

PREFACE

Queer Studies: Beyond Binaries is designed for undergraduate survey courses in the growing field of queer studies, sometimes referred to as LGBT studies or GLBT studies or some other variation of the acronyms associated with sexual identity and orientation. It grew out of my own experiences in teaching such a class, designed for students at any level of undergraduate study and from any major or minor, with no prerequisite. Thus, it makes no assumptions about its target audience's prior knowledge in sexuality studies, and it takes care to spend time defining and explaining the myriad terms and concepts on which the study of the lives of queer people and of the acts of "queering" are built.

While it uses concepts from both queer theory and queer history throughout, especially as foundations for the more specific and detailed ideas, figures, movements, and case studies in each chapter, the book is not designed for classes strictly in either theory or history. There are a number of accessible and excellent books designed to introduce students to queer theory or history, but this book is designed to give its readers an overview of both various disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on the material, ranging from linguistics through biology through psychology through politics, and ending with aesthetics.

UNIQUE FEATURES

Interdisciplinary Approach

I came to the teaching of the course as someone who had taught undergraduate college students for many decades, often using queer texts and concepts in my classes, but never focusing exclusively on queer studies. As a teacher of a general course in queer studies, you may come from specific disciplinary training and teaching but may be eager to expand the reach of your own interest in queer studies to a broader perspective and set of approaches. As a teacher, I myself span both positions, having done my earlier undergraduate and graduate training in communication and performance studies and then later pursuing graduate work in a field that, like queer studies, is by definition and philosophy interdisciplinary, disability studies. My own experience is that the diversity of life experiences and scholarly perspectives my own students bring to this class is itself instructive and has helped form the organization and content of the course. It is also the case that the academy has shifted from strict disciplinary divisions, such as they were, and has been moving increasingly toward approaches that build on dialogues between different disciplines and their similarly

different assumptions, methods, and paradigms. Often, the best of such work involves scholars working in teams, in dialogues between, for example, literary studies and cognitive science, and history and statistics. The book, then, helps model such approaches to the production and understanding of knowledge and offers students an opportunity to begin to enter into the kinds of scholarly and intellectual work they will encounter as they move through their studies.

Active Voice

This book is written with an active voice that invites students to build on their own experiences and knowledge and apply ideas to their daily lives. By doing this, students take ownership of their forming an understanding of queerness as a concept and of queer lives they either inhabit themselves or encounter among peers, family, and the social worlds with which they interact.

Exploration of Various Kinds of Binaries

As the subtitle suggests, one of the most significant features of this book is its consistent questioning of various kinds of binaries, those “either-or” pairings that have increasingly come under analysis and criticism. It is one of the principal reasons the term queer studies is used throughout, rather than LGBT(Q). In my experience students of this generation are much more likely to name and identify their sexual identity (and gender expression) in ways that the acronyms tend to restrict. In the book, as in my classroom, I make as few assumptions about the identities and experiences of students as possible, with the hope that the book will be of use as much to heterosexually identified students as to queer students who seek a place to situate their own sense of self in larger contexts.

Investigative Approach

Each chapter includes at least two “Issues for Investigation,” discussion topics that apply the concepts to real-world contexts or activities that can be carried out independently, in small groups, or as a class. The “Issues for Investigation” allow students to move beyond rote memorization of the terms and concepts. Because they are discussion- and activity-driven, they allow students whose learning styles may be more grounded in practical and applied methods of acquiring knowledge to better understand the material. Teachers will find additional questions and suggestions in the Instructor’s Resources (details about which are provided below).

Intersectional Perspectives

While most existing queer studies textbook focus on queerness itself, it is

becoming more and more clear that identity is never as simple as inhabiting a single category or characteristic. There is growing interest in what critical race and legal scholars call intersectionality, which recognizes that identity is not a matter of belonging to a single social category. Thus, this textbook takes the increasingly prevalent approach of intersectionality as one of its central tenets: that identity is never singular, but always the product of multiple characteristics, such as sexuality, race, gender, class, and ability or disability. An intersectional approach also allows students who may not identify as queer to understand and engage with the ways in which their own multiple identities are relevant to the study of queerness.

Flexibility in Content Coverage

The chapters in Part III are designed to be teachable as stand-alone chapters. This allows teachers greater flexibility in designing the organization of classes. For example, some instructors may want to delve into issues of queerness and spirituality, while others may be more interested in issues of wellness or in power.

