

Bonnie J. Morris/Women's Studies Program

LESBIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE.  
WSTU 3170.10

During our spring 2013 women's studies faculty meeting, we discussed how to develop and expand the new LGBT Sexuality Studies minor, which has excited so many GWU students. Suggestions for developing the minor included adding summer courses, perhaps hiring additional faculty. As we talked, it became clear that so far no one had planned to teach a single course with a focus on women. The minor had courses addressing gay men, masculinities, and important new trends in transgender rights, plus some concepts in law and policy—but the “L” in LGBT was not represented by our curriculum. I offered to develop a new course, one that met GWU standards for cross-listing through Women's Studies, American Studies, or History, in addition to our LGBT minor. It was introduced successfully in fall 2013.

Learning outcomes: The long-anticipated emergence of LGBT Studies in academia presents a bold, timely framework for students and faculty exploring the history of sex roles. Especially when it is housed in Women's Studies, a balanced LGBT concentration should require at least one introductory course addressing “the L” as a focus of inquiry, especially if other university courses already invite theoretical approaches to gay male and transgender identities. In what ways have women's same-sex relationships, communities of affinity, and criminalization as lesbians differed from the sociopolitical experiences of gay men and/or transgendered citizens—both in the West and cross-culturally? How do we “read” women of the past as lesbians? How might women's roles within the broader LGBT movement now be studied as historical context, after the dramatic twentieth century of increasing visibility and backlash? In concert with the new concentration on women and gender in GWU's History Department, this course is one more option for the study of women and women's lives, preparing students for informed assessment of women's location in the progression of LGBT rights.

Content and approach: Beginning with an introduction on origins from ancient Africa and the Mediterranean, this course will focus on religious, cultural, social and political responses to same-sex from the Middle Ages to the present, with emphasis on the history of lesbian identity and activism in the West. We will also examine the rise of psychology, the medicalization of the female body, and women's changing roles during and after wartime. The founding of modern political activism and affinity groups (Daughters of Bilitis) and mainstream feminism's rejection of openly lesbian members will also receive scrutiny, leading to comparisons of separatist movements and recent media mainstreaming.

Written work:

*All students will prepare three different papers: one on religion's view of female sexuality, another on politics and culture, and a final paper on media and representation.*

Complete instructions for each assignment will be distributed well before each is due. The first paper, due 9/24, will be a four-page response to religious attitudes toward female homosexuality. The take-home midterm, due 10/27, will consist of two essay questions on the emergence of medical, political and legal designations for lesbians in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; the final paper, due 12/11, invites your choice of an approach to how media images of lesbians have changed in your own lifetime. The final grade will be based on these three assignments (30%, 30%, 30%) and attendance (10%.) Late work is not accepted; there is no extra credit; absences due to illness, family emergency, and religious holidays are of course accepted without penalty.

Academic integrity:

The GWU code of Academic Integrity must be observed in preparation of written work. "Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information."

Support for students outside the classroom:

University counseling is available at 202-994-5300 with 24/7 referrals, and Disability Support Services will assist any student seeking potential accommodation at 202-994-8250. (DSS is in Rome Hall, Suite 102.) Accommodation may include extended time of in-class tests and/or the assistance of a notetaker.

Textbooks:

Rebecca Alpert, ed., *Lesbian Rabbis*  
Alison Bechdel, *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For*  
Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Response*  
Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*.  
Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*.  
Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*.  
Leila Rupp, *Sapphistries*

Films:

*Before Stonewall*  
*The Celluloid Closet*  
*Forbidden Love*  
*Lesbiana*  
*Radical Harmonies*  
*The Real Ellen Story*

OFFICE HOURS, fall 2015: I am in the little white townhouse at 837 22<sup>nd</sup> St., third office on the left once you enter (PUSH our front door.) My office phone is 202-994-1263; e-mail is [drbon@gwu.edu](mailto:drbon@gwu.edu); and I am in M/W 10-2, T/Th 10-11 a.m.

THE READINGS AND TOPICS:

Tu, 9-1: An introduction to the class. Why is it necessary to study the female experience of same-sex love? How much do we know about female partnerships, cross-culturally?

Th, 9-3: The problems of creating a history: how do we define WHO is a lesbian?—a brief overview of language, culture, theory and law. READ: Brooten, *Love Between Women*, ch. 1 (Introduction); and Rupp, *Sapphistries*, ch. 1 and 2.

Tu, 9/8: Sappho and the images of same-sex love in the early Greek, Roman and Judaic eras. READ: Brooten, *Love Between Women*, Part One (ch. 2-5) and Rupp, *Sapphistries*, ch. 3.

