

Transfeminist & Queer Asian America

Instructor: Amir Aziz

Level: 3-credit undergraduate/graduate seminar; meets twice a week

Targeted enrollment size: 20-30 students

Keywords: Ethnic Studies; Asian American Studies; Transgender & Queer Studies; Gender & Women's Studies; Cultural Studies

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the myriad ways in which queer, transgender, femme, feminist, gender non-conforming, and gender non-normative Asian Americans have understood, negotiated, and navigated complex issues of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, diaspora, and belonging in the contemporary United States. In particular, this course examines how Asian American transfeminist and queer cultures, politics, and mobilizations challenge systems of racialized/gendered/ableist domination and oppression, by examining a variety of novels, poetry, performance, art, film, and other creative mediums.

Rather than attempting to locate an essentialist trans/queer Asian American identity, this course aims to emphasize the diversified breadth of transgender, queer, and feminist Asian America beyond cultural stereotypes and presumptions as well as challenge colonial and imperial frameworks of sex, gender, and sexuality. Among the questions we will ask are: How can trans and queer life and culture open up new possibilities for engaging with Asian American Studies as both scholarly field and activist praxis? How have works by transgender, queer, and feminist Asian Americans challenged us to rethink some of our most deeply-held assumptions about gender, sexuality, sex, race, ethnicity, and the body?

This course also places particular emphasis on the roles of social media, digitization, and technology in bringing to life the contours of a queer and transfeminist Asian America. With the digitization of everyday life, where increasingly everything must be rendered visible online in order to be 'real,' we have to ask new questions about forms of being that are being produced by the interaction of the digital and the non-digital.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand and learn how to incorporate feminist, queer, anti-racist, and decolonial approaches to the construction of Asian American and transfeminist/queer cultural formations and subjectivities.
2. Identity, recognize, and analyze the formation and reproduction of social, economic, and political hierarchies grounded in ethnicity, race, sex, gender, ability, and sexuality. Through their studies in transfeminist, queer, and decolonial scholarship, students develop the capacity to interrogate cultural stereotypes and naturalizations of hierarchies of differences relevant to Asian Americans.
3. Acknowledge the complexity of gendered, sexed, and racialized experiences in a transnational frame and analyze both micro and macro distributions of power.
4. Recognize how transfeminist and queer cultures, politics, and mobilizations have shifted and changed the terms, understandings, and terrains of Asian American subjectivities and scholarship.

COURSE ASSESSMENT

Class Participation (20%): Each student is expected to complete the assigned reading for each course and actively participate in class discussion. Students should come to class with 2-3 questions about the readings for class discussion. Participation is measured through your active engagement during class time. This means offering your thoughts about course material during discussions, attentively listening to your classmates while they are speaking, and responding to them. Students are required to bring assigned readings with them to class. All course materials are provided online.

Class Presentation (20%): Each student is expected to serve as a discussant during the semester on one or more of the sources of a particular week. Students do not need to prepare PowerPoint presentations. They simply need to talk about: a) core arguments of selected material; b) analysis of how material relates to the themes of the course; and c) several brief, thought-provoking questions to encourage discussion. The discussant role should last for about 10 minutes. The discussant role is where you elaborate your thoughts, pose questions, and interact with classmates. There is no right or wrong method to carrying out the role of discussant. On the day of the presentation the student is required to submit one response paper.

Response Papers (30%) By the end of the course students are required to submit three 3-page response paper (doubles-spaced) on the readings assigned for a class (this includes the one response paper for the class presentation day). Students cannot write more than one response paper for the material for one class session – the three papers must be from different class sessions. Students can opt to write about one text, or can discuss several together. Students must email this response paper before the start of class. This response paper should include: a summary of the text and an analysis of the text considering course themes.

