

Description:

My class will be called *Internet and Queer Identity*. The goal for this class will be to use the online MOGAI and asexual communities to show how an online space and the discourse that came along with it allowed young queer people on the internet to shape their identities and grow into the young adult queer people of today. Further, we will look at in person spaces today, to see how they have been changed by years of development in an online space. In order to accomplish these objectives, the course will start looking at the rise of the online asexual and MOGAI communities, considering in the process who was in them, why they may have felt welcomed there, and what potential benefits they could have gained. We will then examine what happens when those communities go bad (as they often did) and the discourse becomes more harmful than productive, looking at what effects this may have on young people who are attempting to become more confident or comfortable in their identities. Finally, the course will become more big picture. We will look at how these online narratives translate into in person spaces and what distinct effects they have had on the queer community, and we will also examine whether this cycle of online communities and discourse is repeating itself, using TikTok as a new platform of organization.

The audience for my class will be similar to the audience for the intro class that we are in now. While some students may have prior knowledge on the topic, I will be assuming that most students would be coming into my course without extensive knowledge of queer theory, queer history, or queer identities, and consequently will be giving background when needed. I also wanted this class to be accessible. Rather than focus on theory or hard to understand academic writing, this course instead focuses mainly on primary sources from the discourse era (including Tumblr and Instagram post) and personal experiences, like articles and blog posts, from those who were there. This will make the course more accessible to everyone and allow a better conception of the material and what the experience of being there would actually have been like, allowing better discussion and ensuring that everyone in my course is able to engage with the topics and discussion.

Classes:

1) Intro: History and Background of Asexuality and MOGAI

This first class of my microseminar will focus on background information and context of the movements that we will be talking about throughout the later classes of the microseminar. The texts for this class will be two YouTube videos and a blog post from an author who identifies herself within the MOGAI community. Through the MOGAI retrospective video and the video about the history of asexuality, all of the students will hopefully gain a similar knowledge base. Since there will be students in this class from different backgrounds, this first class will focus on filling in any informational asymmetries among students. These texts are all fairly basic and are intended to be understandable to an audience without much specific background in queer theory or queer history without being overly simplistic, so they would be appropriate for a mixed-level audience. I chose these texts in part because of this; I think they will allow students at different levels of prior knowledge to come together and all learn something new.

On this first day of class, the discussion will focus around a few key issues. First, we would analyze why queer people online would want to identify with MOGAI or another online queer community, like the asexual community. Were there societal pressures that would encourage (mostly) teens online to identify in this way? If so, what were they? The goal would be for students in the class to understand and emphasize with the situation of the people who made up these communities to gain a better understanding of how they fit into the conception of queer identity as a whole.

Sources:

“History of Asexuality - LGBT+ History Month | Slice of Ace.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Slice of Ace, 28 February 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWatjkr_894.

“Millions of Dead Genders: A MOGAI Retrospective.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Lily Alexandre, 11 January 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoZFZto6Wqg&t=2s>.

Sharp, Rachel. “The Definition of MOGAI.” *WrrrdNrrrdGrrrl*, 5 October 2016, <https://wrrdnrrrdgrrrl.com/2016/10/05/the-definition-of-mogai/>.

2) The Importance of the Online Queer Space

The second class of my microseminar will discuss what these online queer spaces actually looked like and who made up those spaces. Now that students understand the range of identities that these spaces comprise and the necessity for those identities to have this online space, we will look at personal experiences from people who participated in them. This week, we will look at the upsides of an online queer space, focusing primarily on the positive benefits that online discourse allowed its participants. There are two texts for this week. The first is an article by two Australian professors that details the use and importance of Tumblr specifically as a space for queer youth to connect in a way that they otherwise could not in an offline world. The second text is a study that was published in 2016 about labeling and queer identity on Tumblr and what conclusions we can draw from that. These two texts do require a small knowledge base, but they should be appropriate for the students in my class given the context introduced in the first class.

Discussion for this week will center around these two sources and how we can connect them to the individuals who participated in them. We will consider what the unique benefits of these online spaces are, and why those would be so appealing to queer youth. We will also begin to think about if this is an isolated phenomenon and how queer identity in these spaces translates into queer identity offline.

