

Lesbian Lives and Cultures

San Diego State University | Spring 2020

Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 10-11 am, Thursdays 1-2 pm, and by appointment

General Course Information

Class Days/Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11 am – 12:15 pm

Classroom: Engineering 328

What is this class about?

Over the course of the 20th century, lesbians were made invisible, discounted and ignored; stereotyped and caricatured; criminalized, pathologized, and vilified. Due to lesbian activism, over the past 30 years things have changed: to be a ‘women-loving-woman’ has become normalized. Once forced underground, lesbian culture has been increasingly commercialized. Yet, over the same time period, some people have gravitated away from lesbianism and toward other formations, such as queer, trans, pansexual, or culturally specific identities. This move has left others worried about the “death” of the lesbian and the disappearance of lesbian culture.

In this class we will examine the unique contributions of lesbian thought, activism, and culture as a distinct formation of the 20th century in the United States. How did lesbians come to define themselves, and what unique perspectives did they bring to scholarship, feminism, and popular culture? We will also grapple with some of the conflicts within and challenges to lesbianism that make it a “fraught inheritance” for some (see Christina Cauterucci, 2016). Why do some “young queer women” (in Cauterucci’s terms) feel alienated from lesbian as an identity, even if they recognize the importance of the lesbians who came before in opening up space for non-heterosexual femme lives? We will engage in the lesbian and queer tradition of imagining a different future for ourselves, by designing and crafting our own cultural productions.

Format: As a seminar course, this class will rely heavily on large group discussions, small group discussions, and presentations. We will also have guest lectures, film screenings, and visit the special collections archive at SDSU.

What will you learn?

By the end of this this course you will be able to:

- Define lesbianism as a formation of thinking, activism, and cultural production.
- Discuss some the history of lesbians and queer femmes as well as the history of lesbian and queer femme movements for social change.
- Identify some of the contributions of lesbian culture to dominant culture and other non-lesbian marginalized cultures, including queer culture.
- Critically evaluate some of the limitations of and challenges to lesbian frameworks, both historically and in the present.
- Critically analyze lesbian and queer femme cultural productions.

What will you read?

Required Books:

1. *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* by Susan Stryker, 2017 revised edition, ISBN: 9781580056892
 - a. Make sure to get the revised edition from 2017. Available on reserve at Love Library.
2. *Queer: A Graphic History* by Meg-John Barker and Julia Scheele, 2016, ISBN: 9781785780714
 - a. Working to make available on reserve.
3. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* by Saidiya Hartman, 2019, ISBN: 9780393285673
 - a. Hardcover or the new softcover edition is okay. Available on reserve at Love Library.
4. *Life is Wonderful, People Are Terrific* by Meliza Bañales, 2015, ISBN: 9781940885292
 - a. Working to make available on reserve.

Other Required Readings

Several additional **required** readings listed in the syllabus will be available on the course Canvas page for online reading and/or printing.

What does the professor expect of you?

1. **Read the material assigned prior to class.** The success of a seminar course depends upon students to read the assigned material, and come prepared to class with thoughts, reactions, critiques and questions. Without preparation for discussion, this will quickly turn into a terrifically boring class. Our success depends on your preparation and contribution.
2. **Check Canvas and your email regularly.** Our class is participating in a pilot program to use the Canvas learning management system rather than Blackboard. You will need to login to your Canvas account weekly to complete assignments, access assigned readings, and get announcements. Any changes to reading assignments, instructions for completing assignments, and any other announcements will also be sent via e-mail.
3. **Regularly attend and participate in class.** Again, the success of this class depends on you coming prepared and ready to contribute to class. On a more banal level, to pass the class, you must regularly attend and participate in class. *If you have an emergency or serious extenuating*

circumstance that requires you to miss several class periods, please contact me in office hours (or make an appointment) as soon as possible to discuss your situation. I am much more understanding if you come and speak with me.

- 4. Participate respectfully during class time.** Active participation includes coming to class prepared to engage with your fellow students on the topic, and to meaningfully contribute to discussions and exercises while respecting the contributions of other students. Respect includes turning off non-class related apps and internet browsers on your electronic devices, including iPods, cell phones, laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. before class starts. Respect also includes avoiding side conversations, which are extremely distracting for other students and myself.
- 5. Complete all assignments to the best of your ability and on time.** You should expect to put in three hours of homework per classroom hour each week to keep up with assigned readings and complete assignments. You are responsible for keeping track of when assignments are due. Late policy: I accept assignments *up to one week late (and no longer) for partial credit*. If you have an extreme, unavoidable, and documentable reason preventing you from turning in your assignment on time, please come speak with me. No work will be accepted beyond May 18.

