

First Summer Term: May 28 - June 25
SOHE 302: Special Topics in Society and Health

THE HISTORY OF SEX, A.D. 129 – A.D. 1993

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Believe it or not, the illustration to the right, drawn by Andreas Vesalius in 1543, is of the vagina and vulva. If you're saying "huh?", rest assured this class will help us all put our "huh?" faces in the same room.



The historical dates in this title are deliberately provocative: the course traces a history of the distinction

between “sex” and “gender” but stops well before expansive public debates about changes in the category of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). The dates correspond to the birth of Galen – one of the most essential influences on classical medicine’s conceptions of the sexed body – and the publication of Anne Fausto-Sterling’s “The Five Sexes” (1993), a foundational text in contemporary activism. The seminar is concerned with *how* doctors and scientists came to visualize biological distinctions, and then to understand those distinctions as socially meaningful. The answer is not as intuitive as we may think. Anatomical study is a comparatively new feature of medical education, and doctors routinely performed fully clothed physical examinations on women until the *middle* of the twentieth century. We therefore consider the question historically – what did doctors believe about sex and gender? How did they know what they purported to know? Is it possible to trace change in their perspectives and, more essentially, their medical training over time? This short, intensive course includes reading from the history of anatomical study (with an emphasis on pre-photographic illustrations), from the now-defunct field of “sexology,” and from life-writing by SOGI minorities in very different social contexts that the present; we end with a research paper that engages with these histories....but not necessarily with the present. The course is interested in figuring out how we got here, rather than steering us toward an outcome.