**RELI-357-001 / WMST 300 - Gender and the Body in Judaism**

Fall 2022 / Monday and Wednesday 1:30-2:45 / DK 2053

Instructor: Alexandria Frisch

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Office Hours: By appointment (in person or zoom) or M/W 12-1 pm in Horizon Hall 3117

**Description of Course**

Although Jews have often been referred to as “people of the book,” a closer look at the book, or rather traditional Jewish texts, reveals Judaism is very much a “religion of the body.” Beginning with the biblical account of creation in Genesis 2-3, in which the woman is produced from the side of the man’s body, Judaism highlights the human body in its theological depictions, legal codes, ritual procedures, and communal practices. The same story also conveys the intrinsic connection between the body, gender and sexuality; Adam and Eve are created as distinct beings with different attributes, yet receive the same first commandment to procreate. This course will thus explore the Jewish approach to questions of gender, sexuality and the body as manifested 1) throughout history and in the present American context; and as formulated 2) in religious, legal, ethical and imaginative discourses as well as in lived experiences. We will look at topics such as women in the Bible, rituals of purity, standards of modesty, procreation, homosexuality, transgender identity, and stereotypes.

**Required Texts**

* Danya Ruttenberg, ed. *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), designated *PT* below
* Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (New York: JPS, 1981), designated *OWJ* below
* Danya Ruttenberg, ed., *Yentl’s Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism* (Seattle: Seal Press, 2001), designated *YR* below
* All other course readings are on blackboard and marked (designate *BB* below)

**Assignments and Grading**

Class participation/attendance 15%

At Home Assignments (3) 15% (5% each)

Papers (2) 30% (15% each)

Scholarly Article Responses (5) 20% (4% each)

Jewish Views and Voices Reflection (5) 20% (4% each)

1. **Attendance, Participation,** **and Reading** – all three are key components to having a valuable learning experience. I will be taking attendance at every class session, and participation grades will reflect attendance records. However, attendance is not enough to get the full participation grade. Class discussion will take up a significant portion of each class session. Participation is also dependent on you doing the assigned reading before class. See the schedule below for reading assignments. Reading assignments should be completed by the corresponding class date.

NOTE: although class participation is important, being healthy and keeping others healthy is more important. Please do not come to class if you have any possible COVID-19 symptoms, or if you have been in close contact with COVID-19-positive individuals. We will figure out ways to make up material.

1. **At Home Assignments** – There are a lot of Jewish holidays this semester that fall on a Monday or a Wednesday. We will try to make up some of these classes and others will be covered by **THREE** “at home assignments” that will guide you through the material on your own (with feedback from me!).
   1. Why Feminism? (due Sept 20)
   2. Jewish Bodies in America Part 1 (due Oct 7)
   3. Jewish Bodies in America Part 2 (due Oct 14)
2. **Papers** - You will be responsible for writing **two papers** during the semester, 4-6 pages in length. Detailed assignments will be handed out in class at least two weeks before the due date for each paper. The Final paper will also have a more creative, non-traditional paper option.
3. Gender in Visual Media paper (due Nov 4)
4. Final paper/project (due Dec 12)
5. **Scholarly Article Responses –** The readings on blackboard and PT are mostly scholarly articles. This is your chance to see what it is that Jewish Studies scholars do! You will be responsible for **FIVE short writing responses** that are designed to encourage you to critically reflect on your reading PRIOR to coming to class and to help improve your writing over the course of the semester. It is your choice which 10 you do. Questions for the readings will be posted on blackboard and your responses should be submitted to me electronically on Blackboard *by noon the day of class*. Responses submitted after class will not be accepted. The responses will receive a grade and I will give you feedback, so you can improve over the course of the semester.
6. **Jewish Views and Voices Reflection –** Just as you will be reading scholarly voices, you will also encounter the voices of Jews reflecting their lived Jewish experiences. These appear in *Yentl’s Revenge* and *On Women and Judaism*. You’ll be asked to write **FIVE short reflections** on your choice of the assigned readings from each of those two texts. Instructions will be posted on blackboard.

**Class Policies**

**Technology:** Regarding electronic devices (such as laptops, cell phones, etc.), please be respectful of your peers and your instructor and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to class. Such disruptions show a lack of professionalism and may affect your participation grade.

**Policy on late assignments**: Please make every effort to contact me if you think your work will be submitted late. Unexcused late work will be accepted at my discretion and, if accepted, will result in a lowered grade.

**Honor Code:** All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code.  You can find a copy of the Honor Code at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review. Instances of plagiarism will receive a strict penalty, which includes the possibility of a grade of “F” for the course. Plagiarism consists of presenting the writing, research, or analysis of others as one’s own. It applies not only to the lifting of the verbatim text of another author’s work without quotation marks and accurate citation, but also to the taking of specific information, analysis or opinions―even if not in the exact words of the author him/herself―and presenting them without citation in one’s own paper. This applies both to material in printed format and to material found on internet sites. Any instance of outright plagiarism, as described above, or cheating on an exam will be reported to the Honor Council.

