

QUEER THEORY

Tomer Sassonkin Efron

Fall Semester

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Office Hours: by appointment

Short description:

While originally invoked as derogatory for sexual deviance and oddity, the term “queer” since the 1990s has rather come to designate an affirmative position of radical critique on various fields of knowledge and practice. At its core, queer critique targets questions of identity, individual and collective alike: What does it mean to identify as, and *to be*, e.g., a woman, straight, bisexual, transgender, a person of color, able-bodied, a parent, single, married, a secular Jew, a *human being*? How are our various identities influenced and shaped in relation to normative ideals? What is the relation between these ideals and techniques of social control, language, technology, and our individual bodies? Answering these questions, queer theory disturbs the appearance of necessity, taken-for-grantedness and alleged naturalness of identity categories, as well as the many social, cultural, and political structures supporting these categories and being supported by them: kinship, forms of intimacy and passion, modes of pleasure and bodily conduct, and in general, ways of acting, thinking, and being in the world.

The course will offer a critical introduction to some of key tenets of queer theory, focusing on the queer critique of identity and the ethico-political implications of this critique. Taking the U.S. as our main site of discussion, we will begin with a historical and conceptual background from which queer theory/activism has emerged. Here we will discuss the liberation movements of the 1960s-1980s and the work of Michel Foucault, explicating some key ideas and distinctions, such as the distinction sex/gender/sexuality, social power, heteronormativity, and gender mobility. We will then move on to discuss key instances of the queer critique of identity, as these emerge in the works of Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, Michael Warner, and David Halperin. Throughout the course, we will see how each of these scholars, each in their own unique way, foregrounds the significance of the sexual and gendered body as a locus for effective transformative-political work. And we will also see how the critically queer endeavor – while originating in LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans) realities – is in no way confined in relevance to sexual or gendered “others.”

Assessment*:

Minor assignments:	None
Midterm:	Short essay (3-5 pages), 30%
Final requirement:	Final paper (6-10 pages), 50%
Participation:	20%

Attendance:

* Please note that if distance learning is required, the assessment procedure, modes of assessment and weightings may be changed.

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.

Additional requirements:

Keep phones turned-off while in class.