How will you know you are learning?

Participation: 15 points

You can earn up to 15 points for preparation and participation in class discussion and activities.

Short Writing Assignments: 25 points

Undergrads: complete at least 5 of the weekly short writing assignments. Each week you are tasked with writing a one-page (double-spaced) response to the assigned reading, to be completed **by** class time. In your response, you should demonstrate an understanding of the main argument of the reading, and make at least one connection to another assigned reading, guest lecture, or film. You may also use the response to discuss any critiques or questions you have about the assigned reading. On weeks where we have guest lectures, film screenings, or other activities (such as a visit to the special collections), you may also write a one-page response to these events, using the same guidelines, due on the following class period.

Grads: you will complete at least 8 of the weekly short writing assignments. In addition to the guidelines above, you **MUST** include either a critical assessment of the reading, **AND** you should include in your response at least one possible discussion question for the class.

I highly encourage you to choose which weeks you plan to write in advance. Do not leave these assignments for the last weeks of class, when we will be busy with the paper and final project.

Artifact Analysis Paper: 30 points

Write one long paper for this class. Undergrads will write 8-10 pages. For the paper, you will choose one of the following 'artifacts':

- A journal article, book, manifesto, or other written piece that is from a lesbian standpoint;

- An organization or group engaged in social change activism that was/is made up of or led by lesbian identified people; OR
- A cultural production from a lesbian standpoint, such as a film, memoir, music, poetry, or novel; you could also choose a film-maker, actor, writer, musician/band, or poet.

In your paper you will briefly introduce your artifact, and then describe the contributions your artifact made/makes to dominant culture, feminism and/or to other gender and sexual minority cultures (such as queer culture). Why was/is this artifact important or significant? You should use the concepts and themes from the assigned reading in the course to help you in your interpretation. You may also wish to do additional research on what others have said about your artifact, and discuss whether you agree or disagree with their interpretations. You may also offer a critique or identify problems with your artifact, but you may only do so AFTER you discuss the contributions of your piece.

Grads: Your papers must be 15-16 pages and include additional research on your artifact. You should locate at least three scholarly sources (peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, or books) that directly analyze your artifact, or provide a useful framework for your own analysis. Your papers must also include a critical assessment of your artifact.

Creative Final Project: 30 points

Your objective is to imagine possible FUTURE LIVES & CULTURES that pick up from what we have learned about lesbian lives and cultures. You can take this in a dystopic direction, imagining what life might be like if the status quo remains the same, there is no positive progress, or we turn in terrible directions. OR, you can take this in a utopic direction, envisioning a more just, equitable, or freer future for people of various genders and sexualities.

The way you present what you have imagined is open to all kinds of creative possibilities: short films, songs, poems, visual art, zines, fashion shows, games, short stories, comic books, performance art, murals, photograph essays, taped radio shows/podcasts, blogs – the sky is the limit.

You should attach to your final project a 2-3 page written reflection that narratively describes how your project depicts the utopic of dystopic future you have imagined, and how you used course themes in your project.

Overall grades will be based on the following points earned:

A = (94-100); A- = (90-93)
 B+ = (87-89); B = (83-86); B- = (80-82)
 C+ = (77-79); C = (73-76); C- = (70-72)
 D+ = (67-69); D = (60-66); F= (≤ 59)

Note: At any point in the course, you can estimate your grade by adding up the points you have earned and compare that to the remaining points available.

Other important things to know

Students are responsible for being familiar with the university wide policies found at: https://arweb.sdsu.edu/es/catalog/GC1617/143_UniPolicies.pdf.

Content warning

A course on queer lives, necessarily requires us to encounter texts discussing violence. Please reach out for support from me or the following resources if you are experiencing distress due to this content.

- Campus-based Counseling and Psychological Services, M-F 8 am – 4 pm: 619-594-5220
- San Diego Access & Crisis Phone Line available 24/7: 1-888- 724-7240
- San Diego Access & Crisis Chat Line available M-F 4-10 pm: <https://svcrplv.uhc.com/sdchat/>

Disability and Access Information – Student Accommodations

So that those who have chemical sensitivities can be present with us, please refrain from wearing strongly scented products and fragrances to class, and refrain from coming to class smelling strongly of smoke.