Creative Project (30%): Students will be required to produce a creative project. The project may take any creative form, such as zines, visual art, and online media, or explore the roots of a particular social justice practice that disrupts dominant modes of representation about trans/queer Asian Americans. You may draw upon your own focus or background in specific fields of practice, or explore your commitment to an issue relevant to Asian American Studies. You may work individually or in groups of up to 3 individuals. Collaboration between students is encouraged. Here are guidelines and due dates to keep in mind:

1. **1-2 page written proposal:** Students will be required to write up a short proposal of 1-2 pages due at the middle of the semester describing your creative project, its intended goals, and main arguments/contributions made. Proposals should be printed and submitted in class on the day of the deadline. Students are encouraged to schedule office hours with me in advance to strategize and discuss your proposal to ensure effectiveness and relative ease in conveying your ideas.
2. **Presentation of creative project:** Students will present their creative project in class in the final two weeks of the semester. Though you are free to pursue a topic drawn from outside the class material, your project should adhere, in some form, to the overall theme of transfeminist and queer issues in Asian America. Your project should also convey a clear intended goal, an organized argument, and active engagement with class material. I strongly suggest, then, that you keep on the lookout, throughout the class, for a topic that will lend itself well to strong engagement. I have chosen this creative project assignment to give each of you the opportunity to share the sum of your semester with your peers (rather than with one reader). Beyond the scope of this semester, I have designed this assignment in hopes of providing you with a viable topic that you can pursue beyond class—be it for your senior thesis, other academic projects, or relevant social endeavors.

GENDER, QUEER & TRANS-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

Just as misogynist language excludes women’s experiences, non-gender-inclusive language excludes the experiences of transgender, intersex, gender non-binary, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming individuals, language should be gender- and sex-inclusive when we use words that recognize and affirm how people describe, express, and experience their gender, sex, sexuality, and embodied identities.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTIONS

SESSION 1: Introductions and Course Expectations

SESSION 2: GENDER & SEXUAL POLITICS

- Rosalind Chou, “Why Asian American Sexual Politics?” in *Asian American Sexual Politics: The Construction of Race, Gender, and Sexuality*
- Sean Metzger and Gina Masquesmay, “Embodying Asian/American Sexualities”

WEEK 2 – IDENTITIES AND CULTURES

SESSION 3: CULTURE

- Leti Volpp, “Blaming Culture for Bad Behavior”
- Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*
- Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “From Eurocentrism to Polycentrism” in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*

SESSION 4: RACIALIZATION

- Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “The Theory of Racial Formation,” in *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*
- Lisa Lowe, “Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique” in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*

WEEK 3 – HISTORY, REPRESENTATION, DIFFERENCE

SESSION 5: QUEER HISTORIES

- Amy Sueyoshi, “Queer Asian American Historiography” in *Oxford Handbook of Asian American History*
- Nayan Shah, “Perversity, Contamination, and the Dangers of Queer Domesticity” in *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown*

SESSION 6: SETTLER HISTORIES

- Adria Lyn Imada, “Hawaiians on Tour: Hula Circuits Through the American Empire”
- Davianna McGregor, “Constructed Images of Native Hawaiian Women”

WEEK 4 – LABOR OF LOVE

SESSION 7: CAPITALISM & GENDER

- Yen Le Espiritu, “Labor, Laws, and Love” in *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, and Love*
- erin Khuê Ninh, “Without Enhancement: Sexual Violence in the Everyday Lives of Asian American Women” in *Asian American Feminisms and Women of Color Politics*

SESSION 8: CARE WORK

- Kristina Wong, *The Auntie Sewing Squad: Guide to Mask-Making, Radical Care, and Racial Justice*
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, “Crippling the Apocalypse: Some of My Wild Disability Justice Dreams” in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*

WEEK 5 - GAZE

SESSION 9: LOOKING

- Dorothy Kim & Treeandrea M. Russworm, “Race, Gender, and the Technological Turn: A Roundtable on Digitizing Revolution”
- Kiyomi Kutsuzawa, “Disney's *Pocahontas*: Reproduction of Gender, Orientalism, and the Strategic Construction of Racial Harmony in the Disney Empire”

SESSION 10: LOOKING OTHERWISE

- bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*
- Rosalind S. Chou, “Making Good Sons and Daughters”

