Religion, Gender, and Sexuality in America: A Sociological Approach  
Brandeis University  
Spring Semester 2017

Instructor: Margaret Clendenen
Office: Pearlman 104
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2-4pm
Email: mclende@brandeis.edu

Class meetings: MWTh, 1-1:50pm
Location: Brown Social Science Center 224

Course Description

How do people in the United States live and experience religion in their day-to-day lives, and how are these experiences shaped by gender? How do LGBT people understand and interact with religious traditions and teachings? How do religious organizations affect and reproduce gender norms?

In this course, we will think through these and many other questions. This class will provide an introduction to the sociological study of religion, gender, and sexuality. We will think and talk about what religion, gender, and sexuality mean and how they interact in meaningful ways in people’s lives.

By the end of this semester, you will be able to:
- Discuss what it means to study religion, gender, and sexuality sociologically.
- Consider how gender shapes experiences of religious teachings and traditions.
- Analyze contemporary debates over religion and sexuality in the United States.
- Articulate what you see as pressing issues to study as related to religion, gender, and sexuality in the United States.

As sociologists, our focus in this class will be on religious communities, identities, and practices. We will think and talk a lot about these aspects of different religious traditions; however, unlike many courses in Religious Studies or History, this course will focus on people’s communities and lived experiences, as opposed to providing an in-depth historical or theological/philosophical overview of religious traditions. I invite you to consider other courses offered by the program in Religious Studies or the department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies if you are looking for a course that focuses on these aspects of religious traditions.

I look forward to learning and thinking with you over the course of this semester!
**Course Readings**
The following books are required for the course:


All books are on reserve at the library. All other required course readings are available through Latte.

**Course Requirements and Grading Policies**
Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of reading and writing time per week in preparation for class.

**Attendance and Participation** – 10 points
You are expected to attend all class sessions, and come to class prepared to participate actively. Asking questions, discussing the readings, taking notes, and coming to chat about the class in office hours are all examples of active participation. Absences will only be excused for religious observances or documented illnesses. **After your first unexcused absence, each additional unexcused absence will result in a two point deduction to your grade. Every three times you are late counts as one unexcused absence.**

Unacceptable laptop use will result in a reduced participation grade and revocation of laptop privileges. Similarly, usage of phones in this course is not permitted and will result in reductions to your participation grade.

**Show and Tell** – 5 points
At the end of add/drop, everyone will sign up for one of the “show and tell” days throughout the semester. On your assigned show and tell day, you will bring in an item (or come prepared to show us a website) and be prepared to talk about your item and how it relates to the course.

**Reading Thoughts (RTs)** – 5 points
Generally, classes on Thursdays will be discussion and activity based. On five Wednesdays throughout the semester, you will email me (mclende@brandeis.edu) your thoughts on Thursday’s readings in advance of class. You may submit your RTs any five weeks with assigned reading for Thursday’s class; you are free to submit as many RTs as
you would like (doing so is a good way to have your thoughts addressed in class, particularly if you are shy), but you are under no obligation to submit more than five.

**Your email to me must have the subject line RT** (nothing more, nothing less) and provide answers to the following three questions:
1. What did you find most interesting about Thursday’s readings?
2. What did you find confusing about Thursday’s readings?
3. What two questions would you like to make sure we discuss in class on Thursday?

**RTs are due on Wednesdays by 6pm.** (I will try to read late RTs, but they will not count towards your five required submissions. Yes, even if it’s only 15 minutes late.)

**Paper Assignments** – Two 4-5 page papers, 20 points each
You will be required to write two papers over the course of the semester. Each paper should be between 4-5 pages, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font with one inch margins on all sides. Questions for papers will be distributed at least two weeks before they are due. I will deduct two points for every day that papers are late, including weekends. Your first paper will be due on **March 2** and your second paper will be due on **April 6**.

