

Ethics and Politics of Sex (YHU2269)

M R 18:00-19:30, Elm College Common Lounge

Instructor: Prof. Robin Zheng

Contact information

email: robin.zheng@yale-nus.edu.sg

website: on Canvas, via <http://yale-nus.instructure.com/>

office hours: M R 15:30-16:30 (Cendana RC3-02-05D)

to book an appointment, visit: <https://calendly.com/prof-zheng>

Please don't hesitate to contact me; I am here for you and happy to help however I can. However, note that I do **not** respond instantaneously to emails, especially on evenings and weekends, and I cannot guarantee meetings without *at least* 24 hours' advance notice, so make sure you allow plenty of time to get in touch.

Course description

In this course we consider the moral and political dimensions of sex by focusing on sex understood as individual and social practice. Are sexual preferences, fantasies, behaviors, and traditions morally criticizable at all? What about sexual industries and institutions? In what ways do our sexual practices impede or advance the struggle for social justice?

Course requirements

Attendance and participation	10%	
Discussion facilitation	10%	
Annotations/ after-hours contributions	10%	by noon before/ midnight after every class
First paper (5pp)	20%	11:59p, Sat. 3 Oct
Final paper (6-8pp)	25%	11:59p, Sat. 21 Nov
M(oral) history project	25%	(5% individual proposal due Thu. 17 Sep 20% group presentation in Week 13)

Readings

All texts should be read *in advance* of the lecture, and are available through E-Reserves on Canvas.

Unless otherwise marked, multiple readings listed on the same day are all required. **Optional** readings contain material directly related to course themes and class discussion, but may be skipped. (Discussion facilitators, however, are strongly encouraged to read them.) **Further reading** contains useful background information or more tangentially related content, and are provided for your reference.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is mandatory, because participating in discussion is a crucial part of your own and your classmates' learning. If you must miss class, please obtain an Assistant Dean's note or Medical Certificate to excuse your absence, and use the Buddy System to catch up on any material you miss. Note: An inordinate record of unexcused absences is enough reason to fail the class.

The participation grade will consist of your contributions to class discussion and (if relevant) your time spent in office hours. A steady record of high or low participation can make a difference when it comes to borderline grades.

Discussion Facilitation

Each of you will (in small teams) facilitate one class discussion. You are encouraged to organize the discussion however you think is most appropriate to the material, where that will typically include things like identifying the main arguments of the text, generating discussion questions, distributing handouts, making a presentation, designing individual and/or group exercises, or bringing in further materials (e.g. videos, articles) relevant for learning. Meeting with me beforehand to discuss your less plan is strongly encouraged, but not required.

Annotations & ‘After Hours’ Contributions

You will be asked to annotate the text as a group every week using Perusall (via Canvas). Annotations are due by **noon** before class.

Here are some potential ways you could annotate the text:

Mapping: Mark out the most important structural elements of the text (e.g. the main thesis of the whole paper, the main argument(s) in favor of some conclusion, the key premises of an argument, objections and replies), i.e. what it is *doing* with what it is *saying*.

Defining: Identify concepts that seem particularly important for the argument and come up with a working definition of what you think it means. Look up the definitions of words or references you don’t recognize.

Questioning: Ask a question about something in the text. Different types of questions include:

- ◇ clarificatory (e.g. What is an example of X? What does Philosopher mean when she says X?)
- ◇ extrapolative (e.g. How does this apply to X? What does this view on X tell us about Y?)
- ◇ critical (e.g. Is this really true? If so, why does it matter?).

Reacting: Highlight a claim, phrase, or passage in the text that struck you as being particularly significant and explain why you found it significant. (e.g. I found this surprising, counterintuitive, dubious, spurious, insightful, illuminating, provocative, compelling, etc. because...)

Criticizing: Pinpoint something you disagree with in the text and explain why. This could involve giving a counterexample, showing a conclusion doesn’t follow, or pointing out a false premise.

At the end of each class, make a follow-up post in the ‘After Hours’ discussion forum on Canvas. You can either:

- Offer additional thoughts on something that came up during the class discussion.
- Reflect on your planned contribution. Did it come up in the discussion, or did you make a different contribution instead? Did your confusion get cleared up, or your question(s) get answered? Did you draw any further connections to other readings or your own context?

