

FEMALE PLEASURE: FEMINISM & THE SEXOLOGICAL TRADITION

GNDR_ST 321

FALL
2023



In this course we will read key sexological texts, each of which articulates a position on female pleasure as part of a more comprehensive theory of female (& male) sexualities, including work by Havelock Ellis (1890s-1920s), Sigmund Freud (1905-1930s), Alfred Kinsey (1953) Masters & Johnson (1966), Shere Hite (1976) and the Berman sisters (2000s). We will read these alongside contemporaneous feminist statements, position papers, and manifestos that articulate (or link) female pleasure to explicitly feminist political positions and liberation projects, such as Emma Goldman's treatises on 'free love' (1911), Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" (1970), and Rubin's "Thinking Sex" (1984). Our goal will be threefold. We will work to distinguish between multiple theories on the 'nature' of female pleasure and the assumptions about gender and sexuality that inform each. Feminist statements on female pleasure will aid us in assessing the political stakes and effects of contemporaneous scientific theories of female sexuality as we consider how particular conceptions of "good sex" get hitched to visions of "liberation." We will consider these positions on female pleasure in their historical context in relation to several trajectories: the durability of some formulations and the relative evanescence of others, the unsettled rapport between sexological and feminist projects, and ongoing debates over the "nature" of sexuality itself.

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TTh 11-12:20pm
Kresge 2-410