

RS 3FF3 GENDER AND RELIGION [DRAFT]

McMaster University, Spring Term (May-June) 2017

Instructor: Prof. A. M. Pearson

Lectures: Tues/Thurs 9:30 – 12:20

Email: pearsoa@mcmaster.ca

Office hours: after class

University Hall



Course Description:

Religious authorities (often) appeal to a transcendent source for the truth of their teachings, mediated through texts and specialists. Because such teachings have had much to say about the nature of identity and how to live one's life, religions have also played a powerful role in the socializing of men and women as gendered persons within particular religious worldviews. At the same time, the story of religion has largely been told from the perspective of men addressing other men. What is the story from the perspective of women? And what have men been taught about themselves as males? This course provides an introduction to gender and religion through first, a focus on images of and prescribed roles for women (in particular) in the textual traditions of major religions; second, through an examination of gender, ritual and religion in practice, and last, contested/alternative gender categories and practices.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes -- Students will:

- Gain a basic understanding of the issues related to the construction of gender within religious discourse (in history, text) across several religious traditions
- Become familiar with normative prescriptive roles for women in religious literature (scripture)
- Learn about a variety of gendered ritual practices in different religious traditions
- Practice critical reading, research and writing skills

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

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| • Case Study Reflection | 10% |
| • Quizzes (x 2) | 15% |
| • Project or essay outline | 5% |
| • Project or essay | 35% |
| • Participation | 10% |
| • Exam | 25% |

Required Texts:

- Leona Anderson & Pamela Dickey-Young, *Women and Religious Traditions*, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, 2015
- Course pack of selected required readings
- Selected e-journal articles available online through Mills Library website

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Course Website: Available through Avenue to Learn, where you will find a copy of the course outline (syllabus), handouts, lecture slides, links, the gradebook, and the course discussion board where you can post questions or comments, or share information about course content that may be responded to by the professor or by your fellow students.

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Assignments:

Case Study Reflection: (10%; due May 18) In the Anderson text, choose one of the following “Case Studies” found at the end of the text: “Both Guru and Goddess...” or “Sakyadhita...”, or “Two Muslim Women...”, and address two of the “study questions” provided in a two-page, concisely written analytical reflection.

Participation: The 10% mark will be based on a minimum of 5 thoughtful posts on Avenue discussions on separate topics and weeks. Alternatively, you can sign up to lead the post-lecture discussion, focusing on one or more of the topics/questions posed in the course outline.

Quizzes: May 25 (10%); June 6 (5%)

The quizzes will consist of multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank style questions covering readings, lectures, films up to the date of the quiz. The purpose is to ensure that you have kept up with the readings and have digested basic information.

If you know in advance that you will be absent and so unable to write the quiz or, if you miss the quiz for legitimate reasons (e.g., medical) notify the professor as soon as possible.

Project or Essay: due by June 13, in class (value: 35%; essay length: 2500 words, plus references; project length varies depending on nature of the project). For topics and instructions about outlines, see “topics” document posted on Avenue course website, under “Content”, “Assignments”

Essay/project outline: due May 30. If the outline is *not* handed in prior to the essay, you will receive a 5% deduction from your essay/project grade.

Exam: June 15 (25%), 2 hours, in the classroom. It will consist of some quiz-style questions followed by essay questions covering the entire course content.

Additional Information:

- **Late penalties:** Students are urged to begin work on written assignments well in advance of due dates. Late assignments will be penalized by **2% per day**, except in cases where a medical note from the student’s faculty is presented.
- **Academic honesty:** You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in

unearned academic credit or advantage, with such serious consequences as a grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty refer to the “Academic Integrity Policy” located at:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity> .

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. plagiarism, e.g, the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained
 2. improper collaboration in group work
 3. copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.
- **Course modification.** The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.
 - **E-mail communication.** It is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors, and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. If a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at her discretion.

COURSE OUTLINE

DATE Topics and Readings

Note: “Anderson” refers to the textbook; “cp” stands for the custom course pack and page numbers refer to the original article pagination; “e-journal article” means the article is available through the McMaster library website for e-journals (e.g., EBSCOhost or JSTOR to find/read/download full pdf articles).

May 2/4 Introduction to Gender & Religion: Key Concepts and Themes

Applying (feminist) critical lenses. How is religious experience gendered? What is gender ideology and what role do religions play in creating, preserving, enforcing or interpreting it?

Read: Anderson, xi-xv; 54-60 & 186-188 (“Symbols and Gender”); 202-206 (feminist theologies); and cp. Sered, “Gender Ideology” (195-213)

Handout (posted on Avenue) – “Issues in the Study of Gender and Religion”

Part I: Learning Your Place—Prescriptive Roles and Responsibilities for Women in Scriptures & other Authoritative Texts

Reading Sacred Text: What religious roles and responsibilities are prescribed for women in sacred text? What functions and rituals do women participate in, and from which ones are they formally excluded?

