

SWAG 351: From Birth to Death: LGBTQ Life Trajectories

Dr. Jessica Ann Vooris
Spring 2019, T/Th 11:30-12:50
Chapin 210.

Email: jvooris@amherst.edu
Office hours: M/W 2-3 pm. T/Th 1-3 pm, and by appointment
Office: Frost A28

Course Description

Thinking through questions about age, identity formation, reproduction, and family structures, this course explores gender and sexuality across the life-span, from conception to the end of life.

Some of these questions include: What is a queer child? When and how do people discover their sexuality and gender identity? What does a polyamorous family look like? Can trans women breast-feed their children? What are the distinctive features of aging and mourning in many LGBTQ communities?

Throughout the course we will challenge heteronormative ideas about what it means to live a good life and the class will explore how some LGBTQ folks have created new ways of being and living. Interdisciplinary in nature, this course assigns scholarship from a variety of fields including psychology, biology, literature, queer theory, feminist theory, anthropology, and history. Students should expect to read a variety of theoretical texts, along with poetry, comics, photo-essays and memoirs.

Required Texts:

Bechdel, Alison. *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For*. 2008.

Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name. A Biomythography*. 1982.

How the Course Will Be Organized:

We will meet two times a week for a discussion-based class. In order to have a productive learning environment students need to come to class having read the material, and be prepared to talk and share with others your thoughts on the topic and texts. While class is primarily discussion-based, I will also lead mini-lectures, and students will participate in a variety of interactive games, dialogues, improv role-playing, and art-based activities.

Creating a community of learning means that we must be respectful of each other and build a space where each member of the class feels comfortable about sharing their thoughts. This does not mean that we will always agree, and in fact we may often disagree with each other, and this can be a positive, productive part of learning! However, we must always be open to listening carefully to each other and we treat each other kindly and with respect.

Remember that we all enter the classroom with different knowledges, experiences, and identities. We each have something to contribute, every one of us is learning (even me!), and it is okay to ask questions. Together we can create a community where dialogue is encouraged, we understand that mistakes happen, and that communication and understanding can be difficult across differences. Learning means taking risks, trying new things, playing around, guessing at times, and recognizing that sometimes we won't get it right the first time.

Communication for the Course

Moodle: An updated syllabus, and course assignments will be kept on Moodle. Most of the readings will be in your course reader (and not on e-reserves), with the exception of some recommended texts. Note that some of the readings are links to videos and websites, and you will need to read them online. I have indicated which ones on the syllabus, and the active links will be on Moodle.

Email: Please send email to jvooris@amherst.edu if you have questions/comments about the course, readings, or want to make an appointment with me. It will be helpful if you include the course number and a relevant subject heading with your email. **Example:** SWAG 351, question about Emily Martin reading.

Note that email sent after 7 pm may not be responded to until the morning, and I will not be checking email frequently on the weekends. Please give me at least 24 hours to respond, however, if you don't hear from me in 48 hours, do send a reminder email! (Note: if you email after 7 pm on Friday, I may not reply until Monday morning).

Electronic Policy—Let's Have a Conversation About It

Laptops/phones/tablets can be useful for taking notes, especially for students with difficulty writing by hand. They can also be used to look up information on google during class discussions. However, they are also a source of distraction, and it is worth noting that some studies shows that many students learn more when taking notes by hand, rather than through electronic means. Other studies have shown that a student who chooses to dis-engage with class via facebook, etc, will distract and affect the learning of other students.

For these reasons, I ask that students think carefully about their use of laptops/electronics in class. The course reader provides everyone with a physical copy of the readings, and it is easier for us all to be present in the room with each other if we do not have screens distracting us. However, I understand that laptops can be a necessary part of learning for students, and I am open to their presence. If you plan to use a laptop or tablet in class, please come talk to me about how you are going to use it, and how to incorporate them into the classroom space.

Graded Assignments

15 % Class Discussion/Attendance
10 % Leading Class Discussion
25 % Weekly Reading Journal
25 % Group Research Project
25% Life History Essay

Grades:

A work is excellent, unusually creative and/or analytically striking

B is fine work of high quality, though not as skilled, ambitious, or carefully presented as A

C is average or usual work fulfilling the assignment; should not be hasty, or insufficiently collaborated

D work is below average or incomplete; shows many difficulties or cannot follow instructions

F work is not sufficient to pass; unwillingness to do the work, or so many difficulties unable to

complete

I will explain in more detail what the expectations are for each assignment in the handouts and on Canvas.

