

# Political Science 353

## Identity Politics: Sex, Gender, Sexuality

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### Course Description

*This is a course on Identity Politics, focused on sexual and gender identity. We will explore the concept of gender boundaries: from conventional ideas about sex and gender that are often presented as “natural,” to politically charged challenges to gender categories. What does it mean to be masculine or feminine? What does sexuality have to do with gender? Are all females naturally feminine? Males naturally masculine? Does sexual orientation correspond in any predictable way to gendered behavior? How do we experience our self as gendered? Do we feel male or female, or are we taught what to feel? Is gender natural or a social construction? How is it related to race and ethnicity? To social class? And what are the political implications of all this?*

*The books I’ve ordered will be supplemented with readings available on electronic reserve, and by several films. The course is experimental: together we will see what works, what doesn’t, and what we may have to add to our study.*

### Course Work

*Written work will consist of three short take-home writing assignments based on readings and class discussions, and a term paper on gender, sexual identity and boundaries (or “passing”), on a topic to be selected by each student.*

*The class depends heavily on discussion. Attendance is required and expected, and part of the final grade will be based upon participation. There will be opportunities for volunteer groups of students to lead class discussions. Students are expected to come to class prepared by having done the assigned readings. If you miss a class because of illness, medical or family emergency, please check in with me immediately upon your return. Any other reasons that might constitute excused absences should be arranged with me ahead of time. Students with disabilities should contact me to make necessary arrangements.*

### Classroom Policies

*Rules of the game in the classroom are civilized and respectful discussions at all times, emotional safety in the classroom, but pushing ourselves always to challenge preconceptions about identity, and who we are.*

*Plagiarism (copying written work from other students, published, or internet sources) will result in failing the class.*

## Course Readings

### Texts

The following books have been ordered and are available at the bookstore:

- Nella Larsen, *Passing* (novella from the 1920's on a black woman who passes as white)
- Plato, *The Symposium* (on sex and love in ancient Greece)
- Michal Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (essays on the history of masculinity in the U.S.)
- Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (novel based on a true story about a woman who lives as a man in order to be true to her genius as a jazz musician in the mid-twentieth century, when there were no women jazz musicians)
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* (Feminist Biologist analysis of the scientific history of sex and gender)

### Course Reserves

In addition, selections will be placed on e-reserve from among the following scholars. Student suggestions are welcome as additions or substitutions:

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*
- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*
- Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*
- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*
- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Lecture on Femininity*
- Michael Kimmel and Michael A. Messner, *Men's Lives*
- Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo, *Sport, Men and the Gender Order*
- William Pollack, *Real Boys*
- Eileen McDonough and Laura Pappano, *Playing With The Boys*
- Adrienne Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality*

Additional Readings may be added if they occur to any of us.

### Films:

Race: The Power of an Illusion

The Bird Cage

Normal

Brokeback Mountain

## **Schedule of Readings:**

### **Weeks 1-3 (Aug. 25-Sept. 10): Boundaries: Race, Gender, Sexuality**

Nella Larsen, *Passing*

Jackie Kay, *Trumpet*

Films: *Race: The Power of an Illusion* and *The Bird Cage*

### **Week, 4 (Sept. 15-17): Classical Sexuality**

Plato, *Symposium*

## **First writing assignment**

### **Weeks, 5-7 (Sept. 22-Oct 8) Constructed Masculinity**

Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*

Chapters 1-4, pp.1-124

*e-reserve: Kimmel and Messner, Men's Lives ( "Introduction," "Perspectives on Masculinities", "Caveman Masculinity" and "The Male Privilege Checklist"*

William Pollack, *Real Boys*, pp. 3-64 (*e-reserve*)

Chapters on electronic reserve from Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo, *Sport, Men and the Gender Order: "The Men's Cultural Center" and "Cool Pose: Black Masculinity and Sports"*

### **Weeks 8, 9 (Oct 13- Oct.22)Constructed Femininity**

Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (*e-reserve*)

Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (*e-reserve*)

Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*

Chapters 8, "*The Masculine Mystique*"pp. 173-191

McDonagh and Pappano, "*Playing With the Boys*" (*e-reserve*)

Film: *Normal*

## **Second Writing Assignment**

### **Weeks 10-13 (Oct. 27-Nov.24) Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Sex: Nature and Social Construction**

Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, pp. 1-44. Additional Chapters to be presented by student volunteers.

*Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents,  
Lecture on Femininity (e-reserve)*

*Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (e-reserve)*

*Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (e-reserve)*

*Film: Brokeback Mountain*

### Third Writing Assignment

#### **Weeks 15-16 (Dec 1-8)**

*Student Presentations*

*Term Papers Due*