

SEXUAL CULTURES OF 20TH-CENTURY BRAZIL

Course Syllabus

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Course Aims and Objectives

This course aims to provide a broad introduction to the diverse “sexual cultures” – that is, practices, identities, and communities linked to sexuality – which have inhabited 20th-century Brazil. Drawing from anthropological and historical texts, we will cover a range of sexual cultures (including Brazil’s emergent lesbian and gay communities, transgendered *travesti*, sex workers, and poor *favelado* communities), in each case examining configurations of identity, practice and desire. Although the focus will be on non-normative or “alternative” sexual cultures, we will nonetheless devote time to considering “mainstream” and “traditional” constructions of sexuality, particularly how conventional notions of gender (grounded in the distinction between masculine *activeness* and feminine *passivity*) have structured (and continue to structure) Brazil’s multifaceted sexual universe. While male perspectives have been disproportionately represented in the social science literature to date, we will strive throughout to consider implications for female sexuality and broader theorizations of gender.

We will consider a variety of influences in the ongoing reproduction of sexual cultures, including social movements (case study: the Women’s Movement), scientific discourses (case study: Brazil’s HIV/AIDS epidemic), regional identities (case study: the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul), mass media (case study: the mega-star Xuxa) and processes of globalization. As a counterpoint to the predominantly urban settings in which most of the sexual cultures we will examine exist, we will also consider the sexual world of an indigenous population in the Amazon. Our class will conclude with a detailed consideration of Brazilian *Carnaval*, bringing the analytical and ethnographic frameworks addressed in the course to bear on the complex interplay of practices, desires, and identities which occur in this well-known public ritual. Throughout the course, we will be attentive to the ways Brazilian sexualities have been exoticized – by academics, by foreigners, and by Brazilians themselves.

The material in this course addresses topics of a sensitive nature – sexual identities, sexual practices, and sexual desire. Though we will endeavor to examine Brazilian sexual cultures substantively, engaging our readings on their own terms, class discussions may nonetheless raise troubling issue. Accordingly, it will be important for all of us to be respectful of each others’ comfort level. By the same token, students are encouraged to frame course themes comparatively in relation to their own cultural backgrounds (U.S. or otherwise).

Course Logistics

Class Format. Students are expected to attend every class and to complete assigned readings *prior to class*. Students should come to class ready to discuss key themes and questions raised in each week’s readings. Classes will generally begin with a lecture from the instructor, followed by structured discussion with the entire class. These discussions will follow questions posted by

the instructor and by students each week on Learnlink. (Preliminary questions are included prior to each set of readings below.)

Grading. Your grade will be based on participation (40%) and written work (60%). “Participation” refers to attendance, preparedness, and participation in Learnlink and classroom discussions. For written work, students are responsible for three short (3-5 page) papers: a position paper and two “comparative analysis” papers (each worth 20%). In the position paper, you will compare and contrast two readings with respect to the notion of “sexual culture” (as explicitly stated or implicitly inferred) used in the description or analysis. In each of the two “comparative analysis” papers, you will compare and contrast two sexual cultures examined in the course with respect to configurations of (sexual) desire, identity, practice, community.

Readings

We will read several books in (or nearly in) their entirety (listed below). It is highly recommended that your purchase these books at the beginning of the semester. Other readings will be made available via Online Reserve at Woodruff Library.

1. Alvarez, Sonia E. 1990. *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
2. Green, James. 2000. *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3. Gregor, Thomas. 1985. *Anxious Pleasures: The Sexual Lives of an Amazonian People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
4. Kulick, Don. 1998. *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
5. Parker, Richard G. 1999. *Beneath the Equator: Cultures of Desire, Male Homosexuality, and Emerging Gay Communities in Brazil*. New York: Routledge.
6. Simpson, Amelia S. 1993. *Xuxa: The Mega-Marketing of Gender, Race, and Modernity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

WEEK 1: Traditional Constructions of Sexuality & Gender, Pt. 1: Public and Private

This week, we will examine the gendering and “sexing” of distinctions between public and private space. We will consider theoretical frameworks of Gilberto Freyre and Roberto DaMatta, and then apply these to three “cases” from the early 20th century.

Questions:

1. How do Freyre and DaMatta theorize the distinction between public and private?
2. For each, how do public/private distinctions map onto (or structure) constructions of sexuality or gender?
3. What are Caulfield and Green’s arguments regarding a) the *masculinization*, and b) the *sexualization* of public space?

