Course title: Gender and Sexuality in Russia
Course code: GEND 3001 RASP
Programs offering course: Russian Area Studies
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Spring 2021

Course Description

This course gives students an overview of the major issues related to gender and sexuality in Russian society: social constructions of masculinity and femininity, sexual and gender variance, family, reproduction, women's agency and women's movements. The course takes an interdisciplinary approach to the subject, as it employs historic and social analysis, and it also explores different media, through which gender and sexuality in Russian culture are shaped and articulated. The course will follow a chronological order with emphasis on the following time-periods: Middle Ages, the Petrine reforms, the post-Petrine, ‘modern’ phase of Russian history, the state socialism, and post-socialist Russia. The course's readings comprise texts written by historians and social scientists, as well as literary fiction, memoirs, autobiographies and visual texts. Artistic works serve not as illustrations of some historic truths, but as ways to contest and complicate the understanding of gender and sexuality constructs under the changing regimes of power.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- differentiate between the constructivist and the essentialists approaches to gender and sexuality;
- examine various configurations of gender and sexuality in Russian culture, from the medieval to modern times;
- examine and categorize gender, queer and transgender identities and the way they intersect with the notions of class, citizenship and nationhood in Russia;
- develop the skills of gender-sensitive reading of literary, film and visual texts.

Course Prerequisites

None

Methods of Instruction

Course material will be presented through the combination of lectures and discussions. It is important that students come to class having prepared home assignments and ready to offer thoughtful responses to the assigned texts. Each student will be asked to conduct an oral presentation on the topic of her/his choice during one of the final class meetings.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Paper 25%
2. Oral Presentation 20%
3. Midterm Test 20%
4. Final Test 20%
5. Class Participation 15%
TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

Paper

Students chose the topic for their presentation and paper based on their own interests and then discuss it with the instructor for final approval. The topic should relate to the class material and could be based on a text, film,
theoretical concept, or author covered in the course. You could base your presentation and your paper on what anthropologist call “direct observation technique,” i.e. on your first-hand experience of living in Russia. You can discuss such diverse phenomena as social activism, street fashion, visual representations of gender in popular culture or mainstream media, etc. Alternatively, you can base your research on secondary sources and provide an in-depth account of a particular historic or cultural topic.

Your paper should be 7-10 page long, double-spaced between lines along with 1” margin on all sides and it should use 12-point Times New Roman font.

Oral Presentation

Before submitting the paper to the instructor, each student will give an oral presentation on the chosen topic, as a way to share her/his findings with the rest of the class and receiving feedback from peers and the instructor. Your presentation should last 15 minutes. Supporting visuals in the form of handouts, PowerPoint or other forms are welcome.

Midterm Test

Final Test

Two tests will be given during the semester, which will assess your knowledge of course concepts, theories and facts, and they will be a combination of multiple-choice questions and several open questions. Each test will take approximately 45 minutes to write.

Class Participation

Students are expected to complete all reading or viewing assignments before each class meeting and to come to class prepared to debate issues brought up by the readings, films or visual texts.

Attendance

Attendance is crucial for successful completion of the class. Students are allowed to have two unexcused absences for each course for the whole semester program. These allowed unexcused absences should be used for situations such as minor illnesses without a doctor’s note or personal situations that prevent the student from attending the class. Allowed unexcused absences should not be used in a planned way for travel or other activities. Unexcused absences beyond the limit of two will lower a student’s grade by 2 points on the 100-point scale each. For example, if your overall score in the class is 90 (an equivalent of A-) and you have had three unexcused absences, your final score will be 88 (B+).

N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class:

Introduction to the course. Theorizing sex, gender and sexuality: existentialism vs. social constructionism

Reading:


Judith Butler, “Gender as Performance,” pp. 109-125

Masculine and feminine images in Russian folklore

Reading: Joanna Hubbs, Mother Russia, pp. 24-51

Week 2

Class:

Gender and family order in pre-Petrine Russia
Week 3
Class:

The ‘woman question’ in nineteenth-century Russia
Reading: Richard Stites, The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia, pp. 3-37; 89-99

Russian urbanization and shifting patterns of family life

Week 4
Class:

Gender bending, sexual transgressions in nineteenth-century Russia
Reading: Nadezhda Durova, The Cavalry Maiden: Journals of a Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars, pp. 3-34;

Gender politics and state socialism: the new Soviet man and woman
Reading: Elizabeth Wood, The Baba and the Comrade: Gender Politics in Revolutionary Russia, pp. 1-12; 68-98.

Week 5
Class:

Sexual revolution of the 1920s
Naiman, Eric, Sex in Public, pp. 45-56; 148-180

Marriage and family life in the era of NEP
Assignment: watch Bed and Sofa (1927), dir. Abram Room
Reading: Wendy Z. Goldman, Women, the state, and revolution Soviet family policy and social life, 1917-1936, pp. 113-142.

Week 6
Class:

Soviet masculinity in the making
Assignment: watch Sickle and Hammer (1994), dir. Sergey Livnev
Isaac Babel, “My first goose,” “Salt,” Sashka Christ,” The Life Story of Pavlichenko”
Women and war
Handouts: Soviet posters from the time of World War II, 1941-1945
Your paper and presentation topic is due

Week 7
Class:

Parameters of gender contract during the “Thaw”
Reading: Melanie Ilič, Women in the Khrushchev Era, pp. 5-28; 149-176
Natalia Baranskaia, A week like any other: novellas Site visit: The State Russian Museum, collections of Russian avant-garde art and socialist realism. Topic: visual representation of gender in the 1920s and the 1930s

Week 8
Class:

Women writing their lives: Perestroika and women’s prose
Olga Kuzmina, Women writing, in Russian Life (Summer 2013)
The collapse of socialism and the revision of gender order
Marina Palei, “Cabiria from the Bypass Canal,” in Russian Life (Summer 2013), pp. 61-80.
Midterm test

Week 9
Class:

Female subjectivity in film and visual arts. Russian women artists
Reading: Margarita Tupitsyn, “Unveiling Feminism: Women’s Art in the Soviet Union,” in Arts Magazine (December 1990), 63-37
Female subjectivity in film and visual arts. Women film directors.
Assignment: watch Travelling with Pets (dir. Vera Storozheva, 2007).
Student presentations

Week 10
Class:

Bodies and sexuality
Elena Omelchenko, “‘My body, my friend?’ Provincial youth between the sexual and the gender revolutions,” pp 137-168.
Intersectionality: gender, ethnicity, class


Student presentations

Week 11

Sexuality, nationhood, citizenship


Site visit: Crisis Center for women

Your paper is due

Week 12

Gendered subjectivity and activism


Lova V. Why Russian women don’t need western-style feminism https://www.rbth.com/lifestyle/327529- russian-women-dontneed-feminism

Concluding discussion: What comes next? Post-socialist gendered identities and formations

Final test

Course Materials

Readings


Durova Nadezhda, The Cavalry Maiden: Journals of a Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988

Engel, Barbara A., Between the fields and the city: women, work, and family in Russia, 1861-1914. Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994


Hubbs, Joanna, Mother Russia: the feminine myth in Russian culture. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988


Levin, Eve, Natalia Pushkareva, Women in Russian History: From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997


Naiman, Eric, Sex in public: the incarnation of early Soviet ideology


Online Resources

http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/_generate/RUSSIA.html

