COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to some of the key concerns at the intersection of gender studies and urban studies. While there is a plethora of literature that is concerned with thinking about cities and urban spaces through the lens of social inequality, this field has focused primarily on relations and inequalities of class and race. Sex and gender, on the other hand, has remained at its margins. In this course, we will take gender relations and sexuality as our primary concern and as a constitutive aspect of social relations that vitally shape cities and urban life. We will examine how gender is inscribed in city landscapes, how it is lived and embodied in relation to race, class, and sexuality, and how it is (re)produced through violence, inequality, and resistance. Over the course of the quarter, we will draw on an interdisciplinary scholarship that approaches the central question of how and why thinking about urban life in relation to gender and sex matters. In the process, we will be drawing not just from interdisciplinary scholarship but also work that brings into our analytic attention international experiences. Key topics we will address include concepts of public/private spheres; politics of respectability; sexual violence and public spaces; pleasure and sex in the city.

The goal of the course is not to get to know everything there is to know about gender and sexuality in urban spaces, but to be provoked into thinking about the possibilities of thinking about the city through one’s own body.

Media platforms needed for this course:

1. Canvas (everyone has access to it)
2. Zoom (you don’t need an account; I’ll send you an invite before every class)
3. Netflix and YouTube (if you don’t have access to the former or an account, let me know)
4. Any audio player, maybe a set of earphones? (to listen to audio lectures)

All Times mentioned henceforth are Central Time/Chicago Time. Please calculate accordingly, in case you are elsewhere.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion posts</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>60%</td>
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ORIGINAL SCHEDULE
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:40pm to 4pm.

MODIFIED SCHEDULE (Very important; please read)

FIRST CLASS:

We will meet, as planned, on September 28 (TUESDAY) at 2:40pm. Try to join the Zoom meeting. I want to use the first meeting to say hello to you all and introduce the course and its objectives. There is one reading for the day, please browse it at the very least. I also want to take this time to discuss our mutual expectations and collective goals. In social distance, perhaps, a reminder of institutional solidarity. I’ll send a Zoom invite a by September 27th. Keep an eye out.

REST OF QUARTER:

Discussions

We will be discussing the readings in two different ways:

Canvas Posts (I know you hate it, but bear with me)

I want you to pick two readings in the entire week’s offerings and write a 200-word (at least) discussion post about the two. Summarize the readings and offer your own thoughts. I will open up the Discussion section on Canvas by Week One. This discussion post is due by Thursdays noon. You can comment on each other’s posts, if you want to. It will make it more recursive and fun, but no obligations. By the end of nine weeks, I want you all to have written at least 6 such posts. This means you can skip 3 weeks. I would not want you to, but life is hard… and I get it. These will technically contribute to 25% of the grade.

Zoom Discussions

Barring the first day (September 28) of general introductions and camaraderie-making, every Tuesday and Thursday, we will have a Zoom-based discussion of the readings. Since we are 25 of us and such a large group can hardly make for great discussions, I will be splitting the class into two groups. Group 1 will meet between 2:40pm-3:15pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, whereas Group 2 will meet at 3:20pm-3:55pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. So, essentially, the 1hr 20 mins of the class time will be split into 2 chunks of 35 mins each – and, so, you will only be attending a short session every Tue and Thurs. This should, ideally, make you happy! 😊 As with the Zoom format, I will send you the meeting ID a few minutes before the 1:30pm (CDT) slot. I am not demonic about attendance, to be honest, but I do encourage it. I am technically grading attendance for 15% - but these are strange times and if you just can’t deal with class, let me know and we can try and find an alternative.
Audio Lectures

Every Tuesday and Thursday by midnight, I’ll put up a 20-min audio recording outlining Tuesday’s reading material and summarizing what I think are key points. Think of it like a post-discussion “recap”. This will help cover points that we cannot cover in class due to the paucity of time. It will help tie up loose ends. This does not mean that you don’t read the readings, but that I think it will be great if you could treat this as some kind of an orientation to the material. You will find it under “Files” on Canvas. You can listen to it during the canonical time – or whenever you have a chance. Think of it, if you will, like a podcast! Listening to these is not mandatory – there is no way I can enforce this – but it is just to help you understand the material better.

