NEJS 115b: Gender, Sexuality, and the Bible
Spring 2017
M, W, Th 1:00-1:50 PM
Professor Jacqueline Vayntrub

1. Course Overview
What does the Bible have to say about gender, sex, and relationships? What do we think the Bible says (or should say), and what does it actually say? In this course, we will look at how the Hebrew Bible—a collection of texts written by multiple authors, with multiple (and conflicting) literary and ideological aims, in multiple historical periods—variously depict gender, relationships and social values. The stories and poems we will read in this course are among the most disturbing and difficult in the biblical tradition. Some of these texts have been used to prescribe ideas of gender, sexuality, and family in contemporary religious communities and generally in the West. Some of these stories and poems have also been seen as a challenge to an idea of the Bible as a holy text. In this class we will learn how to read the biblical texts through the lens of the social world of its ancient authors. We will also learn about the history of how these texts have been received in the West, how particular readings have shaped ideas of gender and sexuality, and how we can evaluate these interpretations through critical theory.

2. Course Responsibilities and Grading
Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

The grade for this class will be based on the following percentages:
- **20% of your total grade:** Your continuous, active, and thoughtful participation in class discussion and reflection upon the readings.
- **40% of your total grade:** A midterm exam on March 15, for which you will be amply prepared by a midterm study guide and in-class midterm review session.
- **40% of your total grade:** A final written project that synthesizes the knowledge and skills acquired in this course, to be turned in a week after the last day of the course, 10-12 double spaced pages. You will have a choice of type of project, see below.

*Participation (20% of your total grade—including 5 reflection assignments)*
Come to class ready to listen, participate, and engage thoughtfully with the course material and with other members of the class. If you need to be absent, please inform me ahead of time. Excused absences, outside of religious observance, require a doctor’s note.

Most Thursdays are discussion days. These are the days we process the lectures and readings we engaged earlier in the week together. A number of these sessions will be led by the course assistant, Sari Fein.

Five times in the course you will be required to post on LATTE a 300-400 word reflection assignment on the readings and lectures, specifically responding to a question prompt. These reflections are not evaluated but count towards your participation grade.
How to write a reflection. Think of reflections as (intelligent, well-written) journal entries that you would be comfortable sharing with the class, sometimes they are used to structure discussions (indicate in your reflection if you would like that your words not be shared in class). Reflections are written demonstrations of how you are processing the lectures and readings of the course. In your reflection, you must respond to the question prompt and cite that week’s readings in your response.

*Midterm Exam (40% of your total grade)
The midterm is scheduled for Wednesday, March 15. The exam will cover all the material up to Week 7 of the course. You will receive a midterm study guide a week before the exam, which will tell you the format of the exam, summarize what you need to know, and will give examples of essay questions. There will be a review session for the exam on Monday, March 13.

*Final Project (40% of your total grade)

Option 1: The Bible in the Public Square
Write an 10-12 page, double spaced paper. In this paper you will identify a gender or sexuality issue in American political discourse or popular culture that specifically engages an interpretation of the biblical text. Your assignment is to critically evaluate the interpretation using the readings and discussions in this course.

Option 2: A Time Travelers’ Field Guide to Gender and Sexuality in Ancient Israel
A time traveling device has been invented and you have been recruited to contribute to a field guide for time travelers on Gender and Sexuality in Ancient Israel. Select one topic we have covered in class (for example, “Women and Land Inheritance”) and go further in depth, presenting a guide to ancient Israelite literary, social, and legal values based on a critical reading of relevant biblical texts and the scholarship we have read in the course. 10-12 pages, double spaced.

3. Safe Zone
This course covers topics that may be uncomfortable. We will remember to maintain respect and sensitivity when engaging in classroom discussions. Lectures, reading material, and discussions that deal with sexual violence are indicated in the syllabus with trigger warnings so that students who are sensitive to these topics may prepare themselves. Others may be unsettled by encountering different readings or interpretations of texts central to their religious traditions. Your professor and your course assistant are here to guide you through these issues as you reflect upon them. Our readings and discussions may raise questions you had not thought about before or may relate to issues in your life. Your instructors in this course have an open door policy and we are here to talk about the course and your education as it relates to gender identity, sexual orientation, harassment, and discrimination in a manner that respects you as a member of this learning community.
4. Class Policies

Attendance and participation are a key part of the learning experience in this class. Your participation and attendance grade is based on your attendance in all classes (you are permitted one unexcused absence, beyond that absences without a doctor’s note or otherwise excused by the instructors will affect your grade). Your preparation and participation means having read the assigned reading and making an effort to understand the ideas in these readings, being prepared to raise meaningful questions about the readings, and being willing to share your ideas and respond respectfully to the contributions of other students in the class.

