

Sex Wars: Religion and Gender in the Public Sphere

Religion XXXX (Introductory level)

Spring 2024

KEY INFORMATION AND POLICIES

- Instructor:** Siobhan Kelly (siobhankelly@g.harvard.edu)
- Course Level:** Introductory. There are no prerequisites for this course.
- Office Hours:** I will be available to meet before and after our class meetings. If you know you would like to meet in advance, send me an email to schedule a time. If you aren't available before or after class, let me know and we can find an alternative.
- Where and When:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, time TBD, location TBD
- Course Description:** Religious traditions have always had a lot to say about sex, gender, and sexuality—be it eunuchs under Roman rule or reproductive autonomy in the US today. Many heated and long-standing public debates take place at this very intersection. While we tend to imagine religion as inherently sex negative, religious communities have diverse and diverging approaches to sex and sexuality. In this course, we turn to “Sex Wars” in the public imagination, including but not limited to: abortion, miscegenation, gay marriage, sodomy, contraception, trans life, child and sexual abuse, consent, and the AIDS crisis. Using resources from religious studies and gender studies, we will investigate the way such public debates appear and recur, deepening our understanding of the relationship between religion, racialized gender, and public discourse, and developing tools to both research on and intervene in these ongoing debates.
- Course Format:** We will meet twice a week, during which time I will occasionally lecture to provide important context and information, and to orient our discussions, as necessary. Each course meeting will feature student participation and discussion—come prepared to engage and think aloud with each other, and with me.
- Why Take It?** Think about how many times a day you see hotly-contested debates about religion, gender, and sexuality unfolding—on TV, in movies, on social media, at the family dinner table, and more. While we are not always prompted to think of these topics as intricately intertwined, they are—and once you start looking, you can see it everywhere. This course will teach you what you are looking at, how to talk about it, and focus your attention on intervening into long-standing public and private debates on these topics.

Especially true when thinking about topics that are so close to home for so many, thinking and talking about religion, gender, and sexuality is not easy, and we may often be expected *not* to talk about this. Here, we will practice talking about these issues respectfully and convincingly, ready to make a difference in conversations about topics that impact how we live, love, work, and communicate.

Learning Goals: This course aims to provide students with a critical understanding of the relationships between religion, gender, and sexuality that emerge as key touchpoints in public discourse. We will learn through close reading; discursive, rhetorical and visual analysis; and class discussions of canonical and emerging works on gender, sexuality, and religion from fields including religious studies, queer and trans studies, Black studies, feminist thought, sociology, anthropology, and popular cultural material. In addition to learning key information on the history, formation, and current state of debates about religion, gender, and sexuality—and particularly how race, gender, and sexuality all interact with religion in public debates—students will develop their analytical writing and argumentative skills, the ability to write convincingly for public audiences, and how to make sense of the discourses of religion and sex that surround us.

Course Materials: There will be no additional costs for this course. All materials will be available on Canvas.

Designation: This course aims to have an “RPP” curricular designation.

Course Time Allotment: We will meet 27 times for 80 minutes over the course of the semester, twice weekly (36 hours). I expect students to spend approximately 8 hours per week reading and reviewing required readings (108 hours total). Each reflection post should take approximately one hour to complete (10 hours total). The two response papers should take 4 hours each (8 hours total), approximately two hours preparing the discourse analysis presentation, 16-20 hours on the final project and reflection, and 30 minutes meeting with me in person to discuss your work.

Accessibility and Accommodation: Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you may require accommodations or modification of any of course procedures. You may speak with me after class, during office hours, or by appointment. If you need accommodations around online learning or in classroom accommodations, please be sure to reach out to Student Accessibility Services (SAS) for their assistance (sas@brown.edu, 401-863-9588). Undergraduates in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact an academic dean in

the College by emailing college@brown.edu. Graduate students may contact one of the deans in the Graduate School by emailing graduate_school@brown.edu.

Academic Integrity:

"A student's name on any exercise (e.g., a theme, report, notebook, performance, computer program, course paper, quiz, or examination) is regarded as assurance that the exercise is the result of the student's own thoughts and study, stated in his or her own words, and produced without assistance, except as quotation marks, references, and footnotes acknowledge the use of printed sources or other outside help." ([Academic Code](#), p. 5)

Students are welcome—encouraged—to discuss course material with each other and others in your life as you find helpful. However, I expect the work you produce in this class to be your own, and quotations, ideas, and information you use from sources other than yourself should be properly cited in all assignments.

