

RLG 3FF3 Gender and Religion

THIS IS A DRAFT SYLLABUS

Dates: Tuesday and Thursdays 9:30 to 12:30
Instructor: Dr. David Penner (email via Avenue)
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

The phenomenon of religion offers a paradox to its believers. On one hand it posits the essential importance of the eternal over the temporal and in this trump the disintegration of worldly identity. However, on the other hand, given that the scriptures of the various world religious traditions are dependent upon a temporal context in order to be understood and followed, many of the world's religious traditions have been institutionalized in relation to certain demands as to who and what human beings are to be. This has included specific depictions of the supposedly separate natures of the male and female gender. While religion may espouse a freedom of constraint from roles foisted upon a human beings by worldly systems it has also significantly contributed to the creation and maintenance of those roles, especially in regards to the way man and woman have come to be defined.

This course is interested in exploring the ways that religion has influenced historical and modern accounts of gender and asks whether the institutionalization of these understandings in society are actually recommended by the corresponding religious texts of the traditions in question. We will explore the ways that religions have conceived the idea of man and woman) and what these conceptions might mean in a religious and/or socio-political sense.

Course Texts

Anderson, Leona. *Women and Religious Traditions* (Oxford)

Scriptures Posted on Avenue
Various Readings Available Online

Method of Evaluation

You will be evaluated with exams and an essay.

Take Home Midterm Exam: 30%
Essay: 30%
Take Home Final Exam: 40%

For all assignments the student is expected to demonstrate their own insights and thoughts in relation to the questions asked of them. They are to use lectures as provocations for their own thinking and considerations. You need not write down everything I say as you will not be evaluated on how well you can mimic the instructor with your own thoughts. There are no secondary materials allowed.

Midterm Exam: Will include four questions of which you are to respond to one in essay form. The questions will be provided to you one week in advance. The questions will be thematic and designed to give you the opportunity to explore the course material in accordance to your own revelations.

Essay: Students will be asked to write an essay based on questions provided available after the midterm. There will be a number of questions to choose from and the student should respond to one question. The essay should be six double spaced pages in length (12 pt font with no more than 1" margins) and must be submitted through the Electronic Dropbox on Avenue. The essay is due May 31st for students wishing to receive full comments and a grade before the final exam.

Take Home Exam: You will receive four possible questions near the end of term. The date of the completed exam will be set in the exam period. No late entries will be graded.

Above all, my main hope for this course is that the material and the lectures confront you in a way that is both emotionally fun and intellectually rewarding.

Lecture Schedule

Note: The Instructor reserves the right to change this schedule. Readings will be added to the course website.

(All readings, except the Anderson Text, are to be found online. Links will be posted on Avenue.)

May 1st: Introduction to Course Themes

May 3rd: The Gender Division and its Implications in the Book of Genesis (Reading: Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-3)

May 8th: Love and Law and Lineage in the Jewish Tradition

((Reading: Anderson, 43-76)

May 10th: The Christian Sexual Dynamic

(Reading: Anderson 179-212; Kopas, Jane, "Jesus and Women in Matthew", *Theology Today* 47.1 13; Kopas, Jane "Jesus and Women: John's Gospel", *Theology Today*, 41.2, p. 201)

May 15th: The Woman Pray in the Back: Modesty in Islam

(Reading: Anderson 213-50; Roald, Anne Sofie, "Perceptions of Women" in *Women and Islam: Reflections on Historical and Contemporary Research*)

Take Home Exam Questions Distributed

May 17th: Filial Piety and Women in Chinese Religions

(Reading: Anderson 117-50)

May 22nd: Goddesses and Gods, Women and Men in Hinduism

(Reading: Anderson 1-42; Erndl, "The Play of the Mother: Possession and Power in Hindu Women's Goddess Rituals" in Pintchmann, *Women's Lives, Women's Ritual in the Hindu Tradition*)

May 24th: None of it Means Anything But All the Same: Gender in Buddhism

(Reading: Fisher, 96-109; Faure, Bernard, "Conflicting Images" in *Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity and Gender*)

May 29th: Rules and Roles in Sikhism

(Reading: Fisher, 270-78; Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur, "Why Did I Not Light the Fire?" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Volume 16, Issue 1, pp. 63 - 85)

May 31st: Indigenous Religious Traditions

(Reading: Anderson 151-78)

June 5th: Menstruation and Cleanliness

(Reading: Harman and Marmon, "Lived Regulations, Systemic Attributions" in *Gender and Society*, Volume 18, Issue 3, pp. 389 - 408)

June 7th: Transgender, Homosexuality in Religion: Fetishization and Alienation

(Reading: Epple, "Coming to Terms with Navajo nadleehi" in *American Ethnologist*, Volume 25, Issue 2, pp. 267 - 290 ; Lal, "Not This, Not That – The Hijras of India and the Cultural Politics of Sexuality" in *Social Text*, 12/1999, Issue 61, pp. 119 - 140)

June 12th: “Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss” Women in Cults

(Reading: TBA)

June 14th: Chastity, Public Morals, and Sexual Enlightenment in Religion

(Reading: TBA)