Gilberto Freyre. 1963. *The Mansions and the Shanties*, pp. TBA.

Roberto DaMatta. 1987. *A Casa e a Rua* (The House and the Street). Rio de Janeiro: Editora Guanabara (in translation), pp. TBA.

Caulfield, Sueann. 2000. *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early-Twentieth-Century Brazil*. Durham: Duke University Press. Introduction and Chapter 2 (“National honor, the family, and the construction of the marvelous city”), pp. 1-5, 48-78.

Caulfield, Sueann. 1997. "The birth of mangue: race, nation, and the politics of prostitution in Rio de Janeiro, 1850-1942." Pp. 86-100 in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, edited by Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy. New York: New York University Press.

Green (2000) Introduction and Chapter 1 (“Pleasures in the parks of Rio de Janeiro during the Brazilian Belle Époque, 1898-1945), pp. 1-61.

WEEK 2: Traditional Constructions of Sexuality & Gender, Part II: *Atividade e Passividade*

This week’s readings address what has been referred to as the “traditional” construction of sexuality and gender in Brazil. This construction, rooted in the distinction between masculine *atividade* and feminine *passividade*, has clearly diversified in recent decades, but nonetheless appears to continue to exert a powerful influence within many sexual cultures. We will focus particularly on notions of masculinity constructed in opposition both to femininity and to homosexuality.

Questions:

1. How is the “traditional” construction of masculinity described by Parker different from dominant notions of male-ness in Western European and North American societies?
2. How might the *bicha* compare to the North American notion of the “faggot”?
3. Among the clients of the *travesti* described by Kulick, how does sexual identity relate to sexual practice and desire?
4. How does the assertion of sexual agency among the *faveladas* described by Gregg challenge or support Parker’s and Kulick’s arguments about sexuality and gender?

Richard Parker. 1999. "Within four walls: Brazilian sexual culture and HIV/AIDS." Pp. 253-266 in *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, edited by Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton. London: UCL Press.

Don Kulick (1998) Introduction and Chapter 3 (“A Man in the House”), pp. 1-18, 96-133.

Selections from dissertation by Jessica Gregg, “Virgens without Hymens: Constructions of Women’s Sexual Agency in Recife, Brazil.”¹

¹ Jessica Gregg finished her PhD in Emory’s Anthropology Dept. a couple years back. Basically, her work (undertaken in a *favela* in Recife) addressed how poor women both embrace (and therefore reproduce) the stereotypical notion of “potent” *brasileira* sexuality and challenge the hegemony of the honor-shame complex by consciously deciding to lose their virginity (as a strategy toward achieving greater freedom in their day-to-day lives.) Great stuff, by the way, and she’s got a book contract.

WEEK 3: Gay & Lesbian Communities, Part I: Dictatorship and Homophobia

This week's readings examine the emergence of an organized, urban lesbian and gay rights movement during the 1970s and 1980s. We are particularly interested in how the 1964-1985 military dictatorship both stifled and facilitated grassroots organization by sexual minorities, and how the infusion of human rights discourses has facilitated the emergence of a new language with which to describe non-normative sexualities.

1. According to Green, around which issues did gay organizations come into being in São Paulo during the 1970s and 1980s?
2. How have processes of "redemocratization" influenced (and been influenced by) lesbian and gay politics?
3. How do the forms of homophobia described in readings by Amnesty International and Mott compare with our perceptions of homophobia in the U.S.?

James Green (2000) Chapter 6 ("Down with repression: more love and more desire,' 1969-1980"), p. 242-278.

Edward MacRae. 1992. "Homosexual Identities in Transitional Brazilian Politics." Pp. 185-203 in *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America*, edited by Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Alvarez. Boulder: Westview Press.

Amnesty International. 1998. "Brazil Human Rights Defenders: Protecting Human Rights for Everyone." Pp. 34. New York, NY: Amnesty International.

Luiz Mott. 1995. "The Gay Movement and Human Rights in Brazil." Pp. 221-230 in *Latin American Homosexualities*, edited by Stephen O. Murray. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

WEEK 4: Gay & Lesbian Communities, Part II: Citizenship and Democracy

This week, we examine the formation and attributes of *comunidades gais* ("gay communities") during the 1990s, and how these communities have related to broader political struggles. To this end, readings address the diversification of "traditional" constructions of gender and sexuality, the "queering" of urban space, and the "spread" of a reflexive "gay" identity.