Graded Assignments

15% Class Participation: This is a discussion-based course, and your participation is important. You are expected to come to class having read and taken notes on the material, and to be ready to discuss the material. The success of the class will depend on everyone sharing their ideas and perspectives. If you are someone who has a hard time speaking up in class, note that you can show that you are actively participating through your listening, your reactions to what your classmates are saying, and your note-taking. Please visit me in my office hours if you are concerned about your participation due to anxiety, neurodivergence, or any other reason.

If you are not in class, you cannot receive participation points. Likewise, if you are in class, but are asleep or otherwise not paying attention, you will not receive participation points. I understand that people get sick, family emergencies happen, or you have an unforeseen circumstance that prevents your attendance. You may have one unexcused absence during the course of the semester, meaning you do not have to even let me know why you have missed and it will not affect your participation grade. Otherwise, please let me know in writing why you are missing class (sickness, family emergency, and religious holidays are excused). If you miss three or more classes, please set up a meeting with me to discuss how you will catch up. In case of any absence you are responsible for the work that you have missed. Check your syllabus and connect up with classmates for notes and any information you need to know. Please do not email me asking what you missed unless you have already talked to a classmate and still have questions.

10 % Leading Class Discussion: Once a semester each of you will lead part of class discussion. This will require you to prepare notes on the readings, discussion questions, an interactive activity, and a short media clip/reading/poem/song/visual to share with class.

25 % Weekly Reading Journal: Throughout the semester you are expected to keep a reading journal, with at least 10 entries (roughly 2 points per entry). Entries can be in written form (1-2 pages, typed or handwritten), audio/video form (3-5 mins), or in a visual/artistic form (comics/collage/drawing). I will provide a list of (optional) question prompts. Your journal will be reviewed once mid-semester, and again at the end of the semester and will be graded based on completion of entries (roughly 2 points each) plus ~ 5 points for creativity, connections between readings, evidence of your own thoughts. These can be hand-written/physical journals, or electronic ones. See moodle for more assignment details.

25 % Group Research Project: In groups of 2-4 you will choose an LGBTQ issue, life-stage, or person to research, and then will create something (a book/zine/video/podcast/theatre play) to share what you have discovered with the rest of the class and to educate a wider public. We will hold a class “conference” day to share our work.

25% Life History Essay: For the final assignment of the semester, you will write either a personal reflection essay about your life experiences, or a biography of an LGBTQ person, connecting your/their life experiences with class texts/discussions/topics. This can be in a formal written format, or interweave creative pieces (poetry/audio/visual art) with a written reflection essay.

CITATIONS:

It is important as scholars and writers that we respect the work of others, and that we make sure to cite our sources. I like to think about citations as a way to give credit, as a way to guide a reader to more information, and as a way to be a part of a community conversation.

If you are unsure of how to properly cite your information and how to avoid plagiarism please refer to online guides on MLA, APA and Chicago Style formatting. I do not have a preference for which one you use, but please pick one and use that consistently throughout an assignment. If you still need help with citations, please set up an appointment to meet with me.

Course Schedule:

WEEK ONE: Introductions and Conception/Fetal Development

Tuesday, January 29th

- syllabus
- “How to Read”
- Dean Spade’s “Purportedly Gendered Body Parts”
- The Gender Book* excerpt

Thursday, January 31st

- Emily Martin, “The Egg and Sperm”
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, Chapters 1-3 of *Sex/Gender*

WEEK TWO: Babies and Children

Tuesday, February 5th

- [Parents’ Keep Baby’s Gender a Secret](#)
- [Boy or Girl? It’s a Secret and an International Controversy](#)
- [Remember Storm?](#)
- [It’s a Theyby](#), the Cut
- [“Get Your Gender Binary Off My Childhood!”](#) by Jane Ward

Thursday, February 7th

- Introduction to *The Queer Child* by Kathryn Bond Stockton
- [How to Be a Girl video](#) (six minutes)
- ["In Her Words"](#) and ["My Son Does Not Need to Prove Anything"](#)
- Mia McKenzie, "To the Queer Black Kids" from *Black Girl Dangerous*
- ["We don't play with our Vulvas at the Table"](#)