WEEK 6 – IT’S ALL ABOUT (ME)ME

SESSION 11: ME(ME) CULTURE AND MASS CONSUMPTION

- madison moore, *Fabulous: Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric*
- Lev Manovich, “The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production”

SESSION 12: DECODING ME(ME) CULTURE

- Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*
- Kai Cheng Thom, *I Hope We Choose Love: A Trans Girl’s Notes from the End of the World*

WEEK 7 – FEM(ME) WORK

SESSION 13: AUNTOLOGY

- Kareem Khubchandani, “Critical Aunty Studies: An Aunroduction” & “Sari” music video by LaWhore Vagistan
- Michelle Jacob, *The Auntie Way: Stories Celebrating Kindness, Fierceness, and Creativity*

SESSION 14: WE ARE DIVINE

- Alok Vaid-Menon, *Femme In Public*
- Hieu Minh Nguyen, *This Way to the Sugar*
- Watch *Drag: Manghoe Lassi* (2019)

WEEK 8 – SPOTLIGHT

SESSION 15: GET ON THE DANCEFLOOR

- Kareem Khubchandani, “Sub-kulcha: The Meaning of Ishtyle” in *Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife*
- Bobby Benedicto, “The Specter of *Kabaklaan*” in *Under Bright Lights: Gay Manila and the Global Scene*

SESSION 16: WRITING DREAMS

- Alok Vaid-Menon, *Your Wound / My Garden*
- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*

WEEK 9 – GLOBAL TRANSFORMATIONS

SESSION 17: Brainstorming Session for Creative Project

SESSION 18: IMPERIALISM AND VIOLENCE

- Watch and discuss *Call Her Ganda* (2018) by PJ Raval

WEEK 10 – BROWN / QUEER / EXTRAORDINARY

SESSION 19: BURNING

- Watch *Brown Girls* (2017) web-series created by Fatimah Asghar
- *Archive of Queer Brown Feelings*, curated by Mustafa Saifuddin for the South Asian American Digital Archive (<https://www.saada.org/qbf>)

SESSION 20: RAGING

- Fatimah Asghar, *If They Come for Us*
- Jhumpa Lahiri, “Sexy” in *The Interpreter of Maladies*
- Dena Igusti, *Cut Woman*

WEEK 11 – QUEER SPIRITUALITY

SESSION 21: SPIRIT

- Kazim Ali, *The Far Mosque*
- Fatimah Asghar and Safia Elhillo, *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 3: Halal If You Hear Me*
- Beyza Ozer, “Self-Care as a Queer Muslim in America”

SESSION 22: EPHEMERA

- Amir Rabiya, *Prayers for My 17th Chromosome*
- Franny Choi, *Floating, Brilliant, Gone*

WEEK 12 – CYBERFEMINISMS

SESSION 23: FEMINIST THEORY AND TECHNOLOGY

- Maria Fernandez, “Cyberfeminism, Racism, Embodiment”
- Judy Wajcman, “Introduction: Feminist Utopia or Dystopia” and “Metaphor and Materiality” in *Technofeminism*

SESSION 24: CYBERFEMINISMS AND RACE

- Radhika Gajjala and Annapurna Mamidipudi, “Cyberfeminism, technology, and international development”
- June Kuoch and Allegro Wang, “Cyber Fantasies: Rina Sawayama, Asian Feminism, and Techno Orientalism in the Age of Neoliberalism”

WEEK 13 – GRASSROOTS / NETROOTS

SESSION 25: TRANSNATIONAL CULTURES

- Jian Neo Chen, “#BlackLivesMatter and the State of Asian/America”
- Hung Cam Thai, “Chasing the Dream: Highly Educated Overseas Brides and Low Wage U.S. Husbands”

SESSION 26: TRANSFEMINISM AND DIGITAL MEDIA

- Emi Koyama, “The Transfeminist Manifesto”
- Kazim Ali, *Sky Ward*
- Alok Vaid-Menon, “On the Other Side of Shame (Body Hair Is Beautiful),” “Strangers are Potential Friends” and “we remain incorrigible”

WEEKS 14-15: Presentation of Creative Projects