Gay and Lesbian (etc.) Cultures in Comparative Perspective

Frank Proschan

e-mail: proschan@indiana.edu
tel: 855-9073
Smith Research Center 140 (2805 E. 10th Street)

ANTH E600 - Seminar in Cultural and Social Anthropology (Sec. 0444)
CULS C701 - Special Topics in Cultural Studies (Sec. 1372)
FOLK F755 - Folklore, Culture, and Society (Sec. 2179)
SEMS S650 - Topics in Semiotics (Sec. 3631)

10:10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Wednesdays
Woodburn WH205

How are genders differently constituted by members of diverse cultures around the world? Which sexual behaviors are affirmed, and which condemned, by various societies? How have cultural constructions of gender and sexuality changed over time within Euroamerican intellectual tradition, and within other intellectual traditions? How do understandings of sexuality and gender interact with understandings of race, class, ethnicity, and nation? What are the bases on which sexual minority communities coalesce, and what are the means by which they communicate internally and externally? And how can the approaches of anthropology, folklore, linguistics, and cultural studies help us to answer such questions as these?

This course takes as its subject matter (non-heterosexual) sexualities and gender identities in all their polymorphous historical and ethnographic variety (including gay male, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgendered, intersexual, etc.). It takes as its approach a comparative, global, and multicultural perspective. It takes as its method the tools of ethnography, folklore, cultural studies, and semiotics. It takes as its goal to encourage students to undertake serious study of topics of interest to them. It takes as its premise that the comparative study of gay and lesbian (etc.) cultures is a central part of the larger study of sex, gender, and sexuality, and a central part of the study of human societies.

The course will involve heavy reading, classroom discussions and presentations, independent research, and a substantial writing requirement. Graduate students from diverse disciplines are welcome as long as they are interested in serious study and committed to meeting the course requirements.

Requirements: Students will be required to keep current with readings and participate actively in seminar discussions; conduct one seminar discussion; conduct research at the library of the Kinsey Institute; and prepare a final term paper (see below).
Week 2 – September 10, 1997

Surveyors:


Week 3 – September 17, 1997

Ethnology and the history of sexology:


Week 4 – September 24, 1997

Essences and constructions I: the constructionist case:


Week 5 – October 1, 1997

Essences and constructions 2: cautions, comparisons, critiques:


Week 6 – October 8, 1997

Roles and identities:


Week 7 – October 15, 1997

Community studies: recovering history:


Week 8 – October 22, 1997

Community studies: emergent communities:


Newton, Esther. 1996. “‘Dick(less) Tracy’ and the homecoming queen: lesbian power and representation in gay-male Cherry Grove,” in Inventing lesbian cultures in America, pp. 161-193.

Week 9 – October 29, 1997

Community studies: male worlds:


Week 10 – November 5, 1997

Expressive culture and enculturation:


One-page paper proposal is due during this class (see below).

Week 11 – November 12, 1997

Language:


Optional:

Week 12 – November 19, 1997

Third sexes, third genders:


Week 13 – Thanksgiving holiday

Week 14 – December 3, 1997

Fieldwork:


Optional:


Week 15 – December 10, 1997

Student presentations:

Each student will present a formal 15-minute talk, in the format of a presentation at a scholarly conference, drawn from their term paper.
Each student will **lead the discussion during one seminar session** (to be assigned during the first class meeting). On the Monday or Tuesday preceding that seminar, the student should meet with the instructor to review the readings and prepare the discussion. The student should bring a set of discussion questions and topics to that planning meeting; the revised questions will be handed out to seminar participants to guide the discussion.

The **term paper, due without fail on December 17, 1997**, will be a paper of about 25 pages discussing a topic chosen by the student and approved by the professor (**one-page paper proposals are due November 5, 1997**). The paper may be based primarily on field research or library research; in either case students are encouraged to avail themselves of the collections of the Kinsey Institute library. The paper should synthesize empirical data drawn from field and library research with theoretical insights and methodological approaches drawn from the course readings and discussions. Topic, approach, disciplinary orientation, and style may vary from student to student, but the paper must demonstrate familiarity with the content of the course and must engage the course readings. Cute titles with pa(i)ren(d)theses or s/lashes are strongly discouraged.