Papers

First paper: 5-6 pp (1500-1800 words), due 11:59p, Saturday, 3 October

Final paper: 6-8 pp (1800-2000 words), due 11:59p, Saturday, 21 November

All papers should be submitted via Canvas. Do not put your name anywhere in the paper! Save the document using a title that includes your student ID and the number of the question you're answering. E.g. "63489001_Question5.docx". You do not need a cover page. Do not use any nonstandard fonts or formatting. Please number all your pages. **Please use at least 2.0 line spacing, i.e. double-space.**

Writing a good paper is in some ways like writing any other good paper, but there are certain standards and demands that are particular to philosophy. You are advised to read through this handout: <https://tinyurl.com/WritePhilPaper>. I will not read drafts of your papers, but I am happy to talk through outlines and ideas. To get feedback on drafts, you should ask your peers or make an appointment at the Writers' Centre: <https://writerscentre.yale-nus.edu.sg/>.

Note: Detailed instructions will be distributed closer to deadline.

M(oral) History Project

You will be asked to interview several persons in your community (broadly construed) about one of the topics discussed in the course, to present your interviewees' opinions in the context of the views we have studied, and to critically evaluate those opinions. Detailed instructions will be distributed closer to deadline.

Late Policy

You are expected to plan and manage your workloads, allowing sufficient time so that you do not lose work through IT malfunction or poor planning. Late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for the first 24 hours they are late (e.g., A- to B+), or by a whole letter grade (e.g., B to C) for submission any time later. Annotations and after-hours contributions will not be accepted late.

Classroom Climate, Access and Inclusion

Maintaining a respectful and inclusive classroom is a necessary condition for the co-creation of liberatory feminist knowledge that forms the subject of this course. Note that "inclusive" here alludes not only to the importance of bringing together a generally diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives, but also more specifically to redressing the historical injustice of groups who have been systemically excluded and marginalized. For this reason, it is particularly important to avoid racist, sexist, ableist or other discriminatory language in class discussions or written work – while recognizing compassionately that people may make mistakes or lack relevant background knowledge, and that language, concepts, and discourse are constantly evolving and always context-dependent.

If you have any physical, psychiatric, or learning conditions that may impact your performance in this course, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we may arrange for the appropriate

accommodations. If you observe any religious or cultural practices that may interfere with this course, please also let me know.

This is a check to see how carefully you have been reading the syllabus. If you see this, please post a cute animal photo somewhere in the “Syllabus” discussion forum, using the “Upload photo” function.

As the instructor, I take final responsibility for what happens in my classroom, so if you have suggestions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out. The College is committed to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment for all community members regardless of race, religion, nationality, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic class. If you or someone you know has been subject to bias, discrimination, sexual harassment, misconduct, or assault in or outside class, I encourage you to follow up with one or more of these authorities as appropriate: me (YHU2269), your faculty advisor, or your Assistant Dean.

Intellectual Property and Privacy

To help ensure that we may all freely engage in rigorous intellectual discussion and disagreement, you may not record and/or distribute course discussions, lectures, lecture slides or handouts, readings, videos, or other course-related materials without obtaining my permission. This includes audio recording, video, transcription, and photography. Lectures and seminars that are delivered in-person, online, or as a pre-recorded videos should never be recorded or distributed beyond the course for which it was intended.

Though you are encouraged to reflect upon and share their own learning experiences and ideas in whatever forum you wish, you should not share course content produced by myself or your peers (e.g. a peer’s essay, comments made in class, posts to a Canvas discussion thread) without prior permission. Violation of this policy is addressed in the Student Code of Conduct and could result in disciplinary and/or legal consequences.

Academic Integrity

I will hold you to the highest standards of academic integrity. The library provides examples, tip, and resources on plagiarism at <http://library.yale-nus.edu.sg/plagiarism/>. If I suspect any kind of academic dishonesty, I am required to report you to the Academic Disciplinary Committee. Any assignment on which that the Academic Disciplinary Committee judges that plagiarism has occurred will receive zero credit.

If you are in any way unclear as to what constitutes plagiarism, please come talk to me in advance. Ignorance or confusion will not be accepted as excuses for plagiarism or other academic misconduct.

Health and Wellness

If you are experiencing undue stress or feel you might benefit from private counseling, please contact the Yale-NUS Health and Wellness Center. You may also wish to reach out to your Assistant Dean or Residential Life Officers in your Residential College. For more information on this and other kinds of support, visit <https://studentlife.yale-nus.edu.sg/wellness/>.