Features to Enhance Student Learning

Each chapter contains one or more “Spotlight” sections, in which an individual, a social movement or event, or a text is described and discussed in detail — ranging from the poetry of the queer Latinx writer Richard Blanco to the vocabulary of the queer dialect Polari to an excerpt from the fiction of the novelist Jane Hamilton, an LGBTQ+ ally. The “Spotlight” sections provide case studies, often historical or artistic, to which students can apply larger, more abstract theories. They also introduce students to lived experiences and expressive products of queer people in particular places and in particular moments in time. This, in turn, helps students situate their own lives, experiences, and perceptions in a longer historical tradition and to see beyond their own individual observations.

Each chapter also includes a list of further readings and viewings that a teacher might assign or students might choose for exploring a particular topic in more detail. The Instructor’s Resources provide other suggestions, as well.

Key terms are bold-faced when first introduced and are defined in the glossary. A book of this scope includes terms that may be unfamiliar to many students (or their particular usage in queer studies may be new to them), and the glossary can help readers reinforce and review meanings and usages of such terms. Teachers may also find the glossary a useful study guide for their students to review for quizzes and exams, as well as opportunities for classes to debate usage — which is always changing and evolving.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

While instructors should feel free to supplement the textbook with their own additional readings (such as memoirs, articles, fiction, poetry, visual texts), this book is designed to be used as the sole or primary text in introductory courses on queer or LGBT studies. The book can also be used as a supplementary text in courses on sexuality studies in general (including women's and gender studies), queer/LGBT identity, and disciplinary courses that address issues of identity and society (which may be found in departments of political science, sociology, and psychology, to name a few). The sample syllabi in the Instructor's Resources provide tips on how to use the book in a variety of these courses.

INSTRUCTOR'S RESOURCES

The Instructor's Resources provides additional materials helpful to both teachers and students. First, instructors will find a number of sample syllabi for introductory courses in queer studies, for both one-semester and one-quarter courses. There are also sample syllabi to demonstrate how to use the text in a more supplementary way for a variety of courses such as Sexuality Studies and Queer Identity. Finally, there are sample syllabi that demonstrate how to emphasize different aspects of the book in various courses. For example, some teachers may want to focus very closely on foundational issues dealing with language and the spectrum of identities and experiences that fall under the heading queer. For them, Parts I and II may be where they spend most of the course.

In addition, the Instructor's Resources features twenty-five to thirty Power-Point slides for each chapter, along with teaching tips and discussion questions tied to the book's "Spotlight" and "Issues for Investigation" sections to help review and highlight central concepts and terms. Tips for making the most of the suggested readings and viewings are also provided for each chapter. Additionally, instructors will find a test bank for those who wish to use content and application exams to measure student learning outcomes. Questions are provided in a variety of formats, including true-false, multiple choice, definitions, and short answer. Essay questions that may be of most use for teachers who wish to give unit or midterm and final exams are also provided. The book's bold-faced key terms along with hotlinks to their definitions, detailed chapter outlines and summaries, and learning objectives are provided for students to use when studying for tests. The resources are available to confirmed adopters. To request the resources, contact coursematerials@columbiauniversitypress.com or bcohen@harringtonparkpress.com.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book begins with a brief introduction, setting both the binary-critical philosophy of the text and the concept of queering as an active verb that students will be asked to engage in throughout the course (and which defines each of the succeeding parts of the textbook proper). Part I focuses on issues of language, ranging from the basic terms used to classify or name nonheteronormative people and experience, to larger units of speech and writing, drawing on work on dialects and slang as well as on speech act theory. Part II is devoted to issues of identity, in terms both of identity formation and of identity intersections (and the condition of intersectionality, which is critical to much of contemporary identity studies in general). This part begins with a consideration of the meaning of the nature of “desire” as a way of grounding what has been central to much of the field of queer studies, that is, variations of same-sex attraction. From there, the chapters in Part II look at various traditional categories of queerness in sexuality studies, including trans and intersex identities. The design of Part II is intended to continually remind and challenge the students to recognize that no single category of identity is extricable from other nodes of identity, and that within any nameable category, there is a wide range of experiences and variations.

Part III examines queerness in contexts ranging from the most formative in students’ lives (school) to those that are more global (such as spirituality and citizenship). There is a logic in the arrangement of chapters, as they move from earliest forms of social context to those that students may enter as they become adults.

Part IV, “Queering Imagination,” deals in the most sustained way with issues of representation and creativity, considering such issues as camp, activist art, and mainstream media works, as well as moving students to “imagining” queer utopias, an issue that has been of concern in recent years to scholars and artists alike. This is followed by a brief conclusion, which serves more as a challenge and call to action for students—an encouragement to continue their study of queer life and experiences at the end of the class.

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