ASSIGNMENTS

Grading:	Letter graded.	
	Participation:	15%
	10 Reflection Posts:	20%
	2 Response Papers:	30%
	Discourse Analysis Presentation:	10%
	Final Public-Facing Project and Reflection:	25%

Participation: Learning is an active undertaking! I ask that you come to our class each week having read and annotated the assigned readings and ready to join in conversation. **Participation includes both class attendance and contributing to the class discussion.** We will discuss a number of controversial and difficult topics over the semester, given the nature of this material: I expect students to engage each other in good faith and generosity, and to take part in the co-creation of a critical, questioning, and respectful classroom environment. Students are allotted one unexcused class absence, and the ability to make up a second unexcused absence through a short writing summary assignment. Additional unexcused absences will count against your participation score; excused absences require permission and/or a Dean's excuse. If you ever have questions or concerns about participation, please contact me.

Reflection Posts: Over the course of the semester, you are responsible for posting **ten (10) reflection posts to Canvas before 9 AM on Tuesdays and Thursdays.** These posts are between 300-500 words, and are not meant to be polished or finished writing. Instead, these are opportunities for you to

make connections between texts, to ask probing questions, or focus in on a specific quote or idea from a reading. Do not summarize the readings, but think about these as an opportunity to begin a conversation. These are graded as Complete/Incomplete.

Response Papers: Students are required to submit **two (2) response papers that are 4-5 double-spaced pages in length. The first is due by February 23 at midnight, and the second by April 12 at midnight.** In these papers, put at least three and no more than five readings from the course into conversation with each other to make sense of a specific instance of a “Sex War.” What “war” or touchpoint you focus on is your choice, and can be represented by a piece of media, news article, social media post, film, or public discourse in another form, where ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality are being discussed in religious terms, or through religious ideas, or in relation to religious beliefs and practices. How do the texts from our class help you make sense of and analyze the issue? What strategies do the participants employ to communicate their ideas? How do they position themselves? How and where do religion, religious rhetoric, or religious ideas appear? Students should use footnotes in Chicago Manual of Style; these assignments are meant to familiarize students with academic conventions around citation and argumentation. Letter graded.

Discourse Analysis Presentation:

Throughout the semester, each student is responsible for a **fifteen-minute presentation and discussion facilitation about a news article** that discusses a conflict over gender, sex, and sexuality that is refracted through religious concerns, ideas, or beliefs. The article should come from a well-known and mainstream news organization. For the first 5-7 minutes, present the overall argument and analyze the language and framing assumptions that undergird the article. Think about the tone, diction, assumptions, organization, and argument being forwarded by the author, whether intentional or accidental, implicit or explicit. For the rest of the time, facilitate discussion with the entire class on the topic. Think of questions to ask students, readings from the semester to put in conversation, and what you hope your peers will take away from your presentation. **Dates of your presentation will be chosen during the first week of classes.** Letter graded.

Final Public-Facing Project and Reflection:

Students are responsible for a **final project that focuses on writing for a public audience.** Think about the topic or “war” where you hope to intervene. This can be an op-ed for a major newspaper, a long-form nonfiction piece for a public audience, a podcast or video, a website, or something else of your choice. **Alongside the piece itself, include a five-page formal reflection:** think about the process of writing, what your goals are for the piece, who you imagine as your conversation partners,

and who your intended audience is. **Include an annotated bibliography** with at least three sources from class readings and three sources from your own research. **Due May 14 by midnight.** Letter graded.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Course Meetings: Note that this is a preliminary schedule, subject to changes as necessary.