**Disability Services:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see the professor and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>

**Inclusion Statement:** in class, we will work to create an environment that lets everyone feel safe, welcome, and respected. We place great importance on considering the mindset and values of the ancient world but that is not an endorsement of that mindset and those values. Your participation is valuable, as is that of your peers. Please let that inform your behavior.

**Religious Observances:**

If a class session or due date conflicts with your religious holidays, please notify me so we can make alternative arrangements. Look over the schedule carefully now and let me know if this is the case at least two weeks prior. <https://ulife.gmu.edu/religious-holiday-calendar/>

**Course Schedule and Readings**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Mon, Aug 22 – What is the Body? What is Gender?**

**Weds, Aug 24 – What is Judaism?**

***BB*** - Milton Steinberg, “Torah,” in *Basic Judaism* (Harcourt, Brace, 1947)

***BB*** - Adin Steinsaltz, “What is the Talmud?” in *The Essential Talmud* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977)

**BODIES AND GENDER IN THE BIBLE AND EARLY JUDAISM**

**Mon, Aug 29 – Bodies, Sin and Purity**

***BB* -** Alexandria Frisch and Lawrence H. Schiffman, “The Body at Qumran: Flesh and Spirit, Purity and Impurity in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 23 (2016): 1-28.

**Weds, Aug 31 – Gender Roles (Mothers, Fathers, Daughters, Sons, Sisters, Brothers)**

***BB –*** Genesis 12 and 18

***BB*** - Susan Niditch, “Women in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press): 29-39.

***BB*** - Tikva Frymer Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002)*,* xii-xxii

**Mon, Sept 5 – No Class (Labor Day)**

**Wed, Sept 7 - Women and Power**

***BB* –** the book of Ruth

***BB*** - Charles David Isbell, “Nice Jewish Girls: Liquor, Sex, and Power in Antiquity,” *Studies in Jewish Civilization: Women and Judaism*, ed. Leonard Greenspoon, Ronald Simkins, Jean Axelrad Cahan (Creighton University Press): 23-31.

**Mon, Sept 12** **– The Rabbinic Role of Women**

***BB*** - Judith Romney Wegner, “The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press): 68-89.

***BB*** - Rachel Adler, “The Jew Who Wasn’t There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman.” *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review*, Summer 1973.

**FEMINISM MEETS JUDAISM**

**Weds, Sept 14 - Feminist Interpretations of Genesis**

***BB*** - Genesis 1-3 (in Bible)

Read ONE of the following (we will choose who is responsible for which reading in the class prior):

***BB*** - Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press): 112-119.

***BB*** - Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender*, *Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 22-38

***BB*** - Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 72-75, 94-105

**Mon, Sept 19 – No Class – At home assignment: Why Feminism? (due Sept 20)**

***OWJ*** - Blu Greenberg, “Feminism: Is it Good for the Jews?,” 3-20; “Can a Mild- Mannered Yeshiva Girl Find Happiness Among the Feminists?,” 21-38

***YR*** – Susannah Heschel, “Forward: It’s Not about Equality—It’s about Who’s in Charge!,” xv-xvii, Danya Ruttenberg, “Introduction,” xix-xxiv

**Weds, Sept 21 - A Feminist Reading of Rabbinic Texts**

***BB*** - Judith Hauptman, “Introduction” and “Relation Between the Sexes,” in *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman’s Voice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998)

***YR*** – Yiskah (Jessica) Rosenfeld, “You Take Lilith, I’ll Take Eve: A Closer Look at the World’s Second Feminist,” 131-153.

**Mon, Sept 26 – No Class (Rosh Hashanah) – Challenges: God and Gender (Make up or Zoom class TBA)**

***BB*** - Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “On Feminine God-Talk,” in *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2006): 393-401

***BB*** - Judith Plaskow, “Sacred Pronouns,” *Tikkun* (2010): 55

***YR*** – Ryiah Lilith, “Challah for the Queen of Heaven,” 102-111.

**BODIES AND GENDER IN JEWISH LIFE AND LAW**

**Weds, Sept 28 – Prayer**

***OWJ*** - Blu Greenberg, “Women and Liturgy,” 75-104

***YR*** – Haviva Ner-David, “Parenting as a Religious Jewish Feminist,” 31-43.

**Mon, Oct 3 – Modesty**

**BB** - Tova Hartman, “Modesty and the Religious Male Gaze,” in *Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism: Resistance and Accommodation* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press), 45-61.

***PT*** - Danya Ruttenberg, “Toward a New *Tzniut*,” in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism,* ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 203-211.