Absence from exams: The midterm exam is scheduled for March 15, 2017. If you have an excused conflict with this exam date, notify me as soon as possible. I will allow in these cases a makeup midterm exam. An excused conflict is defined as a) an excused absence from me, obtained within the first two weeks of the course; b) an emergency or sudden illness. In the case of sudden illness, I expect a note from the health center or a physician. In the case of a different type of emergency, a makeup midterm exam is at my discretion. Absence from the final exam is a matter handled by the registrar’s office.

Laptops and Cellphones: Use of laptops and cellphones are not permitted in the class at any time.

Academic Honesty: You are each responsible for your own work. You will be responsible for the content and quality of your own individual assignments. If you produce and submit work that is not your own, you will have violated Brandeis University’s policies on academic integrity. You are responsible for making yourself familiar with and following the University’s policies on academic integrity (http://www.brandeis.edu/studentslife/sdc/ai). Allegations of violations of this policy will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for potential referral to the Student Judicial System. If sanctioned, you could be failed from the course and suspended from the University.

Special Accommodations: If you are a student with an officially documented disability at Brandeis and wish to have a reasonable accommodation in this class, you should contact the instructors immediately.

5. Contacting the instructors

We will make an effort to answer emails in a timely manner, but do not expect an answer to emails between the hours of 7pm and 8am.

For logistical questions about the course, reporting absences, or matters relating to accessing the readings, please email the course assistant, Sari Fein, sfein@brandeis.edu, Lown 115 Cube 2. For other issues not covered by the above, contact Professor Vayntrub, vayntrub@brandeis.edu, Lown 311.

Office Hours (and Tea Time Wednesdays)
Please come by at our posted office hours or make an appointment to meet. Professor Vayntrub holds tea time office hours on Wednesdays 11-12:30pm. Come by and have a coffee or tea and chat.
Course Readings
You must purchase three books for this course (the name used in the reading assignments are listed in **bold**)


*The remainder of the course readings are posted online on LATTE.*

6. Course Schedule

**Week 1.**

**Why this Course Matters**

Wednesday, January 18 **Overview**

**Topic:** Ancient Texts and Religious Canons in Contemporary Life

**Reading due:** None; Syllabus (online)

**Online:** Explore [http://www.bibleodyssey.org](http://www.bibleodyssey.org)

Thursday, January 19 **Discussion**

**Topic:** Bible as Anthology and its Ancient Context

**Reading:**
1. Segal, “Hebrew Scriptures and their Structure” (9 pp.; online)
2. Coogan, “What is the Old Testament” (11pp.; online)

**Online:** Bible Odyssey, Brennan, “How was the Bible Written and Transmitted”

**Reflection Assignment 1:**
Tell us about yourself, your background with the course material (if any), and your motivations for taking this course. Complete assignment on LATTE.

**Week 2.**

**What can we Know about Gender and Sexuality in Ancient Israel?**

Monday, January 23 **Overview**

**Topic:** Construction of Gender and Sexuality in Antiquity

**Reading:**
2. Lipka, “Determining the Construction of Sexuality in Ancient Israel,” *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible*, 1-17 (17 pp.; online)

Wednesday, January 25 **Close Reading**

**Topic:** Gender and Creation Stories

**Close Reading:**
1. Genesis 1-3 (**JSB**)
2. Pardes, “Creation According to Eve,” *Countertraditions* (14 pp.; online)
Think about: How do the two creation stories in Genesis (1-2:4a; 2:4b-3:24) differently construct gender in the creation of humanity? How are humans understood to function within their world in these two stories? What is their relationship to God?

Thursday, January 26 Discussion Led by Fein
Topic: Theorizing Gender
Reading:
1. Fausto-Sterling, Sexing the Body, 1-44 (online)

Online:
1. Foucault, History of Sexuality “Explained with Hipsters”
2. Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Gender, “Explained with Cats”

Discussion questions:
What kind of challenges do you think you personally, and we collectively as a culture bring to reading about gender and relationships in the Bible? How can theorizing gender and sexuality (as in Fausto-Sterling) reorient our questions and give us new ways to answer them?

Week 3. Constructing Gender Roles

Monday, January 30 Overview
Topic: “Man and Wife”
Reading:
1. Coogan 19-60.