I encourage all students to communicate their other access needs with me. If you have a campus accommodation letter, it would be helpful to get a copy as soon as possible.

If you think that you could benefit from an accommodation, even if you do not yet have a learning disability or psychiatric diagnosis, or if you are experiencing a new or temporary disability caused by injury, please contact the Student Ability Success Center and they will walk you through the process. Visit: http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/sds/services-overview.aspx. SASC is located in Calpulli Center, Suite 3101. Voice: (619) 594-6473.

Student Privacy and Intellectual Property Policy

I assure the privacy of student grades and feedback on individual assignments. I will retain your work for one year after the completion of the course. I agree to only circulate your work with your express permission.

Gender inclusive bathrooms

The nearest are: New Engineering Building (sub-level)

Academic honesty

Any work that you turn in to me must be written in your own words. In order to give credit to the ideas of others, any phrase, sentence or paragraph that is an exact copy of what somebody else wrote (or said) should be attributed to the author (or speaker) by name and include a page number. In addition, any idea from an author or theorist that you use in your work, even if it is not a direct quote, should also be attributed to that author by name. To present someone else's words as your own is considered plagiarism, whether you intended to steal their work or not. Students who are found to be plagiarizing, whether intentionally or not, will be subject to penalty. This can include: receiving a zero on the assignment or exam, receiving a failing grade in the course overall, or being referred to student conduct.

Sexualized Violence and Reporting Requirements

All employees are required to report incidences of sexual assault and sexual harassment to the campus Dean of Students office. That means that professors and other employees who become aware of sexual assault or harassment must contact the Title IX office. HOWEVER, it would be YOUR choice to pursue any action beyond the initial report. You do not have to talk to the university at any point, even if a

report is made about you. Anyone who would prefer to talk to someone confidentially about sexual assault or harassment can contact:

- Campus Sexual Violence Advocate & Educator, [Calpulli Center](#), 2nd Floor, [\(619\) 594-0210](#)
- Center for Community Solutions (CCS), 24-Hour Hotline: [\(888\) 385-4657](#) (Bilingual)

Course Schedule

Subject to change with fair notice – announced in class and posted on Canvas.

Week	Date	Topics and Assigned Readings	Deadlines & Assignments
1	Jan. 23	<i>I. Introductions and Overview</i>	Purchase/rent/borrow assigned books (for assigned reading next week)
2	Jan. 28 & 30	<p><i>II. Historicizing Lesbian Lives & Cultures</i></p> <p>Assigned Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapters 1, 2, and 3 from <i>Transgender History</i> • Pages 17-53 from <i>Queer A Graphic History</i> 	Short writing assignment 1 (on this week's readings) due Thursday
3	Feb. 4 & 6	<p>Assigned Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Woman-Identified Woman" by the Radicalesbians (Canvas) • "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance" by Cheryl Clarke (Canvas) • "What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Literary Criticism" by Bonnie Zimmerman (Canvas) 	Short writing assignment 2 (on this week's readings) due Tuesday
4	Feb. 11 & 13	<p>Assigned Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skim <i>The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly</i> newsletter from January 1972; read the article "Lesbians in Revolt" by Charlotte Bunch (starts on pg. 8) • I encourage you to start reading <i>Wayward Lives</i> (see next week assigned reading) <p>Thursday, February 13: Instead of our regular classroom, meet in the Marsh Room in the 1st floor of the Love Library for a tour of special collections and the Women's Studies history display</p>	
5	Feb. 18 & 20	<p>Assigned reading: from <i>Wayward Lives</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A Note on Method" • "A Minor Figure" (p 13) 	Short writing assignment 3 (on special collections visit) and 4 (on this week's readings) due Tuesday