**Weds, Oct 5 – No Class (Yom Kippur) At Home Assignment: Jewish Bodies in America Part 1 (due Oct 7)**

Listen to: <https://www.tabletmag.com/podcasts/unorthodox/unorthodox-episode-117-jewish-nose-jobs>

***YR*** – Ophira Edut, “Bubbe Got Back: Tales of a Jewess with Caboose,” 24-30.

**Mon, Oct 10 – No class (Fall Break)**

**Tues, Oct 11 – No Class (Sukkot) At Home Assignment: Jewish Bodies in America Part 2 (due Oct 14)**

Listen to: <https://associationforjewishstudies.org/publications-research/adventures-in-jewish-studies-podcast> (Episode 5: Are Jews White?)

***YR*** – Loolwa Khazzoom, “United Jewish Feminist Front,” 168-180.

**Weds, Oct 12 - Reproduction**

***OWJ*** - Blu Greenberg, “Abortion,” 147-154

***PT*** - Elliot Dorff, “A Jewish Perspective on Birth Control and Procreation,” in *The Passionate Torah*, 152-164

**Mon, Oct. 17 – No Class (Shemini Atzeret) – Marriage and Divorce (Make up class or zoom tba)**

***YR*** – A.C. Hall, “The Nice Jewish Boy,” 3-13.

***PT*** - Bonna Devora Haberman, “Divorcing Ba’al: The Sex of Ownership in Jewish Marriage,” in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism,* ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 36-46.

**Weds, Oct. 19 – Circumcision**

***BB* –** Shaye Cohen, *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2005), 207-223.

**QUESTIONING GENDER**

**Mon, Oct. 24 –Masculinity**

***BB*** - Harry Brod, “Of Mice and Supermen: Images of Jewish Masculinity,” in *Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition*, ed. T.M. Rudavsky (New York: NYU Press), 279-291.

***BB*** - Daniel Boyarin, “Introduction,” *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: UC Press)

**Weds, Oct. 26 – Transgender Jews**

***BB*** - Joy Ladin, “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Stern College,” in *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders,* 7-18

***BB* –** Isaac Bashevis Singer, “Yentl the Yeshiva Boy”

**SEX ACCORDING TO TRADITIONAL LITERATURE**

**Mon, Oct 31 – In the Bible**

***BB*** - Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible,” in *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality*, ed. Jonathan Magonet (Providence: Berghahn Books): 3-16.

**Weds, Nov 2 - In Rabbinic Literature**

***PT*** - Danya Ruttenberg, “Introduction,” 1 – top of 3

***PT*** - Aryeh Cohen, “The Sage and the Other Woman: A Rabbinic Tragedy,” in *The Passionate Torah*, 58-72

**“GOOD” SEX**

**Mon, Nov 7 – Purity**

***OWJ*** - Blu Greenberg, “In Defense of the ‘Daughters of Israel’: Observations on Niddah and Mikveh,” 105-124

***PT*** - Haviva Ner-David, “Reclaiming *Nidah* and *Mikveh* through Ideological and Practical Reinterpretation,” in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism,* ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 116-135.

***YR*** – Danya Ruttenberg, “Blood Simple: Transgender Theory Hits the Mikveh,” 77-87.

**Weds, Nov 9 – The Act of Sex**

***PT*** - Melanie Malka Landau, “Good Sex: A Jewish Feminist Perspective,” in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism,* ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 93-106.

***YR***– Hanne Blank, “The ‘Big O’ also means ‘Olam,’” 194-205.

**BAD SEX**

**Mon, Nov 14 – Adultery**

***BB*** - Numbers 5:11-14

***PT*** - Sarra Lev, “Sotah: Rabbinic Pornography?” in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism,* ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 7-23

**Weds, Nov 16 – Consent**

***BB –*** Read sections of 2 Samuel

***BB*** - J. Cheryl Exum, “Raped by the Pen,” in *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International)

**REDEFINING GOOD SEX**

**Mon, Nov 21 - No Class – Nonmarital Sex (Make up class or zoom tba)**

***PT*** - Sara N.S. Meirowitz, “Not Like a Virgin: Talking about Nonmarital Sex,” in *The Passionate Torah*, 169-180

***PT*** - Rebecca Alpert, “Reconsidering Solitary Sex from a Jewish Perspective,” in *The Passionate Torah*, 182-189

**Mon, Nov 28 – Homosexuality**

***BB*** - Rebecca Alpert, “Challenging Male/Female Complementarity: Jewish Lesbians and the Jewish Tradition,” in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism From an Embodied Perspective*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (SUNY Press), 361-374.

***BB*** - Gordon Tucker and Rabbi Barry Freundel, “Two Views: Homosexuality and Halachic Judaism,” *Moment* (June 1993), 40-43

***BB*** - Rabbi Yaakov Levado, “Gayness and God: Wrestlings of an Orthodox Rabbi,” Tikkun 8:5

**Weds, Nov 30 - Conclusions**