Wednesday, February 1 Close Reading
Topic: Man and Wife, cont.
Close Reading:
1. Job 1-2 (JSB)
2. Prov 31:10-31 (JSB)

Thursday, February 2 Discussion
Topic: Adam’s Rib and Source of Sin
Reading:
1. Trible, “Eve and Adam” (online)
2. Pardes, “Chapter 2: Creation According to Eve,” Counter Traditions in the Bible (online)

Reflection Assignment 2: How do these two readings differently approach the creation of humanity and genders in Genesis 1-3?
Week 4.
The Real Housewives of Ancient Israel

Monday, February 6  Overview
   Topic: Mothers of Israel
   Reading:
      1. Coogan 61-98
      2. Meyers, “Women and the Domestic Economy of Early Israel” (Bach 33-41)

Wednesday, February 8 Close Reading
   Topic: Mothers of Israel, cont.
   Reading:
      1. Genesis 12; 17; 20; 24 (JSB)
      2. 1 Sam 1:1-2:11 (JSB)

Thursday, February 9 Discussion
   Topic: Negotiating Marriage and ‘Sister’ Wives
   Reading:
      1. Genesis 29-35 (JSB)
   Discussion: From the readings from Genesis this week and the readings from Meyers and Fuchs, how were the social roles of men and women differently depicted by the biblical authors? Choose one episode from Genesis 29-35 to discuss in detail. Be ready to share your reading with the class.

Week 5.
Gender, Power, and ‘Family Values’

Monday, February 13 Overview
   Topic: Relationships
   Reading:
      1. Frymer-Kensky, “Virginity in the Bible,” in Gender and Law 79-96 (online)
      2. Matthews, “Honor and Shame in Gender-Related Legal Situations in the Hebrew Bible,” Gender and Law 97-112 (online)

Wednesday, February 15 Close Reading
   Topic: Relationships, cont.
   Reading:
      1. Genesis 34 *trigger warning: rape* (JSB)
      2. Exodus 22:15-16 (JSB)
Thursday, February 16 **Discussion Led by Fein**

**Topic:** What is ‘Biblical Marriage’?

**Reading:**
1. Fuchs, “The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible” (online)
2. Chapman, “The House of the Mother (bet ’em),” *House of the Mother*, (25 pp; online)

**Discussion:** How do the biblical texts we have read so far understand marriage and the role of women in society? What kind of power do women have in these texts, and what kind of power do men have over women? Do you think Coogan gives an accurate depiction?

*no class February 20-24*

**Week 6. Straying and Being Led Astray**

Monday, February 27 **Overview and Close Reading**

**Topic:** Women Who Stray

**Reading:**
1. Numbers 5 (*JSB*)
2. Deuteronomy 22, 23:1, 25 (*JSB*)

Wednesday, March 1 **Overview and Close Reading**

**Topic:** Men Led Astray

**Reading:**
1. 2 Samuel 11-12:25 (*JSB*)
2. Proverbs 7 (*JSB*)

Thursday, March 2 **Discussion Led by Fein**

**Reading:**
*optional* *Bach* 461-517 (a series of articles on Numbers 5:11-31)

**Discussion:** What are the different ways sex outside the boundaries of marriage are conceived of in these texts? What specifically is the role of the woman in Numbers 5 and Proverbs 7 in comparison to 2 Samuel 11-12:25. Be ready with examples from the texts.
Week 7.
‘Forbidden’ Women and their Offspring

Monday, March 6 Overview

**Topic:** Translating Prostitution

**Reading:**
1. Vayntrub, “Sexy Sunday School: Naughty Bible Translation” ([online](#))
2. Coogan 150-160

Wednesday, March 8 Close Reading

**Topic:** “Fornication” and “Harlots”

**Reading:**
1. Genesis 38 ([JSB](#))
2. Judges 11:1-3 ([JSB](#))
3. Judges 16:1-3 ([JSB](#))
4. 1 Kings 3:16-28 ([JSB](#))

Thursday, March 9 Discussion

**Topic:** Prostitution in Narrative

**Reading:**

**Reflection Assignment 3:** How is prostitution depicted in biblical texts? What is the status of their offspring? What role do prostitutes (as characters) play in narratives, do they serve any specific purpose in any of them (draw on the biblical texts themselves)? Compare Bird’s arguments with those of Assante’s.

