

RS 216 -- Religion and Sexuality
Marymount Manhattan College

Fridays, 2:30-5:20 p.m.
MAN 505

Instructor

Prof. Patrick S. Cheng
Adjunct Professor
Email: pcheng@mmm.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course offers an introduction to world religions by exploring the intimate connections between religion and sexuality, “two of the most powerful, passionate, and poetic aspects of human existence.”¹ A number of topics will be discussed during the semester, including marriage, gender roles, procreation, pleasure, desire, asceticism, transgression, sexual ethics, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues. No prior knowledge of the major world religions is required for the course. What *is* required, however, is a commitment to completing all of the assigned readings and participating fully in class discussions.

Course Goals

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Describe the basic teachings of the major world religions, with a particular focus on issues relating to sexuality;
- Articulate your own views on the relationship between religion and sexuality;
- Engage in respectful dialogue with others about religion and sexuality; and
- Conduct independent research on a topic relating to sexuality in a religious tradition that is not formally covered in the course.

Required Texts

The following two books are required texts for the course and can be purchased at Shakespeare & Company:

Matthew Kuefler, ed., *The History of Sexuality Sourcebook* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2007) (“HSS”).

Christel Manning and Phil Zuckerman, eds., *Sex and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2005) (“SR”).

You will need to bring both texts to class each week, starting with the first week of class. Additional online materials will be posted on Blackboard during the course of the semester.

¹ Phil Zuckerman and Christel Manning, “Sex and Religion: An Introduction,” in Christel Manning and Phil Zuckerman, eds., *Sex and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2005), at 1.

The following book is not a required text, but you may find it helpful as a supplemental resource, particularly for your research paper. It is also available at Shakespeare & Company:

David W. Machacek and Melissa M. Wilcox, eds., *Sexuality and the World's Religions* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003).

Classroom Etiquette

Please turn off all computers, phones, and other electronic devices during class. You are expected to arrive on time and to participate fully in class discussions. Because this class meets only once a week, you are allowed a maximum of one absence before your grade is adversely affected. All assignments are due as described below; a third of a grade will be deducted (for example, from A- to B+) for each day that an assignment is late.

Course Requirements

The following are the requirements for the course:

- 25% Attendance and full class participation. Please see the attendance policy above.
- 25% Weekly postings on Blackboard, no later than each Thursday at 11:59 p.m., on:
 - What you found most interesting about the readings and why;
 - What you disagreed with the most about the readings and why;
 - What you found most difficult to understand about the readings and why; and
 - Three provocative questions for class discussion.You must submit a posting for each week -- whether or not you are in class -- in order to receive credit for the course.
- 15% In-class quizzes on the readings. Although the quizzes are closed book, you may consult any notes or summaries that you have prepared about the readings.
- 10% One ten-minute presentation to the class about an aspect of sexuality in the religious tradition covered during your assigned week.
 - Creativity is highly encouraged. For example, you can use music, song, dance, acting, poetry, art, and/or multimedia in your presentation.
- 25% Research paper (5-7 pp.) about an aspect of sexuality in a religious tradition not formally covered in the course. You will make a presentation to the class about your topic on December 11, 2009, and the final paper is due on December 16, 2009.
 - Possible traditions may include Daoism, Confucianism, Shinto, African and Caribbean religions, Native American and indigenous religions, Greco-Roman religions, and Wicca.

Reasonable Accommodation

Students with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations or academic adjustments for this course must either enroll in the Program for Academic Access or register with the Office of

Disability Services. For any accommodation, the instructor must be presented with either a letter from the Assistant Director of the Program for Academic Access or an Accommodations Card from the Office of Disability Services during the first week of class.

Plagiarism

MMC fosters an academic community where students and faculty work together to create a learning experience that imparts knowledge and forms character. To achieve this, the College requires all members of the community to adhere to the policy of Academic Honesty that can be found in the Student Handbook, the College Catalogue, and on the College website.

Office Hours

As noted above, office hours are by appointment. The best way to reach me is via email at pcheng@mmm.edu or on Blackboard.

Schedule

September 11, 2009

Week 1 -- Introduction

- Gary Laderman, "Sacred & Profane: On Sexual Diversity, Perversity, and Ecstasy," at <http://www.religiondispatches.org/dialogs/print/?id=338> (July 2, 2009) (online).
- Phil Zuckerman and Christel Manning, "Sex and Religion: An Introduction," in SR 1-14.

September 18, 2009

Week 2 -- Hinduism: Marriage and Gender

- "A Hindu Primer," in *What Is Hinduism?* 43-53 (online).
- Rita Dasgupta Sherma, "Hinduism," in SR 18-27, and questions 1-11 in SR 38.
- "The Laws of Manu," in HSS 34-35 (no. 5).
- "Marriage Hymn From the Rig Veda," in HSS 120 (no. 43).
- "Harem Life From the *Kamasutra*," in HSS 102-03 (no. 36).
- "Gandhi on *Sati* and *Purdah*," in HSS 347-49 (no. 149).

September 25, 2009

Week 3 -- Hinduism: Sexual Rituals and Practices

- "Ten Questions People Ask About Hinduism," in *What Is Hinduism?* 120-31 (online).
- Rita Dasgupta Sherma, "Hinduism," in SR 27-39, and questions 12-15 in SR 39.
- "Krishna and the Milkmaids," in HSS 121-22 (no. 44).
- "Vishnu as Mohini," in HSS 122-23 (no. 45).
- "Erotic Temple Sculpture," in HSS 123-24 (no. 46).
- "Neither Men Nor Women," in HSS 286-87 (no. 126).
- "Of the Auparishtaka or Mouth Congress," *Kamasutra* 2.9 (online).