WEEK THREE: High-School and Questions of Identity

Tuesday, February 12th

CJ Pascoe's "Dude, You're a Fag"

Lal Zimman's "The Other Kind of Coming Out"

Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality"

Thursday, February 13th

Intro, and Chapter 4 from *Out in the Country* by Mary Gray

WEEK FOUR: Puberty and Trans Youth

Tuesday, February 19th

Chapters 8 and 9 of *Redefining Realness* by Janet Mock

Tuesday, February 21st

Vrouenraets et al "Early Medical Treatment of Children and Adolescents with Gender Dysphoria: an Empirical Ethical Study." (2015)

Cameron, from *Beyond Magenta*

4th Wave Now, ["Parents, Trust Your Gut"](#)

WEEK FIVE: Sex and Relationships

Tuesday, February 26th

"Unsuitable for Children" from *That's Revolting*

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic"

Mia McKenzie "Love, QTPOC style" and "Resistance is the Secret of Queer Joy"

[Romantic Love is Killing Us: Who Takes Care of Us When We Are Single?](#)

In Class Poems:

[How to Make Love to a Trans Person](#) poem (online) and Tremors, by Eli Clare

Thursday, February 28th

Opening Up, by Tristan Taormino, Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 4

WEEK SIX: Families We Choose and Marriage

Tuesday, March 5th

Kath Weston "Families We Choose" Ch 4 and 5

Chapter 2 "Moving Portraits" of *Tacit Subjects* by Carlos Decena

Thursday, March 7th

DTWOF

Mia McKenzie, "Calling in a Queer Debt"

Is Kinship Always Heterosexual? –Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

WEEK SEVEN: SPRING BREAK

WEEK EIGHT: Zami: A Biomythography

Tuesday, March 19th

Part one

Thursday, March 21st

Part two

WEEK NINE: Dykes to Watch Out For—Families and Babies and More

Tuesday, March 26th

DTWOF

Thursday, March 28th

No Class—I am traveling for a conference, please use this time to work with your groups

WEEK TEN: Queer Reproduction continued

Tuesday, April 2nd –

Intro, *No Futures*, Lee Edelman

Beyond Mom 'n' Pop

Recommended: "Breastfeeding, Bias, and Men Who Give Birth: Q&A With Trans Activist Trevor MacDonald" (online)

Thursday, April 4th –

"To Bi or Not to Bi: Bisexuality and Disclosure in the Adoption System"

And "Houses Full of Love" (from *Whose Your Daddy*)

Tobi Hill-Meyers, "Donor mom" (from *And Baby Makes More*)

Don Romesburg, "Where She Comes From: Locating Queer Transnational Adoption"

WEEK ELEVEN: LGBTQ Work and Conference Presentations

Tuesday, April 9th **Workplace Inclusions and Exclusions**

HRC Employment Laws: [Online Interactive Map](#)

HRC equality maps (reader)

Against Equality Article on Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Thursday, April 11th –“**Conference**” Day

Group Presentations

WEEK TWELVE: Queer Mourning

Tuesday, April 16th

How to Survive a Plague, movie on Moodle

Excerpt from *Survivable World*, Ron Mohring

“When My Brother Fell” by Essex Hemphill from “*Brother to Brother*”

Thursday, April 17th

[Pulse, Beat, Rhythm, Cry: Orlando and the queer and trans necropolitics of loss and mourning](#)

[Pulse and the Power of Queer Grief](#)

“The Calculus of Pain” from *Imagining Transgender*, David Valentine

WEEK THIRTEEN: Growing Older/In Sickness and Health

Tuesday, April 23rd

Eli Clare, Disability and Queerness essay

DTWOF

[The Challenge of Being Transgender in a Nursing Home](#)

[LGBTQ Seniors Face Discrimination](#)

Thursday, April 25th

Major! Life of Miss Major Griffin. Movie on Moodle

[To Survive on this Shore](#) (portrait project, online only)

WEEK FOURTEEN— Queer World Making-Emergent Strategy

Tuesday, April 30th

“Intro” and “Interdependence and Decentralization” from *Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne Marie Brown

Thursday, May 2nd –final day of classes

No reading. Wrap-up class.

LAST DAY OF CLASSES: Friday, May 3rd