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| Thursday, Jan 25 | <i>Introduction</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No reading |
| Tuesday, Jan 30 | <i>What Sex Wars?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foucault, History of Sexuality Volume 1 “Part One: We “Other Victorians”” and “Part Two: The Repressive Hypothesis” (1-50)• Janet Jakobsen, “Because Religion” (33-65) in <i>The Sex Obsession: Perversity and Possibility in American Politics</i>• Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival” |
| Thursday, Feb 1 | <i>Example 1: Abortion</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• R. Marie Griffith, “The Battle over Birth Control in the Roaring Twenties” (1-48) and “The Abortion War Before and After <i>Roe v. Wade</i>” (201-240) in <i>Moral Combat</i>• Bev Harrison, “The Morality of Procreative Choice” (32-56) in <i>Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion</i>• Randall Balmer, selections from <i>Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right</i> (15 pages) |
| Tuesday, Feb 6 | <i>Whose Sex Wars?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”• Doris L Garraway, “Creolization and the Spirit World: Demons, Violence, and the Body” (146-193) and “The Libertine Colony: Desire, Miscegenation, and the Law” (194-239)• Dorothy Roberts, “The Dark Side of Birth Control” (56-103) in <i>Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty</i> |
| Thursday, Feb 8 | <i>Example 2: Miscegenation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fay Botham, “States’ Rights and the Southern White Protestant Theology of Race in Antimiscegenation Laws and Cases, 1867–1964” in <i>Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law</i> |

- Max S. Hering Torres, “Purity of Blood: Problems of Interpretation”
 - Adrian Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black”
- Tuesday, Feb 13 *Why Sex Wars?*
- Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (110 pages in total)
 - Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, “Why Religion, Why Sex” (1-18) in *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*
 - Judith Butler, “What Threat? The Campaign Against “Gender Ideology.”” *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics, and Innovation* (1-12)
- Thursday, Feb 15 *Example 3: Chastity, Celibacy, and Sexual Renunciation*
- Peter Brown, “From Apostle to Apologist: Sexual Order and Sexual Renunciation in the Early Church” in *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*
 - Joan Cadden, “Is Sex Necessary? The Problem of Sexual Abstinence” (259-278) in *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*
 - Amy DeRogatis, “Sex and the Single Evangelical” (10-41) from *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism*
- Tuesday, Feb 20 **NO CLASS- LONG WEEKEND**
- Thursday, Feb 22 *Power*
- Colleen M Conway, “Introduction: Jesus and Gender” and “How to Be a Man in the Greco-Roman World” in *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (1-34)
 - Foucault, “Part Three: Scientia Sexualis,” “Part Four: The Deployment of Sexuality,” and “Part Five: Right of Death and Power over Life” in *History of Sexuality Volume 1* (51-160)
- Tuesday, Feb 27 *Power II*
- Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics”
 - C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, “Queer Necropolitics”
 - Jasbir Puar, “Introduction: The Cost of Getting Better” and ““Will Not Let Die”: Debilitation and Inhuman Biopolitics in Palestine”” (1-32, 127-154)
- Thursday, Feb 29 *Example 4: Consent*
- Rhiannon Graybill, Meredith Minister, and Beatrice Lawrence: “Introduction: Engaging Rape Culture, Reimagining Religious

Studies” (1-20) in *Rape Culture and Religious Studies: Critical and Pedagogical Engagements*

- Wendy Mallette, “Beverly Smith’s Notes on This Mess”: The Affective Politics of the Lesbian Feminist Killjoy in Queer Progress Narratives” (250-266)
- Susan Brownmiller, “The Mass Psychology of Rape: An Introduction” and “In the Beginning Was the Law” in *Men, Women, and Rape* (11-30)

Tuesday, Mar 5

The Body

- Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body”
- Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex”
- Judith Butler, “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire” (1-46) in *Gender Trouble*
- Gayle Rubin with Judith Butler, “Sexual Traffic”

Thursday, Mar 7

Example 5: Contraception

- Dorothy Roberts, “From Norplant to the Contraceptive Vaccine: The New Frontier of Population Control” and “Making Reproduction a Crime” (104-201) in *Killing the Black Body*
- Paul Preciado, “Pharmacopower” (144-235) in *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*
- Barbara Johnson, “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion” (28-47)

Tuesday, Mar 12

Reproduction

- Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”
- Laura Briggs, *Taking Children: A History of American Terror*
- Jennifer L Morgan, ““The Breedings Shall Goe with Their Mothers”: Gender and Evolving Practices of Slaveownership in the English American Colonies” and ““Hannah and Hir Children”: Reproduction and Creolization Among Enslaved Women” (69-143) in *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*

Thursday, Mar 14

Example 6: The Child

- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
- Lee Edelman, “The Future is Kid Stuff” and “No Future” from *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (1-32, 111-154)

Tuesday, Mar 19

(Social) Reproduction

- Karl Marx, “Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret”
- Rey Chow, “Introduction: From Biopower to Ethnic Difference” and “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1-49)