1. According to Parker, in what ways has urban space been "sexualized" by gay men in Brazil's larger cities?
2. According to Klein, how have transvestite prostitutes brought attention to questions of citizenship?

Richard Parker (1999) Introduction and Chapter 3 ("Contours of the Urban Gay World"), pp. 1-26, 53-97.

Charles Klein. 1999. "'The ghetto is over, darling': Emerging gay communities and gender and sexual politics in contemporary Brazil." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 1:239-260.

Rosalind Petchesky. 2000. "Sexual rights: inventing a concept, mapping an international practice." Pp. 81-103 in *Framing the Sexual Subject: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Power*, edited by Richard Parker, Regina Maria Barbosa, and Peter Aggleton. Berkeley: University of California Press.

WEEK 5: HIV/AIDS

This week, we will consider the relationship between Brazil's HIV/AIDS epidemic and the formation of gay communities. Specifically, we are interested in how public health strategies to prevent HIV transmission among "homosexual men" both succeed and fail to take into account local, traditional constructions of sexuality and gender.

1. According to Daniel and Parker, what were some of the problems with early HIV prevention efforts in Brazil?
2. According to Larvie, how has HIV prevention "produced" a gay community?

Herbert Daniel and Richard G. Parker. 1993. *Sexuality, Politics, and AIDS in Brazil: In Another World?* London Washington, DC: Falmer Press, selections TBA.

Veriano Terto Jr. 1999. "Seropositivity, Homosexuality and Identity Politics in Brazil." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 1:329-346.

Sean Patrick Larvie. 1999. "Queerness and the Specter of Brazilian Ruin." *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 5:527-558.

WEEK 6: The Gendering of Regional Identities: The Case of Rio Grande do Sul

This week, we consider the masculinization of regional identity in Brazil's southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul, attending to implications for grassroots political strategizing by sexual minorities.

1. According to Oliven, what does "gaúcho" signify in contemporary society? How is the concept used?
2. According to Leal, how does *gauchismo* relegate women to the domestic sphere?
3. What is the relevance of *gauchismo*'s gendered attributes for a consideration of sexuality?

Ruben Oliven. 1992. *Tradition Matters: Modern Gaúcho Identity in Brazil*. New York: Columbia University Press. Chapters 4 ("In search or a lost time: the Gaúcho traditionalist movement") and 5 ("The social construction of the Gaúcho identity"), pp. 53-112.

Ondina Fachel Leal. 1989. "The Gauchos: male culture and identity in the Pampas." (PhD dissertation) Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley. Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5.

WEEK 7: The Women's Movement

This week's reading (the majority of Alvarez's book) profiles the grassroots and political mobilization of a large-scale women's movement in Brazil during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Our interest will be to profile the ways this movement has challenged traditional constructions of

gender and sexuality through engagement with the state (both during the military regime and since the return to democratic rule).

1. Around which issues did the women's movement come into being?
2. In which ways has the women's movement envisioned social transformation?
3. How has lesbian sexuality emerged (or not emerged) in the context of the Brazilian women's movement?

Sonia Alvarez (1990) Chapters 1, 2, 5-7, 10, 11.

WEEK 8: Indigenous Sexualities

This week, we consider the sexual lives of the Mehinaku, an indigenous population of the Amazon rainforest. Gregor's classic ethnography examines the range of sexual practices among the Mehinaku and attempts to theorize (drawing from psychoanalysis) the origins and dynamics of these practices. Our task will be to understand Gregor's description and his argument, and to put both as a counterpoint to our prior examinations of sexual cultures in urban settings. This will also be an opportunity to discuss the risks of exoticizing when describing sexuality in "faraway places."

1. Does Gregor "exoticize" the sexuality of the Mehinaku?
2. How does the Mehinaku construction of gender and sexuality differ from the traditional urban construction described by Parker, especially with respect to the relationship between sexual practice, desire and identity?

Thomas Gregor (1985) All.

WEEK 9: Globalization and the Translocal

This week, we return to the cities to consider how processes of globalization and "translocal" experiences have shaped and re-shaped sexual cultures. Focusing on migration (both intra- and inter-national), sex tourism, and transnational social movements, we will consider ongoing diversification of both lesbian/gay cultures and complex intermingling between discourses of "tradition" and "modernity."

