

Credits:

10 ECTS

Study Hours:

29 contact hours + 241 hours of independent study

Course Coordinator and Contact Information:

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Course Description

Sex, Media, and Culture, a core area course for doctoral candidates in Gender Studies at TemaG, offers students an intensive introduction to debates in contemporary sexuality studies as they intersect with media technologies and cultural formations. This PhD course will be held in person (with the option of hybrid attendance for students from other universities), and it combines foundational critical perspectives in media and cultural studies, alongside scholarship on sexuality as it is both lived and mediated through the body, technological apparatuses, institutions, and constellations of value and meaning.

While not attempting to address every single issue that arises where sex, media and culture overlap, the course will provide students with a strong set of critical and methodological tools that will enrich their researcher toolbox.

The course is divided into **three thematic blocks** of two days and it will run during the Spring term of 2024, and **assessment** will be comprised of a 7000–8000 word essay to be submitted no later than 3 months after the end of the course.

Introduction

Sex and sexualities are ubiquitous presences in contemporary media cultures and public discourse, from health panics surrounding the effects of easily-accessible online pornography, to ongoing (and age-old) moral panics about “good” sex and “bad” sex, fears of “sexualisation,” or the growing market for all kinds of sex technologies: porn, sex toys, sexual performance drugs (Viagra, Cialis, etc.), recreational drugs (GHB, methamphetamine, cathinones, etc.), online sex work (OnlyFans, JustForFans), dating and hook-up apps (Grindr, Tinder, Recon, Hinge, Scruff, etc.).

In this course, we will approach sex cultures as pillars of modern and contemporary forms of subjectivation, centring the role and affordances of different media in producing, disseminating, and sustaining different sex cultures and, thus, sexual subjects. Importantly, here, “media” does not only include artefacts more commonly associated with modern and contemporary mediascapes (e.g. film, print media, television, digital media, etc.), but is also extended to the material body itself as an enfolded interface of sensations and affects, desires, and identities. That is, the body as the medium that embodies, mediates and modulates relationships between the self and the world, the medium that bleeds the self into the world and the world into the self. Similarly, by “media” we will also mean the various technological prostheses that have played and

continue to play important roles in cultures of sex and processes of sexual subjectivation: prescription and recreational drugs, sex toys, cosmetic implants, pornography, and so on.

Sex, Media, and Culture will, therefore, navigate the complex political and ethical nature of our sex cultures: Sex cultures can and often do reproduce wider systems of knowledge, whether hegemonic or minoritised. Yet, they also can function as laboratories for experiments with new ways of relating to oneself and others, to interrogate the boundaries between the one and the many, and to embody ourselves differently, sometimes in more capacious ways with the potential to shape wider aspects of our lives and our being-in-the-world.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- 1) Contribute to existing public and scholarly debates in sexuality understood as a highly-mediated pillar of 21st-century lives and subjectivities.
- 2) Summarise and discuss core texts in sexuality studies, media studies, and cultural studies to a professional standard of rigour and critical analysis.
- 3) Reflect on particular aspects of mediated sex and sexuality as they relate to their own research projects.
- 4) Further develop their interdisciplinary skills as researchers in Gender Studies.

Expectations and Assessment

All students are expected to attend all seminar session unless in possession of a valid exemption.

Before each seminar, student are expected to carefully read every single text assigned for that session. While the list of required readings is long, and reading will be time-consuming, the various bodies of work we need to be familiar with in order to research the intersections of sex, media, and culture requires that students dedicate enough time to acquaint themselves with the texts. The lengthy reading list will also ensure that a baseline of relevant knowledge becomes shared by all members of the student cohort. **Ahead of each seminar, every student is expected to select one main idea from each text which they would like to present to the seminar for collective discussion.** Seminars will be focused on unpacking the ideas brought in by students, *not* on in-class close readings of texts—another reason why it is important that reading is done in advance by everyone.