Assignments

I will give four assignments in total BUT here is the deal:

- If you do 3 out of 4 assignments, I will grade each assignment as 20% of the total grade.
- If you do 4 out of 4 assignments, I will grade each assignment as 15% of the total grade.

So, pick depending on how many deadlines you think you can manage.

The assignments are not based on any specific readings – because the discussion posts are geared towards the content of the readings – but are activities that are inspired by us collectively thinking about sex and gender in the city. They are designed to make you think independently of the readings. I am trying to make these assignments as fun as possible. As with anything, if you have any issue with any assignment, let me know. We will figure out a suitable alternative for you.

I will release details of each assignment as per the schedule, but here is a teaser & I will explain more in our first meeting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date available (on Canvas)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reflections</td>
<td>October 2</td>
<td>October 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban policy Case Study</td>
<td>October 22</td>
<td>November 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Culture Analysis</td>
<td>November 10</td>
<td>November 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Design OR Short Story</td>
<td>November 29</td>
<td>December 10</td>
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Classroom Policies

- **Content:** This course addresses topics that some people may find sensitive or uncomfortable, such as self-harm and violence. I cannot predict in advance what might come up for you, but I do not want you to be surprised. If you are concerned about any of the material, please contact me. And please be aware of mental health and self-care
resources available at Student Psychological Services: 
https://wellness.uchicago.edu/mental-health/

- **Classroom Dialogue and Discussion:** While I do encourage a frank and enthusiastic style of discussion of the readings in the course, **everyone is required to maintain a respectful attitude towards different viewpoints.** In case anyone feels uncomfortable about the content or tone of classroom discussions and has any issues with participating freely in class, do not hesitate to contact me. I am readily accessible via email and office hours to address any concerns that may arise.

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**READINGS**

All of the course readings not included in the required texts section of the syllabus are available on Canvas under “Library Course Reserves.” **If you cannot find something, look in “Files” before emailing me.**

Please read in the order listed each week. If you can’t find something, email me immediately.

It might seem like, on some days, there is a lot of reading. I have looked at the page count to keep it fairly consistent and also accounted for the style of writing. Of course, on some days it might seem impossible to read everything, it is fine. Just read as much as you can.

**Week One: Introductions**

Tuesday


Thursday: *Decoding the Public and Private*


**Week Two: Fear in the City**
Tuesday


Thursday


Week Three: Suspicion in The City

Tuesday


Thursday


Week Four: Going out, Staying in Place?

Tuesday

Thursday


Week Five: Cartographies of Resistance

Tuesday


Thursday


Week Six: Sexual Enclaves

Tuesday

Thursday


**Week Seven: Intimacy in the City**

Tuesday


Thursday


(Required Watch “Inside A Japanese Love Hotel” for class discussion: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXgX_r-x-XE)

**Week Eight: Coming out, Staying out: conditions apply**

Tuesday


Thursday

**Week Nine: Gender and Sexuality of Cities?**

**Tuesday**

• Spain, Daphne. “Men Build Chicago’s Skyline, Women Redeem the City” (Ch 7) in *How Women Saved the City*. University of Minnesota Press.

**Thursday**

• Moussawi, Ghassan. 2020. “Because Lebanon is not Kandahar: Beirut as Queer Exception” (Ch2) in *Disruptive Situations: Fractal Orientalism and Queer Strategies in Beirut*. Temple University Press.

**Week Ten: Intimate Geographies: Who Writes the City?**

**Tuesday**

ASSIGNMENTS – RELEASED ONCE EVERY TWO WEEKS DURING THE QUARTER.

Assignment 1: Me and the City

This assignment is guided by the conviction that we all have experiences worth writing about. That, there is no hierarchy of experience. The urban planner is not the only expert on cities. We all are experts in our own right. We all have stories to tell.