Week 8.
Midterm Week + Gendered Language (Guest Lecture)

Monday, March 13

**Midterm Review Session**

Wednesday, March 15

**Midterm Exam**

Thursday, March 16 **Guest Lecture:** Sari Fein (PhD student, Brandeis)

**Topic:** “Speech and Sex, Safety and Security: Gendered Language in the Patriarchal World of the Bible”

**Reading:**
1. 2 Samuel 13 (*trigger warning: rape*) ([JSB](#))
2. Judges 19 (*trigger warning: rape*) ([JSB](#))
3. Bal, “A Body of Writing: Judges 19” ([online](#))
Week 9.
Levirate Marriage and Saving the Family

Monday, March 20 Overview
Topic: Levirate Marriage
Reading:
1. Deut 25:5-7 (JSB)
2. Genesis 38 (JSB)
3. Coogan 108-110
4. Brichto, “Kin, Cult, Land, and the Afterlife” 1-54 (online)

Wednesday, March 22 Film: Ani Ohev Otah Roza

Thursday, March 23 End of film and discussion
Topic: Levirate Marriage and Saving the Family

Reflection Assignment 4: Through the lens of the Brichto reading, how might we understand Tamar’s actions with her father-in-law Judah? What might she be trying to accomplish? Give specific examples from the readings this week to support your point.

Week 10.
“Foreign Women” and Saving the Family

Monday, March 27 Overview
Topic: Ruth
Reading:
1. Ruth (whole book, JSB)
2. Greenstein, “Reading Strategies and the Book of Ruth,” 211-223 (Bach)

Wednesday, March 29 Close Reading
Topic: Inside the Family/Outside the Family Ruth vs. Tamar vs. Tamar
Reading:
1. Genesis 38 (JSB)
2. 2 Samuel 13 (JSB)

Thursday, March 30 Discussion
Topic: The Foreign/Alien Woman
Reading:
1. Numbers 25 (JSB)
2. 1 Kings 11 (JSB)
3. 1 Kings 21 (JSB)
4. 2 Kings 9 (JSB)
5. Ezra 9-10 (JSB)
6. Nehemiah 13 (JSB)
Discussion: In these texts, as in Ruth, what are the different depictions of women as familiar and as other? Try to keep notes to specific different views in your reading and bring them to the discussion.
Week 11.
Woman as Other and Unstable Masculinity

Monday, April 3 Close Reading and Discussion
   Topic: Lady Wisdom and the Demonic Feminine
   Reading:
   1. Proverbs 1-9 (JSB)
   3. White-Crawford, “Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly at Qumran” (online)

Wednesday, April 5 Discussion
   Topic: Masculinity and Prophecy
   Reading:
   1. Graybill, Are We Not Men? (selection; online) get chapter

Thursday, April 6 Guest Lecture: Esther Brownsmith (PhD student, Brandeis)
   Topic: “The Concubine in the Refrigerator: Consumption and Objectification in Judges 19” *trigger warning: sexual violence*
   Reading:
   1. Judges 19 (JSB)
   2. Genesis 19 (JSB)

no class April 10-14

Week 12.
Control, Violence, and Desire

Monday, April 17 Overview and Close Reading
   Topic: Control and Violence
   Reading:
   1. Judges 21 (JSB)

Wednesday, April 19 Close Reading
*Brandeis Monday*
   Topic: Parental Education, Patriarchal Control, and Coming of age
   Reading:
   1. Proverbs 31:1-9 (JSB)
   2. Judges 11 (JSB)
   3. Genesis 34 (JSB)
   4. Day, “Chapter 5: From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter,” in Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel 58-74 (online)
Thursday, April 20  
**Discussion Led by Fein**

**Topic:** Desire  
**Reading:**  
1. Song of Songs-whole book *(JSB)*  
2. Carr, “Gender and the Shaping of Desire in the Song of Songs,” *(online)*  

**Reflection Assignment 5:** How does the relationship between the two speakers in Song of Songs differently sketch out sexuality than the texts of Judges 11 (Jephtah’s Daughter), 2 Samuel 13 (Tamar), and Genesis 34 (Dina)?

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**Week 13.**

**Same Sex Relationships**

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Monday, April 24  
**Overview**

**Topic:** Same Sex Relationships in Law and Narrative  
**Reading:**  
1. Leviticus 17:10-22:33 *(JSB)*  
2. Olyan, “And with a Male you Shall not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman: On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13” *(online)*

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Wednesday, April 26  
**Guest Lecture: Idan Dershowitz (postdoctoral fellow, Harvard)**

**Topic:** Same-Sex Intercourse in Biblical and Pre-Biblical Law

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Thursday, April 27  
**Discussion**

**Topic:** Same Sex Love in Narrative: David and Jonathan / Gilgamesh and Enkidu  
**Reading:**  
1. Coogan 117-140  

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**Week 14.**

**Reading Gender and Sexuality in Our Bible**

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Monday, May 3  
**Topic:** Biblical Scholarship and Interpreting Scripture  
**Reading:**  
1. Trible, “Depatriarchalizing Biblical Interpretation” *(online)*  
2. Junior, “Feminist Biblical Interpretation” and “Womanist Biblical Interpretation,” in *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (76-121; online)