- M.E. O'Brian, "Introduction: The Oaxaca Commune," "Part I: The Impossible Family," and "Chapter 11: Communist Social Reproduction" (1-60, 181-202)

Thursday, Mar 21

Example 7: The Family

- Melinda Cooper, "Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism" (7-24) and "Theology of the Social: The Rise of Faith-Based Welfare" (259-311) in *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*
- Laura Kipnis, "Adultery" (289-327)
- Peter Coviello, "Prologue: Winter Quarters" and "Gods in Subjection: Women, Polygamy, and the Eternity of Sex" (1-22, 89-134) in *Make Yourself Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism*

Tuesday, Mar 26

NO CLASS- SPRING RECESS

Thursday, Mar 28

NO CLASS- SPRING RECESS

Tuesday, Apr 2

Submission

- R. Marie Griffith, "Introduction" (1-24), "For Such a Time as This: Aglow and American Culture" (24-54), and "Free to Submit: Discipline, Authority, and Sacrifice" (139-168) in *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*
- Niklaus Largier, "Part 1: Ascesis" in *In Praise of the Whip: A Cultural History of Arousal*

Thursday, Apr 4

Example 8: Homosexuality

- Zeb Tortorici, "Introduction: Archiving the Unnatural" and "Viscerality in the Archives: Consuming Desires" in *Sins Against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain*
- Mark Jordan, "Church Lives" (Chapters 4-7) in *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (83-208)

Tuesday, Apr 9

Contagion

- Gil Anidjar, "Introduction: Red Mythology" in *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*
- Anthony Petro, "Introduction: AIDS, Sexuality, and Moral Citizenship," "Ecclesiastical Authority: AIDS, Sexuality, and the American Catholic Church," and "Protest Religion! ACT UP, Religious Freedom, and the Ethics of Sex" in *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, & American Religion*

Thursday, Apr 11

Example 9: The AIDS Crisis

- Dominic Johnson, ““Does a bloody towel represent the ideals of the American people?”: Ron Athey and the Culture Wars”
 - Lynne Gerber, ““We Who Must Die Demand a Miracle’: Christmas 1989 at the Metropolitan Community Church of San Francisco,” in *Devotions and Desires*, ed. Gillian Frank, Bethany Moreton, and Heather White
 - Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*
- Tuesday, Apr 16 *(Social) Contagion*
- Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures and the Habitus” and “Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power” in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*
 - Florence Ashley, “A Critical Commentary on ‘Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria’”
 - Michael Cobb, “Introduction: The Last Safe Group to Hate” in *God Hates Fags: The Rhetorics of Religious Violence*”
- Thursday, Apr 18 *Example 10: Conversion Therapy*
- Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America*
 - Watch *But I’m a Cheerleader* (dir. Jamie Babbit)
- Tuesday, Apr 23 *Resistance?*
- Mayanthi Fernando, “Introduction,” “Reconfiguring Freedom,” and “Asymmetries of Tolerance” in *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*
 - Saba Mahmood, “The Subject of Freedom” (1-39) and “Agency, Gender, and Embodiment” (153-188) in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*
- Thursday, Apr 25 *Example 11: Feminism*
- Andrea Dworkin, “Intercourse in a Man-made World” (3-82) in *Intercourse*
 - Nan D. Hunter, “Contextualizing the Sexuality Debates: A Chronology” in *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (16-29) – skim this for context
 - Sara Ahmed, “An Affinity of Hammers”
- Tuesday, Apr 30 *Sex*
- Niklaus Largier, “Part 3: Therapeutics” in *In Praise of the Whip*
 - Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin*
- Thursday, May 2 *Example 12: Gender Normativity*
- C Libby, “Sympathy, Fear, Hate: Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism and Evangelical Christianity” (425-442)

- SJ Crasnow, ““I Want to Look Transgender”: Anti-Assimilation, Gender Self-Determination, and Confronting White Supremacy in the Creation of a Just Judaism” (1026-1048)
- Judith Butler, “Anti-Gender Ideology and Mahmood’s Critique of the Secular Age” (955-967)

Tuesday, May 7

Conclusion

- Janet Jakobsen, “Conclusion: Melancholy Utopias” in *The Sex Obsession: Perversity and Possibility in American Politics*
- Amy Hollywood, “The Unspeakability of Trauma, the Unspeakability of Joy”

FINAL PROJECT DUE MAY 14 BY MIDNIGHT