Week	Date	Topics and Assigned Readings	Deadlines & Assignments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “An Intimate History of Slavery and Freedom” (p 45) • “1909” (p 177) • “Mistah Beauty” (p 193) <p>In class film clips: <i>T’Ain’t Nobody’s Business</i></p>	
6	Feb. 25 & 27	<p>Assigned reading: from <i>Wayward Lives</i>:</p> <p>Book 3 (p. 217 – 349; if you can’t read all of it, focus on 217-286 and 345-349)</p> <p>In class film: <i>Out in the Night</i></p>	<p>Proposal for Artifact Analysis Paper due on Tuesday</p> <p>Short writing assignment 5 (on this week’s readings) due Tuesday</p>
7	March 3 & 5	<p>III. Trouble in Utopia</p> <p>Part 1: Trans Exclusion</p> <p>Assigned reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 4 from <i>Transgender History</i> • Pages 138-146 from <i>Queer A Graphic History</i> • “Radical Inclusion: Recounting the Trans Inclusive History of Radical Feminism” by Cristan Williams (Canvas) 	<p>Short writing assignment 6 (on film from last week) and short writing assignment 7 (on this week’s readings) due Tuesday</p>
8	March 10 & 12	<p>Part 2: Queer Theory</p> <p>Assigned reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pages 54-86, 89-97, 154-160 from <i>Queer A Graphic History</i> • Chapter 5 from <i>Transgender History</i> (p. 151-175, skim the rest) <p>Additional reading for grads (optional for undergrads):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from <i>The History of Sexuality</i> by Michel Foucault 	<p>Short writing assignment 7 (on this week’s readings) due Tuesday</p>

Week	Date	Topics and Assigned Readings	Deadlines & Assignments
9	March 17 & 19	<p>Part 3: Queer of Color Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Living as a Lesbian” by Robert Reid-Pharr (Canvas) Pages 126-135 from <i>Queer A Graphic History</i> <p>Additional reading for grads (optional for undergrads):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens” by Cathy Cohen (Canvas) <p>In class Thursday: Peer workshoping of Artifact Analysis Paper outline or rough draft</p>	<p>Short writing assignment 8 (on this week’s readings) due Tuesday</p> <p>Outline/rough draft for Artifact Analysis paper due Thursday</p>
10	March 24 & 26	<p>Part 4: ‘A Fraught Inheritance’</p> <p>Assigned reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “For Many Young Queer Women” by Christina Cauterucci <p>Tuesday, March 24: Class will meet at 2 pm in the Gold Auditorium (Shiley Bioscience Center) for a guest lecture by Mairead Sullivan; please see me for alternative assignment if you cannot meet at 2 pm</p>	
	March 31 & April 2	No class, spring break	
11	April 7 & 9	<p>IV. Lesbian and Queer Futures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pages 99-109 from <i>Queer A Graphic History</i> <p>In class films: <i>Born in Flames</i>, and <i>Criminal Queers</i></p>	<p>Artifact Analysis Paper due Tuesday</p> <p>Proposal for creative final project due on Thursday</p> <p>Short writing assignment 9 (on Mairead Sullivan’s lecture) due Tuesday</p>
12	April 14 & 16	<p>Assigned reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Life is Wonderful</i> by Meliza Bañales 	<p>Short writing assignment 10 (on <i>Born in Flames</i> and/or <i>Criminal Queers</i>) and short writing assignment 11 (on</p>

Week	Date	Topics and Assigned Readings	Deadlines & Assignments
		In class: guest lecture with Meliza Bañales	this week's readings) due Tuesday
13	April 21 & 23	No assigned reading Tuesday in class: Peer workshopping of Creative Final Project outline or draft No class Thursday, April 23. Instead attend part of the Gender and Social Justice Festival on Saturday, April 25, see me for alternative assignment if you cannot attend on Saturday	Outline or draft of creative final project due Tuesday Short writing assignment 12 (on guest lecture) due on Tuesday
14	April 28 & 30	Assigned reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Lesbian Avenger: A Handy Guide to Homemade Revolution" (Canvas) • "Gay Shame: is there room for direct action divas?" (Canvas) 	Short writing assignment 13 (on Gender and Social Justice Festival) and short writing assignment 14 (on this week's readings) due Tuesday
15	May 5 & 7	No assigned reading Extra Credit: Attend Professor Susan Cayleff's Final Lecture on Monday, May 4 Tuesday, May 5: Class will meet at 2 pm for Lavender Graduation. please see me for alternative assignment if you cannot meet at 2 pm. Thursday in class: 'Future Lives and Cultures' Creative Project Showcase – location TBD	Final creative project (plus written reflection) due on Thursday
Finals Week		Our class will not meet during finals week	