The History of Sexuality in Canada

CANS 308: Sex and Gender in Canada
The McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, McGill University
Fall 2008, Tuesdays, 11:35-2:30

Instructor: Steven Maynard
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10-11am, MISC, 3463 Peel St., Room 203, or by appointment
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WebCT: Accessible via “myCourses,” WebCT will be a vital component of this course. Check it frequently for class announcements, discussion related to assignments, lists of supplementary and recommended readings, Web resources, etc.

Course Description
From First Nations to Queer Nation, this course is an introduction to Canada’s sexual past. Ranging from the seventeenth century to the present, we will explore the diverse history of sexualities in the nation we now call Canada, from “berdache” and boucherie en Nouvelle France to lesbian bars and the birth control pill at McGill. We begin with several classes on how to think about sexuality as historical – as the basis for identities and communities, as a form of regulation, and as a hotly contested terrain of politics. Subsequent lectures explore central themes and developments in Canada’s sexual past with an emphasis on transformations between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

We will approach sexuality as a prism through which to view the operations of power, both in its pleasurable modes and in its more dangerous manifestations. Drawing on feminist and post-colonial thought, we will investigate sexuality’s intimate connections to a wide range of other variables, including gender, race, age, class, colonialism and nation.

The format of the course will be a combination of lectures, class discussion, and several “History Workshops” focussed on the interpretation of sexual history on film and in archival documents. Lectures will provide broad overviews and interpretations, while readings for the lectures are designed to permit deeper exploration of particular themes within the period under consideration. Written work will take the form of a series of essays which emphasize critical writing/reviewing skills.

Throughout the course, one of our central questions will be: what difference does sexuality make, what leverage can it give us, in the project of rethinking Canada, both in the past and in the present?

Required Texts (Available at the McGill Bookstore)

- Sarah Carter, The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915 (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008)
- Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherford, eds., Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005)
- Richard Cavell, ed., Love, Hate, and Fear in Canada’s Cold War (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004)
Assignments and Evaluation

40% -- History Workshops (20% + 20%):
- “Canada’s ‘Dirty Laundry’: Sex, Race, and Immigration in the Late 19th Century” (Paper Due: 7 October 2008)
- “The Queer 1950s in Canada” (Paper Due: 4 November 2008)

30% -- Critical Review Essay: “In the Bedrooms of the Nation: Sex and the State in Canadian History” (Essay Due: 25 November 2008)

30% -- Final Exam

History Workshops: Two classes will be devoted to workshops on two different themes: sex, race and immigration in late-nineteenth-century Canada and queer identities and subcultures in Cold War Canada. There are several components to each workshop. First, we will screen a film. Because you will be writing about the film, you should watch it closely and take some notes. Second, we will examine some related historical documents. These will be available online and you should take a look at them prior to the workshop. Third, there are also a series of readings on the workshop theme. These will be available on Course Reserve at the McGill Humanities and Social Sciences Library. Fourth, during the workshop, we will break into discussion groups in which you hammer out what sense to make of the material and to share ideas on your workshop papers. After the workshop, each of you will prepare a paper (5, double-spaced pages, properly footnoted) in which you compare, contrast and critique the differing place and divergent meanings of sexuality on film, in the historical documents, and as treated in at least two of the readings. Papers are due one week after the workshop. Note: In view of what will be the high demand on Course Reserve materials, students are strongly advised not to leave this until the last minute. You’d be wise to do some of the readings in advance of the workshop so that you have some background and context for the film and documents.

Critical Review Essay: In recent years, debates over the meaning and significance of marriage and monogamy have rocked sexual politics in Canada. Think of the struggle to legalize gay marriage, or current debates over polygamy, or, in a case originating here in Montreal, the Supreme Court decision to legalize straight swingers’ clubs. Appeals to history have played a significant, if underappreciated and underexplored role in these debates. To address this gap, your task is to write an essay that takes as is starting point a critical review of Sarah Carter’s new book, The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915. In addition to reviewing the book as a whole, you should also choose a particular critical point or theme around which to organize your paper. Possible themes include but are not limited to: sexuality and nation; inter-racial relationships; same-sex sexualities; or gender/racial inequalities. To develop your theme, you will research and incorporate into your essay at least three other carefully chosen, pertinent secondary sources – this means not simply the first three references that pop up on a Google search. Dig deep for sources that really help to flesh out your theme. Whatever theme you decide upon, some broad questions to consider include: what role, if any, do you think the state should play in regulating intimate relations and
how does your view square with the historical record? How does having an historical perspective change or challenge commonsense understandings of marriage and monogamy? Does sexuality reinforce or refashion dominant notions of intimate life, gender roles, race, and nation? Keep in mind the distinction between a book report/review and a critique. Do not write a banal book review in which you simply summarize the contents of the book. Instead, craft a critique in which you offer an argument and your own critical point of view. Your paper will be 10 double-spaced pages and follow an accepted footnoting/endnoting format.

