Gender, Science and Technology in the Modern World
Hist 628 - Spring 2015

Professor Alison Lefkovitz
Email: alison.lefkovitz@njit.edu
Class time: Tuesday, 5:30-8:10 pm
Class room: Conklin Hall 338
Office hours: MR 4:00-5:30 and by appointment
Office hours location: Cullimore Hall 327

Historians have repeatedly reminded us that science is not value-neutral. Instead it inevitably reflects the context in which scientists work. This course examines the history of science with particular attention to the critical insights of historians of gender and sexuality. We will consider not only how and why women were marginalized in scientific and technological fields, but also the broader relationship between science and structures of gendered power. Finally we will consider how science helped create and recreate our gender and sexual identities. The course is primarily US-based. Readings will focus on birth control, Darwin, household technology, eugenics, the nature of sexual desire, scientific management, ecofeminism, and other topics.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance, careful reading of the assigned texts, and active participation. I expect thoughtful analysis of the texts assigned and of your peers’ comments. (200 points)

2. Weekly response papers. These should be 1-2 page reflections on the assigned reading. You can evaluate the reading either on its own terms or in comparison with other readings. These responses are due the Monday night (by 8 pm) before we will discuss that reading. They are due every week except the week you sign up for the book review. (200 points)

3. Book review. 5 pages. You will sign up to write a book review of one of the assigned readings. The book review is due the Monday night (by 8 pm) before we will discuss that reading. The review should summarize the arguments and main bodies of evidence from the book, highlight its contributions, and identify its largest flaws. You should also identify the audience that the book will appeal to most. Each component of the review is required even if each section is not given equal weight. (200 points) You will also present the reading to the class on that day. Presentation will include all of the components of your review and an opening question. (100 points).

4. Final Historiographical Essay. 15-20 pages. You should select one of the books from the course (it can be the book you wrote the review on) and place it in its historiographical context using at least 2 books not assigned in class. (300 points)

Required Readings

Most short readings will be available on Blackboard. The following required texts will be available at NJ Books for purchase. They are also available on reserve at Dana library:


1. Introduction
   Tuesday, January 20

2. Women as Practitioners and Patients
   Tuesday, January 27
   * Laurel Thatcher Ullrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812.*

3. Slavery and Sexuality
   Tuesday, February 3
   * Marie Jenkins Schwarz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South.*

4. The Theory of Gender Difference in the Age of Darwin
   Tuesday, February 10
   * Kimberly Hamlin, *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women’s Rights in Gilded Age America.*
5. Victorian Notions of Sex

6. The Rise of the Homosexual
Tuesday, February 17

7. Technology, Progress, and Gender
Tuesday, February 24
* Ruth Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave.*

8. The Fetus
Tuesday, March 3
* Sarah Dubow *Ourselves Unborn: A History of the Fetus in Modern America.*

9. Eugenics
Tuesday, March 24

10. Gender and the Environment
Tuesday, March 31

11. Transsexuality
Tuesday, April 7

12. Gender during the Second Wave
Tuesday, April 14
* Wendy Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women’s Health in the Second Wave.*
13. The Specter of AIDS
Tuesday, April 21
* Stephen Epstein, Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge.

14. Presentations
Tuesday, April 28