question during class in order to stimulate discussion. Individual questions will not be graded; however, the quality of your questions will be taken into account when assigning participation grades. I will give feedback on the first couple of questions so that you know how you’re doing with them.

### **Critical reflection paper (15%)**

Your critical reflection paper is due on **September 27<sup>th</sup>**. This paper will focus on the screening of the film *Pride* in the first class in the context of Adichie’s argument in “The Danger of a Single Story.” You

will be asked to take a first stab at applying some queer theoretical concepts and tools to thinking about the ways in which multiple perspectives on history come into being, interrupt, correct and contest each other.

### **Media Review (10%)**

Your media review paper is due on **October 25<sup>th</sup>**. This paper is your second chance to try out queer theory's concepts and tools and to gauge how much you have learned since the beginning of the course. In this sense, even though it's quite different in format, it's a follow up to your first assignment. For this paper, I will be asking you to review one of a number of selected short Youtube videos claiming to explain queer theory (links to the videos will be available on OWL). I want you to assess the quality of the video's explanation, talk about what it gets right and what, if anything, it either gets wrong or explains poorly. In other words, you will be comparing these videos to what you have learned in the course so far. You may also, if you wish, make suggestions for improving the video or explain how you would use a tool like Youtube to explain queer theory to other people.

### **PSA/Infographic Exercise/Current Issues Assignment (15%)**

Following on from the first two assignments, you have a third opportunity to work with and apply queer theory and to judge how much you have learnt since the start of the course. In this case you have three options, two of which are related. Due on **November 15th**.

1) The PSA/Infographic Exercise: Working singly or in small groups, you will create either a PSA or an Infographic explaining your answer to the question, "Why does queer theory matter today?" You will hand in either a printed version, a URL, or a video on USB. Please note that you will fill out a peer and self assessment form and will receive an individual grade as well as a group grade if you opt to work with others.

**OR**

2) Current Issues Assignment: Write a 4-6 page assessment of an issue affecting LGBTQ people around the world today or in the very recent past. You should base this on a current news report or media story which you will attach to your short essay, either physically or as a URL. You will need to identify the specific issue, place it in its cultural and political context, and show how queer tools and concepts can help us to understand what is happening or has happened.

### **Research Essay (40%)**

Students should choose a topic that allows them to demonstrate their ability to apply queer theoretical tools to understand specific aspects of sexuality and/or intersectionality. This assignment includes two components – a **thesis statement and annotated bibliography** (due **November 8th** and worth 10%) and the actual essay (30%). **Essay due date: December 6th**. Additional instructions will be available on OWL.

### *Course Policies*

**Attendance Requirement:** Please see the "Information for Students" sheet distributed by the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research. Circumstances requiring academic accommodation should be addressed with the Academic Counselor in the student's faculty of registration.

**Participation:** Upper year courses depend on student participation in order to provide a great learning experience. It is important that you do the readings on time and come to class prepared to participate in

classroom discussion. This involves not only having something to say about the topic, but also listening carefully and respectfully to others in the class. Good discussion involves acknowledging that there may be other perspectives on the topic and acknowledging that the experiences of others may be different from your own. The classroom should be a space in which students are free to experiment with ideas and even to make mistakes, change their minds, and re-think. Debate should be lively, but also courteous.

**Late Policy:** Students will be permitted **one free extension**, of no more than **five** working days, on any written assignment; the extension request must be made at least **24 hours in advance** of the deadline **by email** to the instructor. Other than that, late assignments will be penalized unless there is a valid medical or other reason and documentation has been filed with the Office of the Dean of the student's faculty. This extension may only be used once per term.

**Women's Studies Essay Drop Box:** Assignments not submitted in class must be deposited in the essay drop box, located beside from the Main Office doors, Lawson Hall 3260. Please note the drop box protocol: papers received between 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Monday to Friday will be stamped with the current day's date; between 4:00 p.m. and 8:30 a.m. Monday to Friday will be stamped with the previous day's date; before 3:30 p.m. Friday and 8:30 a.m. Monday will be stamped with Friday's date. No essays will be stamped with the previous day's date after 8:30 a.m.

**Use of Electronic Resources:** Mobile phones are not permitted in class at any time. Laptop computers may be used solely for course purposes; other uses of a laptop will result in the student being banned from laptop use within the classroom.

**Prerequisite:** Women's Studies 2273E or permission of the department. Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all prerequisites and that they have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as basis of appeal. If the student is not eligible for a course, she may be removed from it at any time and will receive no fee adjustment. These decisions cannot be appealed. See also 2018-19 UWO Calendar on-line.

**Email:** Email is my preferred method of contact. Please allow 48 hours for response; after that, you may wish to query (politely) whether your email has been received. To ensure reception, please use your UWO email account and include the course number in the subject line. Emails from addresses like [sexykitten69@gmail.com](mailto:sexykitten69@gmail.com) tend to be re-directed by the university's spam filter. Please note that your emails will likely not be answered on weekends.

**Etiquette:** When addressing professors you don't know, it is always most courteous to address that person as "Professor [Last Name]." Once your instructors get to know you, they may invite you to address them by a first name – or they may not. No-one who has put years of effort into obtaining a doctorate wishes to be addressed as "Miss" or "Mr." This is not high school. "Hey Prof" is also not an advisable mode of address if you wish to be taken seriously.

**Turnitin:** "All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licencing agreement currently between the University and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>.)" (<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/courseoutlines.pdf>)

#### **Academic Offences:**

"Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>

**Note for students with disabilities:** Please contact [ws-ugrad@uwo.ca](mailto:ws-ugrad@uwo.ca) if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space accessible to you.



Figure 1 Tracey Moffatt, 1989, *Something More #1* [Cibachrome 98x127 cm]

### Weekly Schedule – Summary

#	Date	Topic	Required Readings
1	Sept 6	Introduction	Film: <i>Pride</i>
2	Sept 13	What is Queer (Theory)?	Barker & Scheele; Wilchins
3	Sept 20	The Trajectory of Queer (An Overview)	Barker & Scheele
4	Sept 27	The 'Queer' in Queer Theory	Sedgwick; Warner
5	Oct 4	What the Foucault?	Foucault
<b>Oct 11 READING WEEK – NO CLASSES</b>			
6	Oct 18	Race, Sexuality, and Biopolitics	Somerville
7	Oct 25	Imperial Queer?	Puar; Wolfe
8	Nov 1	Indigenizing Queer Theory	Brant; Finlay; Gilley
9	Nov 8	Queer(ing) Bodies	Levy-Navarro; McRuer
10	Nov 15	Trans Studies, Feminisms and Queer Theory	Namaste; Stryker
11	Nov 22	Queer Kinship and Families	Bechdel; Cvetkovich
12	Nov 29	Queer Theories of Affect	Muñoz; Blackman
13	Dec 7	(No) Future?	Edelman; Muñoz