Sources:

Byron, Paul and Robards, Brady. "There's Something Queer About Tumblr." *The Conversation*, 29 May 2017, <https://theconversation.com/theres-something-queer-about-tumblr-73520>.

Oakley, Abigail. "Disturbing Hegemonic Discourse: Nonbinary Gender and Sexual Orientation on Tumblr." *Sage Journals*, 17 August 2017, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2056305116664217>.

3) When the Online Queer Space Gets Nasty

The third class of my microseminar will talk about what happens when these queer online spaces are no longer a utopia of welcoming attitudes and exploration of identity, as they often were not. There are numerically a lot of texts for this week, but many of them are Tumblr or Instagram posts, as we will look at historical examples of how this discourse manifested and consider whether we think this was productive or simply harmful to those who engaged in it. We will also be reading an article written by a person who participated in the “ace discourse” (incessant back and forth posting over whether asexual people ought to be considered LGBT/queer, and if they should, what their role in that community ought to be) chronicling her negative experiences as a result of her unwitting participation in discourse by virtue of existing online. I chose these texts because I think it’s extremely important to see not just the perspective of someone who was there, but also to be able to experience this discourse for ourselves to consider if it would be productive or not.

Discussion for this class will focus on what we can learn about the nature of online queer spaces like Tumblr and Instagram from these posts and the experiences of someone who was there. Why do we think these spaces looked like this? What does it say about the people in these spaces that they often turned nasty? Do we think this is inescapable in a queer space, or is it a function of the space that these discussions were happening in, the people that were participating in them, or both? When your identity is dictated at its very core by “discourse,” how does that make someone with that identity feel?

Sources:

Downwithtucutes. Screenshot of a Tumblr post, saying that demisexual people are not LGBT.

Instagram, 15 October 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B3pWe2ABsur/>.

Downwithtucutes. Screenshot of a Tumblr post, saying that performative activism is bad.

Instagram, 1 July 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BzYnJu_H072/.

Downwithtucutes. Screenshot of a Tweet, with commentary that the person is not actually trans.

Instagram, 17 January 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bswx042nNes/>.

Fckintruscum. "MOGAI Identities Aren't Real." *hmp*, 2 September 2018.

<https://fckintruscum.tumblr.com/post/177660794799/mogai-identities-arent-real>.

Hoins, Megan. "The Rhetoric of Digital 'Ace Discourse.'" *Medium*, 19 October 2017,

<https://medium.com/@meganhoins/the-rhetoric-of-digital-ace-discourse-4a690792f0bc>.

Thetruscumsiren. "Just A Little Thing I Have To Say." *Drew*™, 25 January 2019,

<https://thetruscumsiren.tumblr.com/post/182308501797/just-a-little-thing-i-have-to-say>.

Transdangernoodle. "To All Non-Dysphorics." *chris mclean kinnie*, 23 February, 2019,

<https://transdangernoodle.tumblr.com/post/183012056434/to-all-non-dysphorics>.

4) Queer Life After Discourse

The fourth (and final!) week of class will be about what real-life queer spaces look like, both during peak discourse years and now. We will be looking at an experience of this sort of discourse in real life, in the form of TERFs vs. trans activists clashing (a conflict which, despite its history beginning before the incipit of online trans discourse, was greatly cultivated in online queer spaces) and how online discourse impacted the real life views and opinions of those around a trans grad student. These two texts will provide a connection between the online content that we have studied earlier in the class and the real world, allowing us to discuss what effects, if any, we think that queer discourse online has had on those who participated in it. The teens who participated in queer discourse are largely becoming queer adults now, dealing with adult life and in person spaces. What do those look like? Has participation (or involuntary involvement) in online arguments and discourse shaped the way that queer people consider themselves and their identities? If so, is this a good thing? If it's a bad thing, can we fix it? Is there a way to undo the damage done to us by discourse?

Sources:

Compton, Julie. “‘Pro-Lesbian’ or ‘Trans-Exclusionary’? Old Animosity Boil Into Public View.” *NBC*, 14 January 2019,

<https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pro-lesbian-or-trans-exclusionary-old-animosity-boil-public-view-n958456>.

Flaherty, Colleen. “The Trans Divide.” *Inside Higher Ed*, 19 July 2019,

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/07/19/divide-over-scholarly-debate-over-gender-identity-rages>.