Religion 359: Gender, Body, and Religion  
Professor Melissa M. Wilcox  
MW 1:00-2:20, Olin 247  
Whitman College  
Spring 2008

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Course description:
Gender and the human body are nearly ubiquitous in religion. They are evident in one religion’s images of the divine and in another’s refusal to image the divine; in the control and maintenance of the body through asceticism, sexual regulations, dietary restrictions, and other practices; in debates over human nature and reality; in questions of clothing, leadership, and rites of passage; and in many other areas. Over the past fifteen years, studies of gender and the body have multiplied within the field of religious studies, but much more remains to be done. This class has two goals: to explore some of the work that has been done to date, and to consider new ways in which theories on gender and the body can be applied to religion.

Required texts:

All books will be on reserve in Penrose.

Course requirements:
Final grades will be calculated as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Book reviews</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussant presentations</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation of final project</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final project</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Class participation</td>
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Book reviews: Book reviews are a common academic method of evaluating current work in the field. They are not book reports. A book review explains the thesis of a book, details the argument and evidence, comments on both strengths and weaknesses, and situates the book within a broader field (e.g., gender studies or religious studies). For this class, you will write reviews for four of the five single-author books we’re reading. All reviews should be 650-800 words, and should be formatted to match the sample reviews I’ll make available ahead of time. You may choose which book to skip, but note that reviews of Burrus will be due in our final exam session.

Discussant presentations: Twice during the semester, you and a partner of your choice will serve as discussants by introducing the readings for the day and posing potential discussion questions. The two of you will receive a joint score on this assignment. Your presentation must be no more than 15 minutes long (time management is a part of your grade), and should both summarize and analyze the readings, as well as suggesting questions for further class discussion. After the fourth week of the semester, your analysis must include at least one of the theories and/or concepts we studied in the Price and Tuana books. You are encouraged but not required to use visual aids (the chalkboard, handouts, etc.) in your presentations.

Final project presentation: One of the goals of this course is to produce new ideas on the links between gender, the body, and religion. Your project is an important part of that goal, and for that reason you are required to present your project to the class during the last day of class or during our final exam session. Presentations should be 8-10 minutes in length; visual aids are encouraged but not required. If you need audio-visual equipment for your final project presentation, you must let me know by Wednesday, April 30.

Final project: There are two topic options and two format options for the final project. The topic options are as follows:

1. Analyze the role of gender and/or the body in some aspect of a religion that interests you. The readings we’ll be studying throughout the semester offer good examples of how to do this kind of study. Your analysis must make use of at least one of the theories or concepts we’ve studied in class; you may also bring in works you’ve studied in other courses.
2. Choose a theorist or a school of thought whose work focuses on gender and/or the body outside of religious studies. Research this work in depth. In your project, present and analyze the theories you’ve researched, then discuss how these theories might be applied fruitfully to the study of religion.

The format options are:

1. Creative project: This format will probably work best with topic 1, although you’re welcome to try it with topic 2 as well. If you choose this format, you will need to create a work of art—music, poetry, prose, dance, drama, sculpture, painting, photography, etc.—that expresses your thesis and supporting argument. To accompany your creative project, write a 6- to 7-page paper (plus your research bibliography) explaining your thesis, your argument, and the ways in which they are expressed in your art. In your class presentation, you will present your project (perform it, display it, etc.) and explain the critical analysis it embodies.
2. Formal paper: Your second format option is to present your research and analysis in a formal paper of 12 to 14 pages (plus your bibliography). In your class presentation you should summarize your own thesis and argument, giving your audience whatever background information is necessary to allow them to understand your analysis.

You will need to inform me of your choice of topic and format by Friday, April 4. Projects are due in class during our final exam session: Tuesday, May 13, from 2:00-4:00 p.m.
**Class participation:** Since this course relies heavily on discussion, it is extremely important that you be in class, on time and prepared, each day. Please do the day’s reading before coming to class, and be prepared to discuss the reading assignments. You are expected to bring the day’s reading materials, or detailed notes on the reading, to class each day. **Students who miss more than four class sessions without informing me in advance will lose 50% of this portion of their grade.**

**Course policies:**

**Students with disabilities:** If you have a disability and need my help in making this course fully accessible to you, please feel free to contact me, either in person or through the Academic Resource Center (527-5213). I’ll be happy to help in whatever way I can. If you suspect you have a learning difference but have not had your suspicions confirmed, the Academic Resource Center can help you to identify that difference and figure out how to adjust your learning style accordingly. **The only thing wrong with a learning difference is an inflexible educational system.**

**Inclusive language:** Inclusive language is the use of accurate and unbiased gender terminology, and it is required in this course. It’s important for a number of reasons. For one thing, language shapes how people think. When religious studies was considered to be the study of the beliefs of *man*, for instance, people (usually male scholars) tended to study male writers, male believers, male religious leaders, and so on simply because it didn’t occur to them to study women specifically. As a result, they had a less accurate understanding of religion than we have today. “Humanity” and “humans” are gender-inclusive terms; “man” and “men” are not.

Non-inclusive language also can be misleading, inaccurate, or vague. Traditional formal English, for example, requires that you use the singular pronoun “he” as a generic pronoun. Thus, you might say that “when a new member is initiated into the secret society, he must undergo several hours of ordeals.” People who read that sentence are left wondering whether “he” includes women or whether this secret society is for men only. The solution? When you use singular generic terms (like “one,” “anyone,” “a person,” etc.), use the combined pronoun “she or he.” Or, for a less awkward sentence, simply use a plural noun (“people,” “initiates,” “members,” etc.), because English has a non-gendered plural pronoun (“they”).