May 9: Women in the Hindu Textual Traditions

Read: Anderson, 2-14, 24-28; cp. Belsare, “The Doctrine of Purusartha: A Gender Perspective”

May 11/16: Conventional ‘Womanly Virtues’ (and their antithesis): Images and Primary Roles of Women in Jewish, Christian, Islamic and Sikh Textual Traditions; religion, marriage and divorce

- Jewish texts: Anderson, 44-54; 65-72
- Christian texts: Anderson, 181-186; cp. Excerpts from Anthology of Sacred Texts, 43-46
- Islamic texts: Anderson, 214-223; 234-239; cp, excerpts from Anthology of Sacred Texts, 96-98
- Sikh texts: Anderson, 253-257

For a modern perspective, see also articles in the journal “Religion & Gender” vol. 6, no. 1 (2016), special issue on “Motherhood, Religions and Spirituality” (available online, open source)

May 18: Other Roles (missionaries, nuns, ascetics, mystics & scholars)

What other kinds of religiously prescribed, accepted (or reclaimed) roles have women assumed in various religious traditions? What are some of the issues religious women are dealing with today?

Read: Anderson, Hinduism—20-24, 28-29 and Case Study “Both Guru and Goddess...” 323-332
 Buddhism—83-91, 107-08, and Case Study “Sakyadhita...” 334-343
 Judaism—65-68
 Christianity—195-202
 Islam—226-231, and Case Study “Two Muslim Women...” 357-365

Part II: Being religious/ Doing religion—Gender and the practice of religion

- What religious rites have women created for themselves within the context of gendered religious ideologies? How have they created their own meanings in spite of or because of what is said about them in sacred texts?
- How are bodies ritually or symbolically marked as gendered? What meanings and interpretation are ascribed to the body as a religious site?
- How do religions traditionally view homosexuality? (non-heteronormativity)
- What are some alternatives to traditional gender categories in some cultures?

May 23: Quiz 1 (15 min, followed by lecture)

Women’s Ritual Lives: Festivals, Vows and Fasts (focus on Hindu women in India, and Muslim women in Morocco and Iran)

Read: Anderson, 14-15; cp. Wadley, “Hindu Women’s Family and Household Rites” (72-81); and e-journal article: Dianne Jenett, “Pongala, a Women’s Festival in Kerala, India” in JFSR 21, no. 1, Spring 2005, pp. 35-55
 cp. Betteridge, “Controversial Vows of Urban Muslim Women in Iran” (102-110)

May 25: Life-cycle Events and Ceremonies: coming-of-age/initiation, fgc, menstruation, birth

Read: Anderson, 60-62; 66; 231-234;

cp. Gross, “Menstruation and Childbirth as Ritual and Religious Experience among Native Australians” (257-266); cp. Roald on Islamic considerations re. “female circumcision” (237-253); and e-journal articles:

- Tova Hartman and Naomi Marmon, “Lived Regulations, Systemic Attributions: Menstrual Separation and Ritual Immersion” in *Gender and Society*, Vol. 18, no. 3 (June 2004) 389-408 [focus on pp. 393-406]

May 30/June 1: Women’s Bodies as Sites of Religious Identity and Contestation; Veiling, Head and Body Covering (focus on Islam); Immigrants and the Negotiation of religious, cultural & gender norms

Film: “Transparency” 2002, 30 min.

Read: Anderson, [Sikhism] 274-281; [Islam] 239-245; cp. Roald, “Islamic Female Dress” (254-271); and e-journal article:

- R. Williams and Gira Vashi, “ ‘Hijab’ and American Muslim Women: Creating the Space for Autonomous Selves” in *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 68, no. 3 (2007), pp. 269-87, but *focus on* 275-285

June 6: Quiz 2 (10 min., followed by lecture)

June 6/8: Interrogating and Resisting (traditional) Gender Categories (homosexuality & religion, and case studies of the Indian Hijras and the Navajo Nadleehi)

Film: “Homosexuality: A Religious Perspective”

Read Anderson, 16-20; 188-193; and e-journal articles:

- Scott Kugle and Stephen Hunt, “Masculinity, Homosexuality and the Defense of Islam: A Case Study of Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s Media Fatwa,” *Religion and Gender*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2012), pp. 254-279
- Carolyn Epple, “coming to terms with Navajo *nádleehí*: a critique of *berdache*, ‘gay’, ‘alternate gender’, and ‘two spirit’” in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (May 1998), pp. 267-280; and
- Vinay Lal, “Not This, Not That – The Hijras of India and the Cultural Politics of Sexuality” in *Social Text*, 61, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Winter 1999), pp. 119-135 + notes.

June 13: final comments; essays/projects due; project presentations

June 15: exam in classroom (2 hours)