

This paper will analyze the successes (and failures) in teaching ancient sexuality, particularly same-sex desire, at a mid-sized Appalachian public university, demonstrating the importance of foregrounding the social construction of the category “natural.” Encouraging students to appreciate and understand the differences in sexual configurations between the modern and ancient worlds necessitates denaturalizing the socially- and historically-contextualized beliefs they already have. The population at my university is largely conservative, with a high density of first-generation-college students and an equal number who believe that education should be practical. These factors contribute to a sublimated attitude that pre-judges academic models as airy and alien. Consequently, a necessary first step is to get students to see that they are living inside theoretical models, but ones that are so close to their skin as to be invisible.

The lodestone my students use to find these naturalized models is their gut – whenever they feel queasy or aroused they are directed to stop what they were reading and attempt to quantify whence the emotion arises. For example, after watching a series of clips from MTV Movie Award’s “Best Kiss” category, the lesbian kiss in *Cruel Intentions*, the remake of that kiss in *Not Another Teen Movie*, then a male homosexual kiss from *Brokeback Mountain*, students were able to articulate what makes a mass-market “best kiss”, how homoerotic shock is mitigated in a heterosexual context, how a parody shifts the homoerotic shock to the shock of ageism, and why two men kissing in a Hollywood film was newsworthy. This analysis led to an understanding of how the social contexts of actions (not necessarily the actions themselves) are key, what dominant sexual asymmetries currently exist, and how contexts and asymmetries generate contrary emotions of titillation or disgust in different contemporary populations.

Once students both intellectually and physically grasp the implications of multiple sexualities and how they are transformed in their own time, then apprehending how *Symposium* is in dialogue with *Clouds*, or Catullus with Sappho, or Hubbard with Davidson comes all the more quickly. Indeed, by demonstrating the utility of a model before naming it – by reading against the grain of *Against Timarchus* before tying it to Second-Wave Feminism, or sketching out the elite configuration of the term *mollis* before deploying Plummer – it is possible to obviate the knee-jerk rejection to a model just because it has been denominated by a demonized term such as “feminist”, “queer”, or “psychoanalytic”. Though many students never lost their visceral resistance to practices different from their own, most gained an ability to intellectualize and contextualize them.