Gender and Sexuality in Judaism in Late Antiquity

Prof. Sara Ronis
Office hours by appointment

Late Antiquity was a rich and vital time in the construction of Jewish identities. A critical component of these identities was the role of gender and sexuality in understandings of the self and the other. The aim of this seminar is to explore the categories of gender and sexuality as they relate to Judaism in Late Antiquity.

Over the course of the semester, we will explore the critical categories of gender and sexuality both in theoretical works and in primary texts from the Second Temple and Rabbinic periods. By the end of the semester, students will be able to apply gender theory to ancient Jewish texts, and analyze the construction of gender and sexuality in late antiquity. Students will also be aware of the potential pitfalls and payoffs of readings of ancient texts with a sensitivity to gender and sexuality.

A collateral aim for this seminar is to serve as an opportunity for training and feedback on the critical activities of professionalization in the academy. By the end of the semester, students will be able to propose a conference talk, transform a final paper into a paper talk, and gain experience giving a clear and compelling oral presentation. This course thus serves to prepare graduate students to be active, confident, collaborative members of the academy who are thoughtful about the construction of categories of personal and collective identities.

This course is designed primarily for students in the Ph.D. programs in Ancient Judaism, Early Christianity, and Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean. Doctoral students in Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and other fields are also welcome.

Expectations

1. Although students are welcome to consult translations of all texts assigned, knowledge of either biblical or modern Hebrew is recommended, as many of the interpretations we will encounter center on semantic, syntactic, orthographic, and phonetic details in the original. Students unsure as to their Hebrew competence should consult Prof. Ronis.

2. LAPTOP POLICY: Students are welcome to use their laptops in order to read and annotate the materials for the course digitally, as well as to take notes during class. Participation is a key component of the course, however, and I reserve the right to change this policy if laptops become a barrier to full engagement in the discussions during class time.

All of the primary and secondary readings for this course can be found online on the course management system.
Requirements

This course has three main requirements. The first is participation. The second is the writing of a research paper. The third is the conversion of that research paper into a conference talk.

Assignments:

1. **In-class participation (20% of the final grade)**. This class meets once a week. Regular and punctual attendance and active participation in discussion, based on preparation of the assigned materials, is critical to fully engaging in this course.

2. **The research paper (40% of the final grade)**. Each student must write a research paper on a relevant topic of his or her choice. The paper must engage deeply with primary sources and with some of the secondary materials explored in class. This paper is meant to be part of the broader learning process of the course, and has multiple steps:
   a. Week 2-3: Students must meet with professor to propose a research topic or broad research question (5%).
   b. Week 4: Students must submit a formal abstract proposing a topic for their paper/conference talk (5%).
   c. Week 8: Students must submit a research paper of no more than 20 pages double-spaced (30%).

3. **The conference talk (40% of the final grade)**. The ability to convert a research project into a public presentation is a useful, learned skill. In order to develop and practice that skill, each student must convert his or her research paper into a 20-minute talk appropriate for a national conference in the field of Religious Studies/Ancient Judaism. The professor is available for consultation about this conversion.
   a. Week 12-13: Students must present a 9-page double-spaced conference paper, with a handout or powerpoint if appropriate, to the rest of the class (10%).
   b. Week 12-13: Students must give constructive feedback to their peers on their conference talks with an aim to improving their presentations (10%).
   c. Finals Week: Students must submit a final draft of their conference talk which integrates the constructive feedback of their peers (20%)
Course Schedule

Weekly reading assignments, many of which will be available on the course website, will be the basis for discussion each week. Textual examples will be drawn from the reading assignments.

Unit 1: Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Sexuality (5 wks)

Topic 1: Second-Wave Feminism – Revealing Real Ancient Jewish Women


Topic 2: Third-Wave Feminism and the Construction of Jewish Gender

1. Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (1990), Chapters 1 and 2.


Spring 2016
Wednesday 1:30-3:30, Location TBA


**Unit 2: Topics in Gender and Sexuality in Late Antiquity (2 wks)**

**Topic 1: Women, Men, Torah and the Commandments**


**Topic 2: Bodies at the Margins**


**Unit 3: New Scholarly Trends in Gender and Sexuality (3wks)**


Spring 2016  
Wednesday 1:30-3:30, Location TBA  


**Unit 4: Student Conference Colloquium (2 wks)**

**University Statement on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

In keeping with the principles of our honor code, students are expected to be honest in all of their academic work. Academic honesty means, most fundamentally, that any work you present as your own must in fact be your own work and not that of another. This includes using online translation programs such as Google Translate or translating online material, such as Wikipedia entries, or excerpting Wikipedia entries without proper citation. It also includes sharing work or jointly completed work (except as authorized in advance). All violations of these principles will be reported to the instructor and may result in a failing grade for the course and additional disciplinary action by the university.

**University Statement on Inclusivity/Disabilities**