

INSTITUTE OF GENDER STUDIES – PUBLIC LECTURE

# The science of desire: Medical knowledge and practices of “female sexuality” from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present

Two lectures by

## Jennifer Fishman

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Historian of science and technology, Department of History of  
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Uni Mail, room MR280. Free admission  
40 bd du Pont-d'Arve

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## The science of desire:

# Medical knowledge and practices of “female sexuality” from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present

Welcome address by **Delphine Gardey**, Historian and sociologist,  
Professor in contemporary history, Head of the Institute of Gender Studies,  
University of Geneva, Switzerland

## The Biomedicalization of Female Sexual Desire: Sexuo-Pharmaceuticals in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**Jennifer Fishman**, Sociologist, Associate Professor, Biomedical Ethics Unit,  
McGill University Montreal, Canada

While approval for sexuopharmaceuticals for male sexual arousal took a straightforward and expedited path to market, the quest to get a prescription drug approved for women has been much more arduous. This presentation will provide an historical perspective of researchers' attempts to apprehend and biomedicalize female sexuality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century via their development and clinical testing of new drugs to treat 'new' sexual dysfunctions. I will begin with a discussion of Pfizer's failure to get Viagra approved for women and end with the 2015 approval of Addyi, the first drug of its kind to treat women's "low libido." I will conclude the talk with a critical analysis of the medical science of sex difference and how women's bodies and sexualities resist reductionist apprehension.

## Brain desires:

# The neuroscience of sexuality in the 2000s

**Isabelle Dussauge**, Historian of science and technology, Department of History of Science and Ideas, Uppsala University, Sweden

Gay brains, hetero brains; male, female and trans brains are all recurrent cultural figures of the human, and not least, of human sexuality, in the 2000s. But how do contemporary neurosciences re-articulate human sexuality as processes of the brain? Deploying which notions of gender, sexual preference, sexual function, and pleasure? In this talk I interrogate the normativities at work in the conceptual and material practices of the newer neurosciences of human sexuality. I also attend to the directions of desire that the neurosciences attribute to sexuality – from the endpoint of sexological models, orgasm, to the satisfaction of brain reward systems serving the purpose of evolution, as often contended in evolutionary psychology and neuroeconomics. Finally, this talk offers a reflection on the stakes of the neuro-framing of sexuality in the context of the contemporary medicalization of sexuality and the cerebralization of happiness.

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