WGS.110
Response Paper Two

Choose ONE of the following questions and write a 3-4 page response paper in answer to it, using at least two of our readings for this course in support of your answer. Be sure that you have a clearly-stated thesis statement at the end of your introduction that articulates the position you aim to argue in the essay, and be careful to support your points with concrete examples.

1. Performativity and gender: Consider Butler’s argument that gender is a “kind of imitation for which there is no original.” To what extent does drag performance illuminate the ways in which gender becomes legible? Examine some examples of drag that you have observed in film, performance, or in a social context such as a Halloween costume or party, and explain how gender is constructed and read. What, according to Newton (and Butler), is the relationship between drag and “real” gender?

2. Politics of Identity: Consider gay (and/or trans) liberation in relationship to the construction of categories of sexuality. How does our understanding of sexuality in different cultural contexts impact the politics of sexual liberation? When is sexuality rendered visible? How have issues of assimilation and the “epistemology of the closet” impacted our concept of “gay oppression” and the gay liberation movement? You may wish to consider the political movement for gay marriage or “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” as possible specific examples through which to discuss the politics of sexuality and/or gender.

3. Representation & Visibility: Choose a film or cultural text in which gender or sexuality is portrayed (you may select The Children’s Hour, Dykes Do Drag, Kissing Jessica Stein, a selection mentioned in The Celluloid Closet, or another work of your choice) and analyze it in light of one or more theories of representation/discursive production of meaning we have discussed this semester. What has been the effect of censorship, if any? How are sexual and gender identities rendered visible in the text you have chosen, and what is the relationship between the portrayals and the intended (or unintended audience)? You may wish to focus specifically on butch-femme representations and the construction of lesbian identity, or how bisexuality is portrayed in gendered terms.