At the end of the course (and no later than 3 months after the end of the course), students are expected to submit a **7000–8000 word essay** by email to the course coordinator, who will assess the work with either “pass” or “fail.” The essay should be an original piece of scholarly work in which the student draws from the course reading list and from further independent research in order to discuss a topic of their choice that relates or is relevant to their own individual doctoral research work. Suggestions of further reading can be provided by the course coordinator upon request. Assessed essays will be returned to the students within 3 months of submission. Students who fail are offered one re-examination occasion in close connection to the course. After that participation in a coming course examination is offered. The re-examination should be equally comprehensive as the ordinary examination.

Change of examiner

Students who have failed the course or part of the course twice are entitled to request another examiner for the following examination occasion.

Course Breakdown & Required Reading

BLOCK 1 - FOREPLAY

11 MARCH

Day 1: The Thing

11:00–12:00

Lecture

“Sexuality, Media and Culture: an Introduction”

13:00–17:00

Seminar 1

Required Reading

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “The Desiring-Machines,” from *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 1–50.

Elizabeth Grosz, “Nietzsche and the Choreography of Knowledge,” “The Body as Inscriptive Surface,” and “Intensities and Flows,” from *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 115–183.

Susanna Paasonen, “Magic Circles and Magical Circuits of Play,” from *Many Splendored Things: Thinking Sex and Play* (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2018), 17–43.

Strongly Recommended Reading

Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII*, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), 7–64.

Sigmund Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX*, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1961), 12–59.

Jacques Lacan, “The Deconstruction of the Drive,” “The Partial Drive and its Circuit,” and “From Love to Libido,” from *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981), 161–200.

12 MARCH

Day 2: The Frame

09:00–12:00

Seminar 2

Required Reading

Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (London: Routledge, 1980), 117–127.

Dick Hebdige, “From Culture to Hegemony,” from *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), 5–19.

Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” from *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), 31–49.

Strongly Recommended Reading

Guy Debord, “*Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 2005), 7–17 [paragraphs 1–37].

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94–136.

13:00–16:00

Seminar 3

Required Reading

Sarah Kemper and Joanna Zylińska, "Mediation and the Vitality of Media," from *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 1–28.

Strongly Recommended Reading

Mark B Hansen, "New Media," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 172–185.

Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," from *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 7–21.

WJT Mitchell, "There are no Visual Media," *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, No. 2 (2005): 257–266.

Susanna Paasonen, Ken Hillis, and Michael Petit, "Networks of Transmission: Intensity, Sensation, Value," in *Networked Affect*, edited by Ken Hillis, Susanna Paasonen, and Michael Petit (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 1–24.

BLOCK 2 - SEEING, TOUCHING, COMING

25 MARCH

Day 3: Skin, Flesh, Leather

09:00–12:00

Seminar 4

Required Reading

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, No. 2 (1998): 547–566.

Geoff Mains, "Anatomy of a Culture," from *Urban Aborigines: A Celebration of Leathersexuality* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1984), 13–41.

Geoff Mains, "The View from a Sling," in *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, edited by Mark Thompson (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991), 233–242.

Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," from *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 137–181.

Strongly Recommended Reading

Arnie Kantrowitz, "Swastika Toys," in *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, edited by Mark Thompson (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991), 193–209.

Jean-Luc Nancy and Adèle van Reeth, "Body of Pleasure," from *Coming* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 89–97.

Elizabeth Polvinelli, "The Intimate Event and Genealogical Society," from *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 175–236.

Gayle Rubin, "The Catacombs: A Temple of the Butthole," from *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 224–240.

13:00–16:00**Seminar 5**Required Reading

Susanna Paasonen, "Carnal Appeal," "Visual Pleasures: From Gaze to Grab and Resonance," and "The Tactile Grab of Online Pornography," from *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 1–30, 165–206, 251–262.

Susanna Paasonen, "Infrastructures of Intimacy," in *Mediated Intimacies*, ed. Rikke Andreassen, Michale Nebeling Petersen, Katherine Harrison, and Tobias Raun (London: Routledge, 2017), 103–116.

Strongly Recommended Reading

Brian McNair, "The Amazing Expanding Pornosphere," "Porno-Chic, or the pornographication of the mainstream," and "Striptease Culture: The Sexualization of the Public Sphere," from *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratisation of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2002), 35–108.

Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikunen and Laura Saarenmaa, "Pornification and the Education of Desire," from *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 1–20.

26 MARCH**Day 4: Data, Silicone, Microchips****09:00–12:00****Seminar 6**Required Reading

Paul Preciado, "Derrida's Scissors: The Logic of the Dildo," "Butler's Vibrator: A Brief Genealogy of Sex Toys and Sexual Prostheses," "Money Makes Sex: The Industrialization of the Sexes," and "Haraway's Prosthesis: Sex Technologies," from *Countersexual Manifesto* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 57–139.

Strongly Recommended Reading

Lynn Comella, "The Making of a Market," and "The Business of Masturbation," from *Vibrator Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 1–42.

Clarissa Smith, "Designed for Pleasure: Style, Indulgence and Accessorized Sex," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, No. 2 (2007): 167–84.

13:00–16:00**Seminar 7**Required Reading

Sadie Plant, "Hooked," "Runway," and "Passing," from *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and The New Technoculture* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), 182–184, 199–209, 2010–214.

Strongly Recommended Reading

Kate Devlin, "Been There, Done That," "Silicone Valleys," "It's All Academic," "Utopia/Dystopia," from *Turned On: Science, Sex and Robots* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 17–41, 135–162, 183–207, 209–244.

Shaka McGlotten, "The Virtual Life of Sex in Public," "Justin Fucks the Future," and "The Élan Vital of DIY Porn," from *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 17–38, 79–100, 101–122.

BLOCK 3 - LEAKING, CORRUPTING, UNDOING

8 APRIL

Day 5: Infection, Contagion, Immunity

13:00–16:00

Seminar 8

Required Reading

João Florêncio, "Viral Antiretroviral Bodies," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Queer Reading*, edited by Jeremy Chow and Declan Kavanagh (forthcoming 2024).

Jussi Parikka, "Body: Biopolitics of Digital Systems," from *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), 91–164.

Katrin Tiidenberg, "Sex, Power and Platform Governance," *Porn Studies* 8, No. 4 (2021): 381–393.

Strongly Recommended Reading

João Florêncio, "Introduction: Pig Masculinities," from *Bareback Porn, Porous Masculinities, Queer Futures: The Ethics of Becoming-Pig* (London: Routledge, 2020), 1–24.

Kait McKinney and Dylan Mulvin, "Bugs: Rethinking the History of Computing," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 12 (2019): 476–498.

Robert Payne, "Are We Sluts?", and "Virality Minus the Virus," from *The Promiscuity of Network Culture: Queer Theory and Digital Media* (London: Routledge, 2015), 1–40.

Kane Race, "Reluctant Objects: Sexual Pleasure as a Problem for HIV Biomedical Prevention," *GLQ* 22, No. 1 (2016): 1–31.

9 APRIL

Day 6: Transgression, Intoxication, Annihilation

13:00–16:00

Seminar 9

Required Reading

Elliot Evans, "'your blood dazzles m/e': Reading Blood, Sex, and Intimacy in Monique Wittig," in *Raw: PrEP, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Barebacking*, edited by Ricky Varghese (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2019), 91–114.

João Florêncio, "Chemsex Cultures: Subcultural Reproduction and Queer Survival," *Sexualities* 26, No. 5–6 (2023): 556–573.

Paul Preciado, "The Pharmacopornographic Era," from *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013), 23–54.

Strongly Recommended Reading

João Florêncio, "Drugs, Techno and the Ecstasy of Queer Bodies," *The Sociological Review Monographs* 71, No. 4 (2023): 861–880.

Kristian Møller, "Hanging, Blowing, Slamming and Playing: Erotic Control and Overflow in a Digital Chemsex Scene," *Sexualities* (2020): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720964100b>.

Kane Race, "Exceptional Sex: How Drugs Have Come to Mediated Sex in Gay Discourse," from *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 164–189.

Monique Wittig, excerpts from *The Lesbian Body* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1975).