**“Late fees”:** Without significant advance notice there will be no make-ups for discussant presentations or final project presentations. Final projects and book reviews will lose 5 percentage points for each day they are late (this includes weekends and holidays).

**Academic dishonesty:** Honesty is an integral part of academic learning; any form of cheating expresses gross disrespect for the efforts of your teachers, the hard work of your classmates, and your own privilege in having access to a quality education. I will not hesitate to report and pursue incidents of suspected academic dishonesty, including cheating on tests, copying others’ assignments, and plagiarism. **The maximum penalty for academic dishonesty is permanent expulsion from Whitman.**

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This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and genders as well as all races, ethnicities, religions, social statuses, and abilities. All members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity, and to listen especially carefully to the voices of cultural and social minorities.
Course Schedule

**Week 1: Introductions**
Monday, 1/14: Introduction to the course
  Read: Alexander handout
Wednesday, 1/16: Constructing the body
  Read: Syllabus; Price/Shildrick, 42-48, 179-187, 21-28; Tuana, 198-214

**Week 2: Genders, bodies, and power**
*Monday, 1/21: MLK Day – Whitman Symposium*
Wednesday, 1/23: Power and performativity
  Read: Tuana, 55-76; Price/Shildrick, 416-421, 235-243
  Sign up for discussant presentations

**Week 3: Resistant bodies** (Discussant presentations start this week)
Monday, 1/28: Doing and undoing gender
  Read: Tuana, 155-168, 125-144; Price/Shildrick, 111-124, 125-132
Wednesday, 1/30: Gender and racialized bodies
  Read: Tuana, 38-52, 173-192; Price/Shildrick, 93-102

**Week 4: Marked bodies**
Monday, 2/4: Gender and nation
  Read: Price/Shildrick, 388-397, 399-408, 290-301
Wednesday, 2/6: Gender and ability
  Read: Price/Shildrick, 432-443; Tuana, 83-97, 100-119

**Week 5: Gender, body, and religion**
Monday, 2/11: Gender theory, body theory, and religion (No discussants today)
  Read: Tuana, 247-265
  → Review readings so far; come prepared to discuss their application to religion
  Terminology study sheet available in class
*Tuesday, 2/12: Keith Boykin talk at 7:30 – Extra credit opportunity!*
Wednesday, 2/13: Yoruba women and religion
  Read: Olajubu, Chs. 1, 2

**Week 6: Gender and religion in Yorubaland**
*Monday, 2/18: Presidents’ Day – No class*
Wednesday, 2/20: Gender and religion in Yorubaland
  Read: Olajubu, Chs. 3, 4

**Week 7: Gender, religion, and nation**
Monday, 2/25: Gender and ritual in Yoruba religion
  Read: Olajubu, Ch. 5, Conclusion
Wednesday, 2/27: Nation, colonization, and gender in India
  Read: Bannerjee, Chs. 1, 2

**Week 8: Gender and Hindu nationalism**
Monday, 3/3: Hinduism, nationalism, and masculinity
  Read: Bannerjee, Chs. 3, 4
  → Olajubu book review due
Wednesday, 3/5: Hinduism, nationalism, and femininity
  Read: Bannerjee, Chs. 5, 6, 7
SPRING BREAK MARCH 8 – MARCH 23

Week 9: Roots of western sex magic
   Monday, 3/24: Sex magic in the west
      Read: Urban, ix-xi, Intro, Ch. 1
      → Bannerjee book review due
   Wednesday, 3/26: Sex magic in the 19th-century U.S.
      Read: Urban, Chs. 2, 3

Week 10: Sex magic from fascists to feminists
   Monday, 3/31: Sex magic at the turn of the century
      Read: Urban, Chs. 4, 5
   Wednesday, 4/2: Neopaganism and the Church of Satan
      Read: Urban, Chs. 6, 7
      Friday, 4/4: Last day to contact me about your final project topic and format

Week 11: Postmodern sex magic
   Monday, 4/7: Postmodern sex magic
      Read: Urban, Ch.8, Conclusion
   Wednesday, 4/9: I will be out of town. Please use this time to work on your final project.

Week 12: Theorizing possession
   Monday, 4/14: Existing theories
      Read: Keller Intro, Part I intro, Ch. 1 (pp. 1-53)
      → Urban book review due
   Tuesday, 4/15: Undergraduate conference
   Wednesday, 4/16: Rethinking the theories
      Read: Keller Chs. 2-3

Week 13: Examining possession
   Monday, 4/21: Possession at work and at war
      Read: Keller Part II intro, Chs. 4, 5
   Wednesday, 4/23: Possession in theater
      Read: Keller Ch. 6, Conclusion

Week 14: Hermits, martyrs, and sex
   Monday, 4/28: Queering the hermits
      Read: Burrus Intro, Ch. 1
   Wednesday, 4/30: Martyrs and masochism
      Read: Burrus Ch. 2, Ch. 3 to page 109
      → Keller book review due
      Last day to request media equipment for project presentations

Week 15: Sex and the single saint
   Monday, 5/5: Holy Harlots
      Read: Burrus end of Ch. 3, Ch. 4, Postscript

Tuesday 5/13, 1:00-4:00 (our final exam session), in our usual room:
   → Final Project presentations
   → Final project papers due
   → Burrus book reviews due