1. What sorts of "globalization" does Parker address?
2. Which lines of causal influence can be inferred from Parker's analysis? How does he theorize the interplay between local and global discourses of sexuality?
3. Alvarez describes ways in which the Brazilian women's movement's has become connected to a transnational, "global" struggle for women's rights. What are the implications of this "transnationalization" for the future of the "traditional" construction of gender and sexuality in Brazil?
4. How has globalization benefited or harmed cultures oriented around non-normative sexuality and/or challenged dominant, society-wide constructions?

Richard Parker (1999) Chapters 5-7 ("Tale of Two Cities," "Changing Places," and "Globalization, Sexuality, and Identity"), pp. 125-231.

Sonia Alvarez. 1998. "Latin American feminisms "go global": trends of the 1990s and challenges for the new millennium." Pp. 293-324 in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements*, edited by Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

WEEK 10: Race, Gender & Sexuality

This week, we focus on intersections of constructions of race and sexuality, drawing from two examples. First, we will consider the case of Xuxa, the mega-star whose popular television show both "sexualizes race" and "racializes sex" in complex and troubling ways. Next, we will consider the association between male homosexuality and the Afro-Brazilian set of religious practices known as *Candomblé*.

1. In what ways does Xuxa support and challenge traditional understandings of sexuality and gender?
2. What is the significance of Xuxa's skin color?
3. How does Simpson explain how an ex-Playboy model could become a successful television host for children?
4. According to Fry, why might gay-identified men be attracted to *Candomblé*?

Amelia Simpson (1993) All.

Peter Fry. 1985. "Male homosexuality and spirit possession in Brazil." *Journal of Homosexuality* 11:137-53.

WEEK 11: Transgendered Sexualities

This week, we consider a recognized category of sexuality and gender which *appears* to challenge the "traditional" distinction between male/active and female/passive: the *travesti*. We will delve deeply into Kulick's study of transvestite prostitutes in Salvador to consider the relationship between sexual identity, desire and practice. We will also examine the extent to which traditional gender constructions structure the sexual world of the *travesti*. In this reading, methodological and ethical issues surrounding ethnographic representation (e.g., use of photographs) will be considered in depth.

1. How do *travesti*'s sexual relationships with their clients differ from those with their boyfriends? Why is this significant?
2. What sort of "transgendered subjectivity" does Kulick postulate for the *travesti*?
3. For the *travesti*, what is the relationship between transformation of the physical body and self-identity?
4. How does *travesti* sexuality and gender inform our understanding of "mainstream" constructions of heteronormativity?

Don Kulick (1998) Chapters 1, 2, and 5.

WEEK 12: Sex Work

This week, we consider aspects of male sex work in the ongoing production of categories of sexuality and gender. This will include both the *michê* (the hyper-masculine "stud") and the

feminized *travesti*. We will also consider the ways that the HIV/AIDS epidemics in Brazil have re-shaped the world of sex work in urban settings.

1. How does the distinction between *michê* and *travesti* reinscribe and challenge traditional gender categories?
2. How has the HIV/AIDS epidemic re-shaped identity and sexual practice among male sex workers?

Patrick Larvie. 1999. "Natural born targets: male hustlers and AIDS prevention in urban Brazil." in Aggleton, Peter (Ed.), *Men Who Sell Sex: International Perspectives on Male Prostitution and HIV/AIDS*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 159-178.

Don Kulick (1998) Chapter 4 ("The pleasure of prostitution"), pp. 134-190.

WEEK 13: *Carnaval*

In this final week, we will consider the well-known public ritual, *Carnaval*, during which a series of notorious inversions occur: poor people dress like rich people; men dress like women; white people "blacken up," etc. Our aim is to bring the insights of the ethnographies and analytic frameworks covered thus far in the course to examine and explain the sexual cultures and categories of sexuality and gender at play in the context of *Carnaval*.

1. How does Parker theorize the "inversion" that occurs in the context of *Carnaval*?
2. According to DaMatta, what are the key differences between Brazilian *Carnaval* and Mardi Gras in New Orleans?
3. What is Green's argument about the appropriation of Brazilian *Carnaval* in recent decades?

James Green (2000) Chapter 5 ("The homosexual appropriation of Rio's carnival"), pp. 199-241.

Richard G. Parker. 1991. *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil*. Boston: Beacon Press. Chapters 5 ("Bodies and pleasures"), 6 ("The carnivalization of the world"), and Conclusion, pp. 98-164.

Roberto DaMatta. 1991. *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. Chapters 2 ("The many levels of carnival") and 3 ("Carnival in Rio and Mardi Gras in New Orleans: a contrastive study"), pp. 61-115.