

Technologies and Poetics of Gender and Sexuality

16:988:510

Mondays 10:55-1:55

RDJC Room 011, CD

Professor Kyla Schuller

What, exactly, do we mean by the terms gender, sexuality, sex difference and race? Over the last decade, gender and sexuality studies as a field has been exploring the texture and substance of gender, sexuality, and race as material phenomena, in addition to attending to their status as discursive constructs. In the process of beginning to situate the material and biological aspects of these notions of embodied difference at the center of inquiry, many scholars have approached this work in a historical vacuum. Yet to understand the contours of gender, sexuality, sex difference and race—as both denizens of our world and WGS scholars—we need to take a longer view, one that attends to the fact that fluctuating beliefs in the proportional influence of nature and culture on human life are characteristic of the modern era.

This seminar will introduce students to key theoretical models of the materiality of gender, sexuality, and race from the age of Darwin to the present—the period of their modern iterations. We will examine how these categories of human difference have cohered in scientific practice, cultural production, and social movements and in turn, how these fields have been shaped by embodied hierarchies of difference. To understand the political work deployed through gender, sexuality, and race, we will draw broadly on primary sources, including: political tracts, novels and short stories, memoirs, and social movement literature. We will also examine literary, cultural, historical, and biological methodologies, particularly as taken up in queer theory, black feminist theory, and feminist science studies.

In particular, we will examine how our authors, primary and scholarly, pose the relationships *between* gender, sexuality, and race. In so doing, we will build a nuanced and historically situated understanding of how precisely these structural processes have been understood to intersect within individuals' lives and how their intersections have been deployed as mechanisms of power. Other key themes include: the colonial hierarchy of civilization/savagery; the interplay between heredity and environment; the sex/gender distinction; biopolitics; and the dynamic exchange between science and other parts of human culture. Our goal is certainly not to be comprehensive, but it is to develop a genealogy of ideas about the materiality of gender, sexuality, and race that subtend our present moment.