

Judaism and Gender

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Fridays, 1:30-4:00

Gest 102

Description

In this course we will use a feminist critical method to understand how gender has defined Jewish civilization from the biblical era to the present. We will do close readings of Jewish texts from ancient to contemporary times to see how women and men are viewed in them. We will also study the Jewish feminist movement in the twentieth century and assess the changes it has brought to Jewish life.

Readings

The following readings are required for purchase:

A-1 Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism

A-2 Rachel Biale, Women and Jewish Law

A-3 Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, ed. People of the Body

A-4 Judith Kates and Gail Reimer, Reading Ruth

A-5 Miriam Peskowitz, Spinning Fantasies

A-6 Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai

A-7 The Hebrew Bible

A-8 Debra Kaufman, Rachel's Daughters

The following readings are recommended for purchase:

B-1 Rebecca Alpert, Like Bread on the Seder Plate

B-2 Laura Levitt, Jews and Feminism

B-3 Laura Levitt and Miriam Peskowitz, eds. Judaism Since Gender

B-4 Catherine Wessinger, Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership

The following books will be available on reserve and in bulk pack:

C-1 Harry Brod, ed. A Mensch Among Men

C-2 Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, The Savage in Judaism

C-3 Tikva Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddess

C-4 Rivka Haut, Daughters of the King

C-5 Elizabeth Koltun, ed. The Jewish Woman

C-6 Debra Orenstein and Jane Litman, eds. Lifecycles II

C-7 Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ, eds. Womanspirit Rising

The following books are on reserve and are for reference only:

D-1 Simone Zelitch, Louisa

D-2 Elana Dykewoman, Beyond the Pale

D-4 Marcia Falk, A Book of Blessings

D-5 Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore, eds. Jewish Women in America

D-6 Debra Orenstein, ed. Lifecycles I

Requirements

Attendance is expected at every class session. Bring to class a **one page typed response to the readings** for every session. The response should include what you understand as the main points or arguments that these authors address, questions for discussion, and issues raised in the readings for which you need clarification. (40% of grade)

Synagogue visits. During the semester, we will arrange for group or individual trips to a synagogue to observe a religious service. You will write a 2-3-page report of your observations about gender roles that will be due **April 27** and will be the focus of our discussion in class. (10% of grade)

Final Project. Tell the story of a Jewish woman. You may write a biography (or autobiography), present a work of fiction, create a midrash based on the life of a woman in ancient times, or find another mode of expression for this project. Your project should apply the ideas and theories that you have learned in the course to the life of a particular individual. On **March 9** you will hand-in a one-page prospectus. We will then meet (in person, by phone or by e-mail) to discuss your plans. You will give a 15-minute in-class presentation on your topic that will be scheduled for the weeks beginning March 23. A 10-15 page (or equivalent) completed work will be due at the end of finals week. (50% of grade)

Course schedule

January 26: Introduction

Film: "Half the Kingdom"

Click stories

February 2: Asking the "right" question: History, Midrash and Halakhah

Readings:

1. Plaskow, "Torah: Reshaping Jewish Memory" **A-6, 25-74**
2. Peskowitz, "Engendering Jewish Religious History" **B-3, 17-39**
3. Alpert, "On Seams and Seamlessness" **B-3, 109-112**
4. Adler, "Here Comes Skotsl: Renewing Halakah" **A-1, 21-59**

February 9: Defining Gender, “Male and Female”

Film: “Yentl”

Readings:

1. Lefkowitz, “Coats and Tales: Joseph Stories and Myths of Jewish Masculinity” **C-1, 19-29**
2. Boyarin, “Justify My Love” **B-3, 131-137**
3. Boyarin, “The Great Fat Massacre” **A-3, 69-99**

February 16: [Hetero]sexuality

Readings:

1. Genesis 1-3 and Song of Songs **A-7**
2. Plaskow, “Toward a New Theology of Sexuality” **A-6, 170-210**
3. Adler, “Justice and Peace Shall Kiss” **A-1, 105-167**
4. Biale, “Sexuality and Marital Relations” **A-2, 121-146**
5. Anderson, “The Garden of Eden and Sexuality in Early Judaism” **A-3, 47-68**

February 23: Marriage

Film: “Chicks in White Satin”

Readings:

1. Biale, “Marriage, Divorce and the Agunah” **A-2, 44-101**
2. Adler, “Brit Ahuvim” **A-1, 169-208**
3. Levitt, “Jewish Women at Home” **B-2, 29-107**

March 2: Our Bodies, Ourselves: Images and Stereotypes

Guest Lecturer: Lori Lefkowitz, Director, Kolot: Jewish Women’s and Gender Studies, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Readings:

1. Genesis 20-22, Judges 19 and the Book of Esther **A-7**
2. Prell, “Why Jewish Princesses Don’t Sweat” **A-3, 329-360**
3. Friedman, “Shattered and Whole” **C-6, 175-180**

March 9: To be, or not to be a Mother [One page proposal for final project due today]

Readings:

1. Biale, “Procreation and Conception and Abortion” **A-2, 198-238**
2. Orenstein, “Beginnings” **D-6, 5-82 (selections)**
3. Kaufman, **A-8, 86-112**

March 23: Across the Generations and Issues of Aging [Final project presentations begin today]

Note: Class will meet at Temple University.

Film: "Complaints of A Dutiful Daughter"

Readings:

1. The Book of Ruth **A-4**
2. Selections from Kates and Reimer **A-4**: Reimer (97-105), Kerber (125-130), Hirsh (309-315), Feld (166-181)
3. Zelitch, **D-1**

March 30: Women as Ritual Experts: Niddah

Readings:

1. Adler, "Tumah and Taharah" **C-5, 63-71**
2. Adler, "In Your Blood, Live" **C-6, 197-206**
3. Biale, "Niddah" **A-2, 147-174**
4. Eilberg-Schwartz, "Menstrual Blood, Semen and Discharge" **C-2, 177-194**
5. Waserfall, "Menstruation and Identity" **A-3, 309-328**
6. Weissler, "Mitzvot Built into the Body" **A-3, 101-116**
7. Kaufman, **A-8, 67-85**

April 6: Jewish Lesbian Perspectives

Readings:

1. Biale, **A-2, 192-197**
2. Alpert, **B-1, 1-52**
3. Dykewoman, **D-2**

April 13: Women and Orthodoxy

Film: "Price Above Rubies"

Readings:

1. Sered, "The Synagogue as a Sacred Space" **C-4, 205-216**
2. Kaufman, **A-8, 1-14, 113-167, (36-66 optional)**
3. Haut, "Women's Prayer Groups" **C-4, 135-157**

April 20: Women and Work in the Ancient World: weavers

Reading: Peskowitz, **A-5 (whole book)**

April 27: Women and Work in Contemporary America: rabbis [Synagogue assignment due today]

Guest panel: area rabbis

Reading: Wessinger, **B-4, 271-346**

May 4: Thinking about God and the Goddess

Readings:

1. Plaskow, "Reimagining the Unimaginable" **A-6, 121-169**
2. Frymer-Kensky, "Our Father and Our Mother" **C-3, 162-167**
3. Gross, "Female God-Language in a Jewish Context" **C-7, 167-173**
4. Falk, "Book of Blessings" **D-4**

Final project due: Friday, May 11 at noon