I present you with three sets of questions. PICK TWO. I want you to answer these with as much honesty as you are willing to offer up. The point of this exercise is not to “test” your knowledge of anything, but to provoke you into thinking about your own relationship to the city – and how your gender, sexuality, age, class, race, religion, etc. mediate that relationship. Write with sincerity. I am not teaching a creative writing course. I am not qualified to judge the aesthetic frills or the narrative décor of your writing. I am just a curious reader.

Do not worry about whether you are politically correct or not; do not censor yourself.

No word limits. Write as much as you want, however you want to.

1. What is your most favorite city in the world? When did you first go to this city? Critically introspect why you like this city – more specifically, why you like this city. Bring up examples and specific instances to convince the reader that this is an important reason.

   For instance, I love Mumbai. While I had visited it fairly often growing up, the first time the adult version of myself went and really went there was in 2015. I felt like the city – unlike other Indian cities – was so busy that nobody stared at me. Everyone was too busy in their own lives, and I could be this weird spectator. All my life, I avoided gazes – but now I could gaze. I could gaze at the poverty that does not bother hiding in most of Mumbai. I could walk around, take the overcrowded trains, and blend into a city that is noisy, smelly, and tastes of a gritty and grimy resilience. In a way, I felt most acutely aware of my class than my gender. And, for women, that too can be a privilege – or maybe this is the deadly appeal of power…(and so on and so forth)

2. What is your least favorite city in the world? When did you first go to this city? Critically introspect why you DID NOT like this city – more specifically, why you did not like this city. Bring up examples and specific instances to convince the reader that this is an important reason.

3. Look back at your life and write about one incident in any public space in a city that made you very conscious of your body, or made you feel very visible. Need not be negative experiences only.

   For instance, I distinctly remember feeling very “brown” one unsuspecting summer in Chicago in 2017 when I was walking down Magnificent Mile with a friend and a very
sweet old white woman stopped me on the sidewalk and said that the color yellow looks marvelous on my “exotic, dark skin”. I still remember the city skyline retreating that moment. One moment I was walking mirthfully walking down the street with my arms heavy with shopping bags confident in my ability in having assimilated, and the very next moment I felt like I would never stop being visible. The ride back home just felt different – an irritating encounter, so typical of the world of strangers we inhabit. A fairly benign, but profoundly irritating, encounter.

Assignment Two

This assignment is designed in order to explore solutions to the problem of women’s safety in urban cities in middle-income countries. This assignment requires some amount of preliminary internet research. I would suggest that you work with someone on this assignment, in case it feels overwhelming to do it alone.

Remember, you don’t HAVE to do this assignment. You are required to do only 3 out of the 4 assignments in this course. If you want to, you can do all 4. If you do 3 out of 4, I will grade each assignment at 20% each; if you do 4 out of 4 assignments, I will grade each assignment at 15% each.

Think before you start working on this. The reason I am giving this choice is so you can decide what works best for you in terms of how you are feeling right now.

Step 0: Imagine a city that has a population of about 15 million people and a sex ration of about 850 women per 1000 men. City X is in a middle-income country where sexual assault and violence against women in public are highly common. The city is also home to transgender communities, although they constitute a numerical sliver in the city’s population.

Of late, the city has been attempting to take seriously the cause of women’s safety. The mayor of the city is putting together a proposal to enhance women’s safety and is deliberating the following proposals to make public transportation and spaces safer:

Transportation and Public Spaces

1. To make public transportation free for all women.
2. To designate specific “women only” cars in the metro and to split the space of a bus down the middle – the front portion is only for women, while the back portion is only for men.
3. To start a fleet of a thousand “Pink Cabs” that have women drivers and transport only women.
4. To tie-up with private taxicabs that provide women free drop-offs from the metro station to their homes after 9pm at night.
5. To increase CCTV camera coverage in all public spaces in the city.
6. To deploy plainclothes policemen to surveil and monitor spaces in the city for sexual harassment and assault on the streets.
7. To make “sex assault kiosks” available all over the city where people can go and complain about specific incidents and get information around either legal remedies, or educational material around self-defense and other preventive tactics they could deploy in everyday life.
8. Have large educational posters and banners that advocate for harassment-free public spaces and advocate gender equality.
9. To commission murals and art that can communicate the ills of sexual harassment to the wider public.
10. To increase street lighting on main streets and have “panic buttons” installed all over the main thoroughfares. These panic buttons are linked to the closest police station in the area.