Final Exam: A final exam will be scheduled during the official exam period. The exam will cover all course material but be based heavily on the concepts and history covered in the lectures. A reminder that it is your responsibility to confirm the date and time of the exam and to contact the Student Affairs Office in the event of an exam schedule conflict.

Overall, a few things to keep in mind about assignments and evaluation:

- In all of your written work, spelling, grammar, organization and style are of paramount importance. If you know you have difficulty in any of these areas, consult a writing/style guide, visit the Writing Centre on campus, or see me. A portion of one of our first classes will be given over to a discussion of writing and research skills.
- You will find that your mark reflects the amount of effort (for instance, the extent of your research), the depth of thoughtfulness, and the degree of engagement demonstrated in your work.
- Extensions and Late Papers: Extensions will not be given in this course except on verifiable grounds of medical emergency or serious family crisis. Late papers will be penalized 1 full mark per day, including weekends (for example, if you earned 73% on a paper but it was two days late, your mark would be 71%).
- Academic Integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. For more information, see: http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity

Course Schedule

Note: Readings not found in the textbooks are available online and can be accessed via the McGill Library catalogue.

2 September 2008
Lecture: “How I Spent My Summer Vacation, or Sex, Canada Day, and Canadian History”

9 September
Lecture: “How to Do the History of Sexuality”
16 September
Lecture: “‘My Canada Includes Sodomy’: The Pre-19th-Century Experience”
Readings:
- Go to and explore the site, “The Drummer’s Revenge: LGBT History and Politics in Canada” (http://thedrummersrevenge.wordpress.com), especially the categories of New France, British North America, and women’s history. Pay particular attention to how the site interprets the category of “sodomy.”

23 September
Lecture: “The ‘Malthusian Couple’ in Canada”
Readings:
- Sarah Carter, “Creating ‘Semi-Widows’ and ‘Supernumerary Wives’: Prohibiting Polygamy in Prairie Canada’s Aboriginal Communities to 1900,” in Contact Zones (also appears as Chapter 6 in The Importance of Being Monogamous)

30 September
History Workshop: “Canada’s Dirty Laundry: Sex, Race, and Immigration in the 19th Century”
Film Screening: Richard Fung, Dirty Laundry (V-Tape, 1996)
Historical Document: Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, 1885

This is available online via the McGill Library catalogue as an eBook. Once redirected to the Report, scroll down to “View Page.” You will looking for the references to sexuality – female prostitution, sodomy, etc. These can be found on pages 50, 83, 150, 198-99, 213, 219, 311, 354 and on pages 93, 189, 194, 228, 259, 333. Further references can be found by using the index to the Report, found on the last pages. The Library also has micro-fiche versions as well as several copies of the original Report which you are encouraged to seek out as a way to get a feel for the actual historical document.
Readings: A list of readings to use in writing your history workshop paper will be listed on WebCT.
7 October  

**** Papers for History Workshop I are due at the beginning of class ****

Lecture: “The ‘Hysterical Woman,’ Part I”
Readings:

14 October
Lecture: “The’ Hysterical Woman,’ Part II”
Readings:
- Robin Jarvis Brownlie, “Intimate Surveillance: Indian Affairs, Colonization, and the Regulation of Aboriginal Women’s Sexuality,” in Contact Zones.
- Valerie Korinek, “’It’s a Tough Time to Be in Love’: The Darker Side of Love in Chatelaine during the Cold War,” in Love, Hate, and Fear.

21 October
Lecture: “The ‘Perverse Adult,’ Part I”
Readings:

28 October
History Workshop: “The Queer 1950s in Canada”
Film Screening: Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives (NFB, 1995)
Historical Documents: Pulp Novels and Tabloids from the 1950s-60s
Documents will be posted on WebCT. However, students who wish to look at some actual postwar tabloids and pulp novels are encouraged to make a trip to Les Archives gaies du Quebec (the Quebec Gay Archives) to explore their holdings. Open to the public on Thursday evenings, from 7:30-9:30pm, the Archives is located at 4067 boulevard St-Laurent, bureau 202. For more information, visit: http://www.agq.qc.ca

Readings: A list of readings for your workshop papers will be posted on WebCT.

4 November  **** Papers for History Workshop II are due at the beginning of class ****
Lecture: “The ‘Perverse Adult,’ Part II”
Readings:
- Mary Louise Adams, “Margin Notes: Reading Lesbianism as Obscenity in a Cold War Courtroom,” in Love, Hate, and Fear.

11 November
Lecture: “The ‘Masturbating Child,’ Part I”
Readings:

18 November
Lecture: “The ‘Masturbating Child,’ Part II”
Readings:

25 November  **** Critical Review Essays are due at the beginning of class ****
Lecture: “The Historical Present and the Future of Sex in Canada”
Course Wrap-Up and Review for Final Exam