Schedule of Readings

Week	Topic	Day	Text(s)
1	Sexual Preferences: Beauty	R	Ted Chiang, "Liking What You See," in <i>Stories of Your Life and Others</i> (New York: Vintage Books, 2016), 237-274. (Optional) Minerva, Francesca, "The Invisible Discrimination Before Our Eyes: A Bioethical Analysis." <i>Bioethics</i> 31, no. 3 (2017), 180-189. (Further reading) Naomi Wolf, "The Beauty Myth," in <i>The Beauty Myth</i> (New York: HarperCollins, 2002): 9-19.
2	Sexual Preferences: Race	M	Charles Mills, "Do Black Men Have a Moral Duty to Marry Black Women?" <i>Journal of Social Philosophy</i> 25.1 (June 1994): 131-153.
		R	Robin Zheng, "Why Yellow Fever Isn't Flattering: A Case Against Racial Fetish," <i>The Journal of the American Philosophical Association</i> , 2.3 (2016): 400-419.
3	Sexual Violence & Rape Culture	M	Angela Davis, "Violence Against Women and the Ongoing Challenge to Racism" and "JoAnne Little: The Dialectics of Rape," pp.138-160.
		R	Carol J. Adams, "I Just Raped My Wife! What Are You Going to Do About It, Pastor?": The Church and Sexual Violence," in <i>Transforming a Rape Culture</i> (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 1993): 57-86.
4	Sexual Consent	M	Robin West, "Consensual Sexual Dysphoria: A Challenge for Campus Life." <i>Journal of Legal Education</i> 66 (2016): 804. (Optional) "Cat Person," by Kristen Roupenian
		R	Celia Kitzinger, "Problematizing Pleasure: Radical Feminist Deconstructions of Sexuality and Power" in <i>Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice</i> (New York: SAGE, 1994): 194-209. bell hooks, "Seduced by Violence No More" in <i>Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations</i> (New York: Routledge, 1994): 109-113.
5	Pornography: Anti-porn Feminism	M	Catharine Mackinnon, "Francis Biddle's Sister: Pornography, Civil Rights, and Speech," in <i>Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law</i> (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 163-197.
		R	Rae Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts," <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i> 22, no. 4 (1993), 293-330.
6	Pornography: Feminist porn	M	Anne Eaton, "Feminist Pornography" in <i>Beyond Speech: Pornography and Analytic Feminist Philosophy</i> (New York: Oxford University Press): 243-258.
		R	<i>No Readings</i>
7	Pornography: New Directions	M	Mireille Miller-Young, "(Black) Porn Star" in <i>A Taste for Brown Sugar</i> (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014): 180-225.

		R	Amanda Cawston, "The Feminist Case Against Pornography: A Review and Re-evaluation," <i>Inquiry</i> 62, no. 6 (2019), 624-658.
8	Prostitution	M	Martha Nussbaum, "Whether from Reason or Prejudice": Taking Money for Bodily Services," <i>The Journal of Legal Studies</i> 27.2 (1998): 693-723. Optional: Lori Watson, "Why Sex Work Isn't Work," <i>Logos: A Journal of Modern Society & Culture</i> 13.3-4 (2014).
		R	Jennifer Chisholm, "Seduction as Power? Searching for Empowerment and Emancipation in Sex Work," <i>Wagadu: a Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies</i> 19 (2019), 32-56.
9	Sex and Gender	M	Kate Bornstein, "Naming All the Parts" in <i>Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us</i> (New York, Routledge, 1995): 21-40.
		R	John Stoltenberg, "How Men Have A Sex" in <i>Refusing to be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice</i> (London: UCL Press, 1989): 18-31.
10	Sex and the Body	M	Talia Mae Bettcher, "Appearance, Reality, and Gender Deception: Reflections on Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Pretence" in <i>Violence, Victims, Justifications: Philosophical Approaches</i> , ed. Felix Ó Murchadha (New York, Peter Lang, 2006): 175-200.
		R	Don Kulick and Jens Rydström, "Paying for Sex," in <i>Loneliness and Its Opposite: Sex, Disability, and the Ethics of Engagement</i> (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 174-216.
11	Disability & Asexuality	M	Alexa Schriempf, "(Re)fusing the Amputated Body: An Interactionist Bridge for Feminism and Disability," <i>Hypatia</i> 16.4 (2001): 53-79.
		R	Kristina Gupta, "Asexuality and Disability: Mutual Negation in <i>Adams vs. Rice</i> and New Directions for Coalition Building" in <i>Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives</i> (New York, Routledge, 2014): 551-586.
12	Sex and Politics	M	Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of Politics of Sexuality" in <i>Culture, Society, and Sexuality: A Reader</i> (London, UCL Press, 1999): 150-187.
		R	Inés Hernández-Avila, "In Praise of Insubordination, or, What Makes a Good Woman Go Bad" in <i>The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader</i> (New York, Routledge, 2006): 191-202. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" in <i>Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches</i> (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press): 53-59.
13	<i>No readings</i>		