**Step 1:** Write at least one “pro” and a “con” under at least 7 points of this proposal. Add more recommendations, if you wish. Do not exceed 300 words under each point. **Make a copy and save it in a separate document.**

**Step 2:** Do a quick Google search and find a comparable city. By comparable, I mean that the population can be somewhat similar (a few couple millions here and there is fine). Look for big cities in what are generally called developing countries. Pick one.

**Step 3:** Look at the map of this city that you have picked. Take note of the streets and try to see whether this city has more main thoroughfares or narrow streets.

**Step 4:** Do a quick search of sexual assault in public spaces (and transport) in this city. Get a sense of the demographics – what is the sex ratio. Look for newspaper articles about women’s safety in this city or look for YouTube videos. If you find nothing, email me.

**Step 5:** Remind yourself that this isn’t your PhD, it is just a class assignment with 20% or 15% weightage of the grade, so be realistic and do not spend more than half an hour on researching the city. Just get a sense of it. This assignment is not going to be published and no one is going to make fun of you for getting something wrong. Please write this down.

**Step 6:** Look back at the policy recommendations and your pros and cons. Now, armed with the sense of this actual city, change or modify your pros and cons, if there are changes. Add more details or completely change the arguments. If you wish, add explanatory notes as to why you made these changes by using the “Comment function” in MS Word. Highlight the part of the text you are changing and go to the Review tool and, under that, add “New Comment”.

**Step 7:** Email me both documents – the first pro and con list, and the updated pro and con list – by midnight May 12. Make sure that the updated list mentions the city you are looking at. If you need more time, take it. Deadlines are meant to be upended during this time. Just let me know!

**Step 8:** Have fun with this!
Assignment THREE

For the third assignment, I want you to let loose and let your creative juices flow. Pick one prompt from below:

1. **What would your ideal city look like? How would it work?** By this, I mean go completely wild. No limits to how you're imagining an ideal city. Mine, for instance, would have pink clouds, purple grass, and just free key lime pie at street corners. Of course, my ideal city would also have fewer men, fewer cars, no cops, and lots of cats! Your ideal city does not have to make "practical" sense nor be feasible; the whole point is to imagine beyond the world that we see as immutable.

   You could write a set of bullet-points in which you spell out the various characteristics that you associate with the "perfect" city, or you could write a poem, an ode to this utopian city, or you could just write a personal essay or memoir. Or, a photo essay. Or - most adventurously a mix of all these modes!

2. **Write a short story set in a city** that plays with the themes of gender, sexuality, intimacy and/or violence. It could be fictional, or it could be memoir-style. I want to see somewhat of a plot, characters, dialogue, and - most importantly - the city. You could also do a "Humans of New York" style piece, or like the short essay of mine that you read in class, but make it narratively similar to a short story. One tiny condition: it has to be set in an actual city, not an imaginary one.

Need I remind everyone that this is not a lit/creative writing class, so go easy on yourself? The point is not for me to critique your style of writing, but to play with one's imagination. Don't worry about your writing style, grammar, etc. Just do this for fun. Think of it as a collective fun thought experiment!

**Logistics:**

1. Whichever prompt you choose, try to write between 1200-2000 words. Exceptions are, of course, possible. Write to me.

2. Graduating seniors, please submit this by June 4. Others, take until June 8.

3. Upload a Word doc to the Assignments tab. Do not email me with the documents. I tend to lose them (as I learned over Assignment 2!)