October 2, 2009

Week 4 -- Buddhism: Desire and Renunciation

- Ven. S. Dhammika, *Good Question, Good Answer* 1-17 (online).
- Alan Sponberg, "Buddhism," in SR 41-46, and question 1 in SR 57.
- "The Early Life of the Buddha," in HSS 135-37 (no. 50).
- "The Dhammapada," in HSS 137-38 (no. 51).
- "Buddha and Tara," in HSS 138 (no. 52).
- "Drukpa Kunley's Attempt at Incest," in HSS 187-88 (no. 79).

October 9, 2009

Week 5 -- Buddhism: Ethics and Sexuality

- Ven. S. Dhammika, *Good Question, Good Answer* 18-38 (online).
- Alan Sponberg, "Buddhism," in SR 46-57 and questions 2-3 in SR 57.
- "Early Buddhist Legends," in HSS 169-70 (no. 70).
- "The Levels of Buddhist Heaven," in HSS 170-71 (no. 71).
- "List of Buddhist Sexual Sins," in HSS 171-73 (no. 72).
- Punnadhamo Bhikkhu, "Same Sex Marriage" (online).
- Kerry Trembath, "Buddhism and Homosexuality" (online).

October 16, 2009

Week 6 -- Judaism: Marriage and Pleasure

- "Introduction to Judaism" 14-15 (online).
- Barbara Geller, "Judaism," in SR 93-105.
- "The Legend of Adam and Eve," in HSS 31-32 (no. 3).
- "The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah," in HSS 51-53 (no. 12).
- "The Song of Songs," in HSS 118-20 (no. 42).
- "Maimonides on Marriage," in HSS 156-58 (no. 62).
- "Jewish Marriage Contracts," in HSS 158-59 (no. 63).

October 23, 2009

Week 7 -- Judaism: Traditional and Contemporary Ethics

- Rabbi Noah Gradofsky, "Introduction to Judaism" 1-8 (online)
- Barbara Geller, "Judaism," in SR 105-112, and questions 1-7 in SR 112.
- "The Holiness Code," in HSS 76-78 (no. 24).
- "Prostitution as Metaphor," in HSS 78-80 (no. 25).
- "The Talmud on Rape, Seduction, and Slander," in HSS 155-56 (no. 61).
- Stacy Trevenson, "A Stranger in a Strange Land" (online).

October 30, 2009

Week 8 -- Christianity: Marriage and Asceticism

- Anthony F. LoPresti, "Christianity," in SR 117-28, and questions 1-5 in SR 137-38.
- "Jesus on Sex and Marriage," in HSS 143 (no. 56).
- "Paul on Sex and Marriage," in HSS 144-45 (no. 57)
- "Paul on Sex and Marriage, Again," in HSS 145-46 (no. 58).
- "Augustine's *Confessions*," in HSS 60-62 (no. 18).
- "Augustine on the Origins of Lust," in HSS 162-63 (no. 66).

- “Jerome’s Letter to Eustochium,” in HSS 163-65 (no. 67).

November 6, 2009
No Class

November 13, 2009
Week 9 -- Christianity: Sexuality and “Biblical Values”

- Anthony F. LoPresti, “Christianity,” in SR 129-37, and questions 6-8 in SR 138.
- “List of Christian Sexual Sins,” in HSS 165-69 (no. 68).
- “Martin Luther on Sex and Marriage,” in HSS 205-07 (no. 85).
- Rev. Jay Johnson, “Articles of Faith: Biblical Values for American Families” (online).
- Mary A. Tolbert, “The Bible and Same-Gender Marriage” (online).
- David Kundtz, “Why Do They Hate Us So Much?” (online).

November 20, 2009
Week 10 -- Islam: Marriage and Gender

- Shahid Athar, “Twenty-Five Questions Asked About Islam” (online).
- Larry Poston, “Islam,” in SR 181-87, and questions 1-5 in SR 194.
- “The Qur’an on Women,” in HSS 125-27 (no. 48).
- “The Qur’an on the Afterlife,” in HSS 127 (no. 49).
- “Early Islamic *Hadith*,” in HSS 159-61 (no. 64).
- “Later Islamic *Hadith*,” in HSS 161-62 (no. 65).

November 27, 2009
No Class

December 4, 2009
Week 11 -- Islam: Contemporary Issues

- Muhammad Rafeeq, “A Muslim Catechism” 1-17 (online).
- Larry Poston, “Islam,” in SR 187-94, and questions 6-10 in SR 194-95.
- “Abu Nuwas on Sexual Choice,” in HSS 182-83 (no. 75).
- “A Tale From *The Thousand and One Nights*,” in HSS 183-85 (no. 76).
- “Nafzawi on Physical Attractiveness and Abortion,” in HSS 212-13 (no. 89).
- “Egyptian Women and Work,” in HSS 322-23 (no. 141).
- “Female Circumcision,” in HSS 357-60 (no. 156).

December 11, 2009
Week 12 -- In-Class Presentation of Research Paper Topics

December 16, 2009
Week 13 -- Research Paper Due

- I will be available for consultation in person, by phone, or by email prior to the due date for the research paper.