

Feminist and Queer Perspectives

Official Course Description

This course covers five themes: the history of marriage, primarily in the West; the transition from arranged marriage to companionate marriage; feminist attempts to render marriage egalitarian; capitalism and the growth of the wedding industrial complex; queer perspectives on both heterosexual and same-sex marriage. No prerequisites.



Figure 1: Illustration from an article about an Indian businesswoman who offered a prospective groom a job, rather than a date. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/jeevansathi-arranged-marriage-job-bengaluru-b2074047.html>

What This Course is About

Marriage is an interesting institution, in part because it's so much a part of everyday life for very many people. While far from a universal custom, many cultures do embrace some form of marriage, a fact that is also true historically. Yet, even if we consider only the history of marriage in the West, we are confronted by the many ways in which it has changed. There is

significant evidence that same-sex relationships were celebrated by the early Christian church; in fact, Christianity took little interest in marriage for its first 1200 or so years, focusing primarily on preventing divorce. The age at which people could marry has also changed, although child marriage continues to be an issue in many parts of the world (child marriage is legal in 44 American states and one NGO reports that “nearly 300,000 children as young as 10 were married in the U.S. between 2000 and 2018 – mostly girls wed to adult men”).¹ Depending on the culture, marriage may be restricted to two people (and within that, to two people of “opposite” sexes) or may allow, most commonly, one man to marry several women (polygyny) or, more rarely, one woman to marry several men (polyandry). Marriage may be viewed as a lifelong commitment or a given society may accept people having multiple serial marriages. Marriage may confer rights and benefits (particularly in the US, where many benefits that in other countries accrue with citizenship are limited to the legally married) or it may take away rights (in the 18th and 19th centuries in Britain, for example, women lost rights on marriage and became effectively chattels of their husbands).

To be happy, we must admit women and men aren't 'equal'

By Suzanne Venker / Published February 05, 2013 / FoxNews.com



Figure 2: This photograph of Stephanie Figarelle and Lela McArthur getting married at the Empire State Building in 2012 was mistakenly used by Venker and Fox News to illustrate a story on why marriage must be restricted to heterosexuals. Venker argues that marriage rights must be limited because women are not equal to men.

Marriages, especially among the upper and middle classes, used to be arranged; in 19th century Europe and North America, the idea of marriage for love began to take precedence.

Marriage equality is a phrase that has been used recently to argue in favour of allowing same-sex couples to marry legally (throughout history, lesbian and gay couples have tried to find alternative ways of formalizing their relationships, including unofficial marriages and commitment ceremonies). But the idea of equality in marriage, as shown by Venker's argument that feminism has failed women by convincing them that they are equal to men and thus need to be treated equally within the marriage, also applies to feminist interventions. Marriage does not have a simple, progressive history. Women in 8th century England who married men had far more rights, including rights of property and inheritance, than their sisters in the 18th century. The idea that marriage should be a partnership, called "companionate marriage," depends on a more egalitarian notion of how marriages should work.

This course will look at five main themes: the first is a history of marriage (due to time constraints, this section will concentrate primarily on marriage history



Figure 3: Image from an Irish Times report about the high cost of weddings. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/consumer/big-day-wedding-budget-splashing-the-cash-on-marriage-1.3497583>

in the West). Following this, the class will consider how marriages in the West went from being primarily arranged and concentrated primarily on financial and political alliances to so-called "companionate marriage," or marriage for love. This change took work on the part of reformers, including legal interventions so that women regained, for example, the right to retain their own property after marrying. Feminist interventions to try and make heterosexual marriage more egalitarian are both important and incomplete. The class will next look at how the rise of neoliberal capitalism has affected marriage and, particularly, weddings; the 15-minute church ceremony and wedding breakfast has been replaced by more elaborate and expensive rituals, including the "destination wedding" and spawned an entire media industry (*Say Yes to the Dress* and its ilk). Following this section, we will finish up with a discussion of marriage equality and same-sex weddings which will focus on the various competing discourse, including opposition to same-sex marriage from within the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

Marriage Trivia

Q: How many wives did King Solomon have in the Bible? How many concubines?

Q: Which Christian theologian said that it is better to marry than to burn?

Q: Which country currently has the largest number of polyandrous weddings?

Q: When people in the 19th century called a woman an "ape leader," to what were they referring?



Assignment Information
See pages 3-4



Textbooks
See page 3



Course Schedule
See page 5

Textbooks

Required

Virtual course pack available through your course OWL (see under Course Readings).

Films and TV episodes will be screened in class.

Recommended

Abbott, Elizabeth. *A History of Marriage: From Same Sex Unions to Private Vows and Common Law, the Surprising Diversity of a Tradition*. Seven Stories Press, 2011.

Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*. Penguin, 2006.

Assignments

Participation/Contribution (10%)

In order to have a good classroom experience, it is important that we come together as a group to have thoughtful, informed, and respectful discussions of the issues we are investigating. Some of these issues may be fraught and members of the class may have very different opinions about them, which makes creating a collegial community in the classroom that much more urgent. Participation is not attendance (you get no marks for just showing up) but is really about the contribution you make to the class. As a result, it is also important that you show up to class having done the readings, watched any assigned films or media, and prepared yourself for the class discussion. To help you with this, a checklist will be provided each week on OWL. You will also be assigned two weeks in which you will be expected to bring a discussion question based on the readings. These discussion questions will count toward your participation/contribution grade. See the course OWL for more detailed instructions about how to write a good discussion question.