4. The usual reminder: you have to do just 3/4 assignments, so if you're not doing this, that's fine.
Assignment FOUR

Step 1: Pick one film from the file attached. You can also watch Skate Kitchen (Links to an external site.) on Hulu. I did not add it to the original file, but I am mentioning it here.

Step 2: Watch whichever film you like, and while watching it, take notes on themes that jump out at you with reference to our broad discussions in class (you need not think of specific readings, but just our collective discussions)

Step 3: Finish the movie and keep your notes aside for at least a day. I call this thought-marination, but I genuinely believe that writing requires some distance from collection of "data".

Step 4: After giving it some time, write/record your thoughts and make sure you answer the following questions:

1. What is the plot of the film? Who are the main characters? What is the story, and where is it set?

2. How does the film address the themes we have been working with? If it does not go into any of the ideas we have talked about, what did it address?

3. Your reflections on how the film addressed issues of sexuality and gender in the city. This is a broad question and I am more than happy for you to write whatever you want.

4. What did the film neglect? What issues/themes did you wish it had covered, keeping in mind the context in which the film is set. In short, criticize the film - not from the perspective of filmmaking (which I am not qualified to judge) but more from the realm of the substantive issues of the course.

You are, of course, free to write about anything else but try to cover these 4 questions. Written essays should be no less than a 1500 words and no more than 2500 words. Audio recordings can be no longer than 20 minutes. If you are working on an audio recording, I encourage a "conversation style" template in which 2 people can watch the same film and have a conversation about it - in which case, it can be 25 mins long.

Please upload the assignment under Assignments but upload a word document only.

FILMS FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT

Relevant films available online, for you to watch during this lockdown.
20 films that you could use to think about sex and gender in the city – Assignment Three will be based on your thoughts about any one film from this list. So, make sure you watch at least one.

Always check for the film’s availability on websites other than the ones mentioned here. I am no fan of Amazon either, so in case you find these elsewhere, even better.

Name of movie – country it is set in – one of the hyperlinked websites it is available on – year of release

1. **10** – Iran – Amazon Prime (Dir: Abbas Kiarostami) – 2002
   A visual social examination in the form of ten conversations between a driving woman and her various pick-ups and hitchhikers.

2. **Circus of Books** – USA – Netflix (Dir: Rachel Mason) – 2019
   For nearly four decades, unassuming couple Karen and Barry Mason ran Circus of Books, an LA porn store that became a hub for the local gay community.

3. **Atlantics** – Senegal – Netflix (Dir: Mati Diop) – 2019
   In a popular suburb of Dakar, workers on the construction site of a futuristic tower, without pay for months, decide to leave the country by the ocean for a better future. Among them is Souleiman, the lover of Ada, promised to another.

4. **Amelie** – France – Hulu or Prime (Dir: Jean-Pierre Jeunet) – 2001
   Amélie is an innocent and naive girl in Paris with her own sense of justice. She decides to help those around her and, along the way, discovers love.

5. **Mulholland Drive** – USA – YouTube, Google Play (Dir: David Lynch – 2001
   A dark-haired woman is left amnesiac after a car crash. She wanders the streets of Los Angeles in a daze before taking refuge in an apartment. There she is discovered by Betty, a wholesome Midwestern blonde who has come to the City of Angels seeking fame as an actress. Together, the two attempt to solve the mystery of Rita's true identity. The story is set in a dream-like Los Angeles, spoilt neither by traffic jams nor smog.

   A faded movie star and a neglected young woman form an unlikely bond after crossing paths in Tokyo.

7. **Queen** – India/Europe – Netflix (Dir: Vikas Bahl) – 2013
   A Delhi girl from a traditional family sets out on a solo honeymoon after her marriage gets cancelled. The film traces her emancipation as she travels alone through Paris and Amsterdam.

8. **Princess Cyd** – USA – Hulu, Prime, YouTube. (Dir: Stephen Cone) – 2017
Eager to escape life with her depressive single father, 16-year-old athlete Cyd Loughlin visits her novelist aunt in Chicago over the summer. While there, she falls for a girl in the neighborhood, even as she and her aunt gently challenge each other in the realms of sex and spirit.

