

ENG 6016 Theories of Gender, Sexuality, and Sexual Difference

Spring 2026



Since the early twentieth century, first with psychoanalysis and later with feminist theory, sexuality has been disentangled from reproductive biology and from the primacy of genitality. Recast in terms of sexual drives and the libidinal economy, sex has come to signify something transversal – cutting across the entire spectrum of human experience and shaping every dimension of the body, pleasure, and desire. For Alenka Zupančič and the Freudo-Lacanian tradition, sex is above all a concept that names a persistent contradiction at the heart of reality. For Luce Irigaray and second-wave feminism, sexual difference is not simply the biological or social distinction between “man” and “woman,” but the fundamental and irreducible alterity between two sexes that cannot be collapsed into sameness. By contrast, Judith Butler and many feminist thinkers of recent decades have defined gender not as a fixed identity or natural attribute, but as something performed, enacted, and continually reiterated through social practices.

This seminar investigates sex, gender, and sexual difference through the combined perspectives of psychoanalysis and feminist theory. The course will be discussion-based, with each session opening with a 30-40-minute lecture by the instructor followed by collective discussion. Students will be expected to read approximately 100–120 pages per week, introduce the assigned readings once during the semester, and complete a final paper of 15–18 pages, which may take the form of a draft scholarly article, a conference presentation, or an extended book review.

Instructor Name: Pietro Bianchi

Course meeting times: W Period 9-11 (4:05 PM – 7:05 PM) Keene-Flint Hall 111

Office Hours: Tuesday (10:00 – 12:00) or by appointment at Turlington 4342 or on Zoom (personal ID: 561 851 9876). (NB: Zoom appointments have to be scheduled in advance by email, even during office hours).

Course website: elearning.ufl.edu

Instructor Email: pietrobianchi@ufl.edu

Structure of the Course

As a general structure, each seminar session will be organized as follows. At the beginning of class, I will offer a 30–40 minute introduction to the topic of the day. This will be followed by a short intervention (10–15 minutes) by one or two students responsible for introducing the assigned reading. Their role is to open the discussion by reflecting on the texts and identifying key questions, problems, or themes that would benefit from further collective analysis.

This intervention should **not** take the form of a formal conference-style presentation and does **not** need to be read aloud. Rather, it should consist of a thoughtful and engaged reflection on the assigned material, aimed at fostering a shared conversation. I cannot emphasize enough that this is intended to be *informal in style*, though certainly not lacking in precision, rigor, or clarity. The schedule for these interventions will be determined during the first session of the seminar.

After a 10-minute break, the remainder of the class will be devoted to open discussion. All participants are expected to actively contribute by sharing questions, comments, and reflections on the readings and by engaging with one another's ideas.

Attendance and Participation

Participation in a graduate seminar is essential. A seminar is not a traditional, top-down class in which knowledge is simply delivered and work is carried out individually; rather, it is a collective endeavor grounded in shared reading, discussion, and critical exchange. For this reason, participation is not optional. Even when you are not responsible for introducing the readings, actively contributing your questions, reflections, and insights is a fundamental part of the work of the seminar.

Attendance is equally crucial, and you are expected to make every effort to attend all class meetings. That said, I recognize that unforeseen circumstances can arise. One absence due to extraordinary circumstances will not result in any penalty. Any additional unexcused absence

will lead to a reduction of the final grade. Five or more absences will result in failure of the course.

Course Requirement and Grade Distribution

The requirements for this course fall under three categories:

In-class Presentation of the Reading (15%) Once in the semester you will be required to open the discussion for the chosen texts or film of the day (15 minutes)

Weekly Posts on Canvas (15%) Every week you will be asked to post on Canvas a short reflection and/or a few questions (a couple of paragraph and not more than a page!) regarding the readings assigned for the day. The deadline for this assignment is **Tuesday at midnight**.

Final Paper (70%) Your final seminar paper (15-20 pages) will be due Monday, **May 1** at noon.

Schedule of classes

SECTION I: PSYCHOANALYSIS

Jan 14

Introduction to the course: What is Sex?

Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* (Introduction + Ch. 1, 2 and 3)

Jan 21

Psychoanalysis (I) Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (excerpts)

Sigmund Freud, *The Infantile Genital Organization*

Sigmund Freud, *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex*

Sigmund Freud, *Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes*

Jan 28

Psychoanalysis (II) Jean Laplanche

Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (excerpts)

Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (excerpts)

(film) *Nymphomaniac* (2013, Lars von Trier)

SECTION II: SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Feb 4

Simone De Beauvoir

Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (excerpts)
Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (excerpts)
(film) *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975, Chantal Akerman)

Feb 11

Feminism of Sexual Difference (I)

Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (ch: “This Sex Which Is Not One”; “When Our Lips Speak Together”)
Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*
Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (excerpts)
(film) *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973, Ingmar Bergman)

Feb 18

Feminism of Sexual Difference (II)

Julia Kristeva, *Women’s Time*
Julia Kristeva, *Stabat Mater*
Julia Kristeva, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Introduction + Ch. 1)
Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (excerpts)

Feb 25

Feminism of Sexual Difference (III) Carla Lonzi: Refusal, Separatism, Self-Awareness

Carla Lonzi, *Let’s Spit on Hegel*
Carla Lonzi, *Shut Up, or Rather, Speak: Diary of a Feminist*
Carla Lonzi, *Itinerary of Reflection*
Carla Lonzi, *Now You Can Go: A Dialogue with Pietro Consagra*
Jamila H. Mascot, *Leaving and Living*
(film) *The Art of Joy* (2025, Valeria Golino, Nicolangelo Gelormini)

SECTION III: BEYOND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE: PERFORMATIVITY, MAKING KIN AND NEGATIVITY

Mar 4

Beyond Sexual Difference: Performativity, Making Kin, and Negativity (I)

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (“The Repressive Hypothesis” “Scientia Sexualis”)
Monique Wittig “One Is Not Born a Woman”
Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind* (excerpts)

Mar 11

Beyond Sexual Difference: Performativity, Making Kin, and Negativity (II)

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Performativity Against Sexual Difference*

Mar 25

Beyond Sexual Difference: Performativity, Making Kin, and Negativity (III)

Donna J. Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*

Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (Introduction + “Playing String Figures with Companion Species”, “Making Kin”)

Apr 1

Beyond Sexual Difference: Making Kin, Making Kin, and Negativity (IV)

Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory And The Death Drive* (excerpts)

Lorenzo Bernini, *Queer Theories: An Introduction: From Mario Mieli to the Antisocial Turn* (excerpts)

SECTION IV: THE REAL OF SEX

Apr 8

“Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel”: Sexual Difference and Psychoanalysis Today (I) - Joan Copjec

Joan Copjec, *Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason*

Joan Copjec, *The Sexual Compact*

Apr 15

“Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel”: Sexual Difference and Psychoanalysis Today (II) - Slavoj Žižek

Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing* (excerpts)

Slavoj Žižek, *The Incontinence of the Void* (excerpts)

(film) *The Piano Teacher* (2001, Michael Haneke)

Apr 22

Final discussion