**Site Visit and Site Visit Reflection** – 15 points
You will attend a service or gathering at a religious center in the greater Boston area (or elsewhere if you are traveling). You are strongly encouraged to attend a religious center outside of the religious tradition(s) in which you were raised and/or currently belong. We will brainstorm potential sites in class. **While you are attending, pay particular attention to explicit and implicit messages about gender and sexuality.** (How is the leadership gendered? Do men and women sit together? Does the congregation have a statement affirming LGBT people? Does the sermon (if there is one) talk about gender/sexuality? etc.) Please come to class on February 9 prepared to discuss your experiences, and with any materials that you may have gathered while there (bulletins, brochures, etc.) (5 points). You will also submit a reflection on your experiences. Your reflection should be 4-5 pages, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, and is due on **February 9** (10 points).

**Final** – 25 points
Your final exam will be due on **May 9** by 12pm. The prompt will be distributed in class on April 24. The exam will consist of two essay questions. One question will be worth 10 points, and the other question will be worth 15 points. The total, combined length of the essays should not exceed 8 pages, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font.
Grades are calculated as follows. All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for this course.

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**University Policy on Academic Integrity**

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow Brandeis University’s policies on academic integrity. I will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct.

**University Policy on Academic Accommodations**

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu). Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

**Creating an Inclusive Classroom**

I am committed to making our classroom and our campus an inclusive and supportive learning environment. We come to this class as people with differing racial and ethnic identities, socioeconomic statuses, abilities, religious upbringings and commitments, gender identities and expressions, sexual orientations, and so forth. Your presence in this class signifies your commitment to engaging with diversity in mature, respectful ways, remembering above all Brandeis’s commitment to being a “center of open inquiry and teaching.”
Course Outline

Part 1: Definitions and Methodologies

What is religion? How do sociologists study gender and sexuality?

Introductions

January 18  Introductions and Overview of the Course


Thinking about Religion…


Chapter 1


Thinking about Gender and Sexuality…

Preface, Chapters 1 and 3

Chapters 4 - 5

Chapter 6

Show and Tell: An example of a gendered advertisement (print, YouTube commercial, etc.)
Part 2: Communities

Where does religion take place? How are religious communities organized around gender and sexuality?

Gender in Religious Communities


Show and Tell: Something interesting from the website, YouTube channels, Facebook pages, etc. of Lincoln Sq. Synagogue or Bais Chana

*Paper 1 Assignment Distributed in Class*

February 9  *Site Visit and Site Visit Reflection Due (no RTs!)*

Thinking Historically – The Case of the Oneida Community


Show and Tell: Something interesting about the Oneida community


February 20-24  *February Break, No Class*

Thinking about Today – The Case of Christian Mixed Martial Arts


*In Class Film: Fight Church*

March 2  *Paper 1 Due (no RTs!)*

*In Class Film: Fight Church*

### Part 3: Identities

*How do people develop sexual and gender identities in relation to their religious identities?*  
*How are feminist identities impacted by religion?*

**Feminist Identities**

March 6  “Feminism in Faith: Four Women Who are Revolutionizing Organized Religion”  
Buzzfeed  

*Show and tell: The website of an explicitly feminist and religious organization OR the website of an explicitly anti-feminist and religious organization*


**LGBTQ Identities**

Chapters 1-2


*In Class Film: For the Bible Tells Me So*
March 16  

In Class Film: For the Bible Tells Me So

LGBTQ Identities – Cont.

March 20  

Show and tell: A short (less than five minutes) YouTube video related to LGBTQ affirming religion

March 22  

March 23  
TransTexts, Keshet Online Resources

http://www.keshetonline.org/resources/transtexts/

Paper Assignment 2 Distributed in Class

Part 4: Practices

How are religious practices gendered? How do religious practices affect gender, sexuality and sexual practices?

Lived Religion

March 27  

Show and tell: Five pictures that you take around campus of places that people find religious and/or spiritual

March 29  

March 30  

April 3  
April 5  
*In Class Film: TBD*

April 6  
*Paper 2 Due (no RTs!)*

*In Class Film: TBD*

April 10-18  
*Passover, Easter, and Spring Recess – No Class*

### Gender and Religiosity

**April 19**  

*Brandeis Monday*

**April 20**  


### Sexuality and Evangelical Christians

**April 24**  

*Final Exam Distributed in Class*

**April 26**  

**April 27**  
Concluding the Class


May 3  No Reading!

Final Exam due by May 9 at 12pm.