9. **Columbus** – USA – Prime, YouTube (Dir: Kogonada) – 2017
   A Korean-born man finds himself stuck in Columbus, Indiana, where his architect father is in a coma. The man meets a young woman who wants to stay in Columbus with her mother, a recovering addict, instead of pursuing her own dreams.

10. **The Big City** – India – Prime (Dir: Satyajit Ray) – 1963
    Satyajit Ray’s first portrayal of contemporary life in his native Kolkata, follows the personal triumphs and frustrations of Arati who decides, despite the initial protests of her bank-clerk husband, to take a job to help support their family. With remarkable sensitivity and attention to the details of everyday working-class life, Ray builds a powerful human drama that is at once a hopeful morality tale and a commentary on the identity of the modern Indian woman.

    Lola receives a phone call from her boyfriend Manni. He lost 100,000 DM in a subway train that belongs to a very bad guy. Lola has 20 min to raise this amount and meet Manni. Otherwise, he will rob a store to get the money. Three different alternatives may happen depending on some minor event along Lola's run.

12. **Dreams of a Life** – Britain – Prime (Dir: Carol Morley) – 2011
    Discovering the truth about the life of a vivacious, intelligent woman and how she came to be so tragically forgotten. Nobody noticed when 38-year-old Joyce Vincent died in her bedsit above a shopping mall in North London in 2003. When her remains were discovered three years later, her heating and her television were still on. Who was Joyce Vincent, and how could this happen to someone in today's age of communication?

13. **Frances Ha** – USA – Netflix, Prime, YouTube (Dir: Noah Baumbach) – 2013
    A story that follows a New York woman, who doesn't really have an apartment. She apprentices for a dance company although she's not really a dancer and throws herself headlong into her dreams.

14. **Blue Jasmine** – USA – Prime, YouTube (Dir: Woody Allen...errr, I know) – 2013
    A New York socialite, deeply troubled and in denial, arrives in San Francisco to impose upon her sister. She looks a million, but isn't bringing money, peace, or love.

    A rebellious Saudi girl (Waad Mohammed) enters a Koran recitation competition at her school and hopes to win enough money to buy her own bicycle.

16. **Brother to Brother** – USA – Prime (Dir: Rodney Evans) – 2004
Perry (Anthony Mackie) is a would-be painter struggling to find his voice as an artist and his identity as a black gay man. When his disapproving father kicks him out, he winds up in a homeless shelter where he meets a sympathetic gay poet named Bruce (Roger Robinson). As they get to know each other, Perry learns that Bruce was at the center of the 1920s and ’30s Harlem Renaissance and faced many of the same prejudices and challenges in his day that Perry faces now.

17. **Leave It On The Floor** – USA – Prime (Dir: Sheldon Larry) – 2012
   Kicked out of his home for being gay, a young man (Ephraim Sykes) finds a new family with Los Angeles drag queens.

18. **Paris is Burning** – USA – Netflix (Dir: Jennie Livingston) – 1990
   This documentary focuses on drag queens living in New York City and their "house" culture, which provides a sense of community and support for the flamboyant and often socially shunned performers. Groups from each house compete in elaborate balls that take cues from the world of fashion. Also touching on issues of racism and poverty, the film features interviews with a number of renowned drag queens, including Willi Ninja, Pepper LaBeija and Dorian Corey.

19. **Gully Boy** – India – Prime (Dir: Zoya Akhtar) – 2019
   A Mumbai street rapper, who lives in Asia’s largest slum Dharavi, comes of age while using his music to highlight urban inequalities.

20. **On The Road** – Italy (Guardian documentary) – 2017
   Hundreds of women operate as sex workers along the Strada Bonifica, the ironically named ‘road of love’ on the Adriatic coast of Italy. There has been a huge increase in the number of Nigerian women working along the 10-mile stretch of road – some of whom have been trafficked into the country and forced into prostitution. The film moves between the women’s stories, the Italians who live and work there and the local NGO, named On the Road, attempting to support the women.