Th, 9/10: Early Christian responses to same-sex desire. READ: Brooten, *Love Between Women*, Part Two (chapters 7-10) and Rupp, *Sapphistries*, ch. 4.

Tu, 9/15: Sisterhood communities and gender rebels in early modern Europe: nuns, Beguines, pirates and cross-dressers. READ: Brooten, *Love Between Women*, ch. 11.

Th, 9/17: Same-sex romantic friendships in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. READ: Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The female world of love and ritual," in *Disorderly Conduct*.

Tu, 9/22: Freud, psychology and the medicalization of the deviant body in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. READ: Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, ch. 2.

Th, 9/24: FIRST PAPER DUE. Film in class: "Before Stonewall."

Tu, 9/29: Women's colleges: passion pits or a solution to the education question? READ: Inness, *The Lesbian Menace*, ch. 2, and Rosemary Auchmuty, *A World of Girls*, ch. 6, "The Crush."

Th, 10/1: Salons and speakeasies: from Paris to Harlem and Greenwich Village in the interwar years. READ: Faderman, *Odd Girls*, ch. 3 and 4; Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms*, "I Used to Be Your Sweet Mama."

Tu, 10/6: The uproar over Radclyffe Hall's 1928 novel, *The Well of Loneliness*. READ: as much of Hall as you can, plus Faderman, *Surpassing*, Part III-A, ch. 2 (pp. 314-331), "The Spread of Medical 'Knowledge.'"

Th, 10/8: World War II: WACs, Nazi persecution, and women in pants. READ: Johnnie Phelps, in *My Country, My Right to Serve*, ed. Mary Ann Humphrey; and Faderman, *Odd Girls*, ch. 5.

Tu, 10/13: Postwar military purges, bar culture and the paranoid 1950s. READ: Rochella Thorpe, "A House Where Queers Go: African-American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1940-1975," in *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America*, ed. Ellen Lewin; Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, "Lesbian Liberation Begins," Lisa E. Davis, "The Spy Who Came in From the Closet," and Faderman, *Odd Girls*, ch. 6-7.

Th, 10/15: Pulp novels, fictive gay girls; DOB. READ: Susan Stryker, *Queer Pulp*; Jaye Zimet, *Strange Sisters*; and Inness, *The Lesbian Menace*, ch. 4 and 5.

Tu, 10/20: Butch/femme in the 1950s and 60s. READ: *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, as much as you can.

Th, 10/22: Film in class, “Forbidden Love.” (Finish *Boots*.)

Tu, 10/27: MIDTERMS DUE TODAY. Film in class: “Lesbiana.”

Th, 10/29: Second wave feminism, the Lavender Menace, and the place of lesbians in women’s liberation activism. READ: “The Woman-Identified Woman” and “The Combahee River Collective Statement,” in *Feminism in our Time*, and Faderman, *Odd Girls*, ch. 8.

Tu, 11/3: Lesbian feminism and separatism. READ: Adrienne Rich, “Complusory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” in *Feminism in our Time*, and Faderman, *Odd Girls*, ch. 9.

Th, 11/5: The women’s music movement and the explosion of festival culture as lesbian sites for art and activism. READ: Morris, *Eden Built By Eves*, ch. 1-4. Film: “Radical Harmonies.”

Tu, 11/10: Racism, anti-racism, black lesbian coalitions and visibility. READ: Barbara Smith, *The Truth That Never Hurts*; pp. 45-74, 111-115, 124-153.

Th, 11/12: The sex wars, the 1980s, and the re-emergence of religious backlash. READ: Faderman, *Odd Girls*, ch. 10-11; Alpert, *Lesbian Rabbis*, pp.

Tu, 11/17: On April 30, 1997, Ellen DeGeneres came out in national TV (not aired in all states!) What’s the back story to her decision? Which other lesbian comedians paved the way? Film: “The Real Ellen Story.” READ: Bechdel, *Essential Dykes to Watch Out For*.

Th, 11/19: The media, lipstick lesbians, and the marketing of commercial images/consumer power. READ: Alexandra Chasin, *Selling Out*, ch. 1 and 3.

(No classes during Thanksgiving week, 11/24 or 11/26.)

Tu, 12/1: The lesbian as transman or transwoman: changing embodiments of gender. READ: "Lesbians Under the Medical Gaze: Scientists' Search for Remarkable Differences," in Journal of Sex Research 27:3: pp. 317-339, Feinberg, Stone Butch Blues, and handouts.

Th, 12/3: LAST CLASS. Screening: "The Celluloid Closet." Your final papers will be due in my faculty mailbox on Friday, 12/11. THANK YOU!!