Land Acknowledgment

The department recognizes that we are located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples. Particularly in the context of this course, we would like to acknowledge that colonization disrupted Indigenous practices related to gender and sexuality and changed social relations amongst Indigenous peoples. Indigenous marriage practices have also been colonized and altered and the course will take account of this history and of contemporary First Nations practices.

Course Policies

Attendance Requirement: Please see the “Information for Students” sheet distributed by the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies. Circumstances requiring academic accommodation should be addressed with the Academic Counselor in the student’s faculty of registration.

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.

Essay Submission: Your assignments will be submitted via the Assignments tab on OWL. Per departmental policy, all written work must be submitted to Turnitin – this will happen automatically when you upload your assignment to OWL. Please do not use the GSWS physical drop box to submit an assignment unless you have cleared this in advance with the instructor.

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. Please avoid distracting your classmates. No-one wants to watch you buy underwear.

Module Quizzes (25%)

At the end of each module, you will be asked to write a brief quiz on the topic. Answers should be limited to a maximum of two pages. Quizzes will be available on OWL under the Assignment tab and must also be submitted to OWL. The format for the quizzes will be explained well in advance. Due: the first week after each module.

Critical Reflection Paper (25%)

This is a short paper of about 4-6 pages reflecting on the work of the course up to the midterm point. Students will be provided with a choice of several questions but are also encouraged to come up with their own. Please run those questions past the instructor at least one week before the due date. Due: February 15, 2023.

Final Research Paper or Critical Project (40%)

Students will have the choice between a traditional research paper of approximately 8 pages or a critical project. The latter might take many forms, including podcasts, videos, Instagram posts, comic books... Really, it's up to your imagination. All critical projects must be approved by the instructor two weeks before the due date. Students opting to write research essays may come up with a topic of their own, pending my approval, or may choose from a list of three suggested essay topics, which will be posted approximately three weeks before the due date. Due: April 5, 2023.

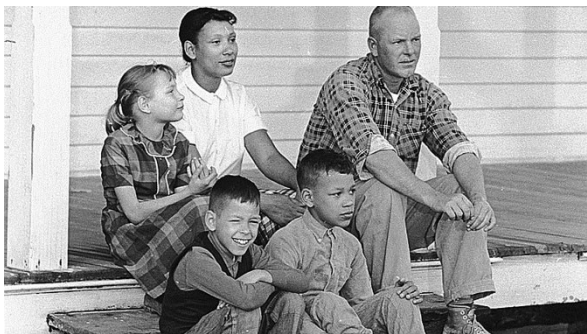


Figure 4: Richard and Mildred Loving made history in the USA when they successfully petitioned the Supreme Court to overturn laws preventing interracial marriages.

Course Policies Cont.:

Prerequisite: None.

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 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/courseoutline_s.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, in the online Academic Calendar.

Plagiarism with intent to deceive on any assignment worth 10% or more will result in serious academic penalties, based on interviews with the department chair and the Dean of the student's Faculty.

Avoid the pain: don't cheat.

Learning Objectives

Course Objectives

- Students will learn the history of marriage in the West, with particular attention to the role of religion, politics, and the making of alliances
- Students will understand the arguments made for and against moving from arranged marriages to companionate ones
- Students will recognize the efforts made by feminists and other reformers to change the institution of marriage, particularly from the late 18th century onwards
- Students will become conversant with the practices and arguments around child marriage and contemporary efforts to end the practice
- Students will understand the social and legal ramifications and challenges to laws restricting marriage, particularly in terms of the history of interracial marriage, but also such complications as the inability of First Nations same-sex couples in the USA to marry if tribal law does not permit it
- Students will become aware of and able to critique the relationship between marriage and migration
- Students will engage in an overview of arguments for and against same-sex marriage, including pro and con arguments from within the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

General Objectives

- Students will be given opportunities to improve their oral discussion skills and to participate in lively and dynamic debates on course topics
- Students will improve their writing skills through the use of written assignments
- Students will bring feminist, queer, and intersectional perspectives to bear on class topics and will practice these approaches both verbally and in writing
- Students will read critically and will understand that not all course reading represent a “correct” perspective on the topic, but will bring critical thinking skills to bear on evaluating readings and other course materials

Weekly Schedule

Please note that the reading schedule will be provided on OWL.

Week 1: Introduction – overview of the course syllabus and introduction to the topic

Week 2: History of Marriage I: From Ancient Times to the Renaissance

Week 3: History of Marriage II: From the Enlightenment to the 20th Century

Week 4: History of Marriage III: A Very Brief Overview of Global Issues

Week 5: Arranged Marriages, Benefits, Downsides, and Incentives to Change

Week 6: Feminist Interventions in Companionate Marriage: Can Marriage be Equal?

Week 7: Interracial Marriage, Laws, Challenges, and Social Expectations

Week 8: The Rise of the Wedding Industrial Complex

Week 9: Marriage in Film and Television and on Social Media

Week 10: Why Marriage? The History of Same-Sex Marriage in the USA and Elsewhere

Week 11: Marriage Equality in Canada

Week 12: Where Now? Contemporary Challenges to Marriage as a State Institution (especially now the US Supreme Court has struck down Roe v Wade)



Figure 5: The first same sex couples marry in Taiwan.
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3011626/taiwan-holds-asias-first-legal-gay-weddings-after-passing>