

Issues in Social Practice: Human Sexuality
Sociology 4800: Section A
Fall 2008

Instructor: Dr. Mark Patrick George

Class Times: Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

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Required Text

Human Sexuality, Diversity in Contemporary America 5th Edition. 2008. Bryan Strong, Christine DeVault, Barbara W. Sayad, & William I. Yarber. New York: McGraw Hill.

* Additional readings/articles are assigned and posted on WebCT/Vista.

Course Description

The objective of this course is to equip students with the ability to analyze human sexuality through a sociological lens. In order to do that we will examine how humans understand, define, and express their sexuality. We will also identify and examine many of the social forces and structures that impact these processes. Some of the specific areas we will explore include; the social construction of gender and sexuality; how researchers attempt to study sexuality; sexual violence; sexual practice; the social control of sexuality; sexual health and disease; and the commercialization of sexuality.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course student will be able to:

- * Critically analyze human sexual behavior in different social contexts and time frames.
- * Identify, analyze, and document how human sexuality is a dynamic process that is ever- changing and socially constructed given various ongoing social processes and systems.
- * Identify and articulate how social variables like race/class/gender/age/sexual orientation shape definitions of “appropriate” human sexuality and sexual behavior.
- * Identify and articulate the social forces that have shaped their own sexuality and sexual understanding.
- * Identify and articulate their own sexual anatomy, the health risks associated with sex, and measures associated with safe sex practices.

Is this Course for You?

Given what has been outlined and that sociologists strive to understand social life from a non-judgmental standpoint, be aware that the course content and class discussions are explicit in nature. Class discussions, guest speakers, and video footage used in the course are very frank and sexually explicit in nature. So you should think about your

own sensibilities/moral convictions, this content, and the class requirements in order to decide whether this is the course for you.

If you decide to take the course you are expected to strive to be open minded, mature, and respectful of other's perspectives and life experiences. This does not mean you have to change your moral convictions or viewpoint. That is not the point of the course. It simply means that you should approach the course ready to be exposed to different ways of thinking about human sexuality. You should also be ready to engage in thoughtful yet challenging dialogue, active listening, and not impose you own moral system on others.

Course Requirements

Exams: There will be four exams during the course of the semester. Each will consist of a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions. The average of these exams will account for 50% of your final grade. Make-up exams will be given only if a university accepted excuse is provided ahead of time. Failure to do so will result in a grade of zero (0) for the missed exam. Any excused make-up exams given will not follow the format of regularly scheduled tests. Instead, all make-up exams will be essay format.

Reading Quizzes: Throughout the course, beginning the second week of classes, random reading quizzes will be given. Of the eight reading quizzes you will take, two of your lowest grades will be dropped. The average of the six remaining scores will account for 20% of your final grade. Given that two of your lowest scores are dropped, no make-ups will be provided for missed quizzes. Since I use quizzes to record attendance on the days they are given, you should inform me after class if arrive in class late and miss the quiz. Otherwise you may be counted absent for that day.

Attendance and Class Participation: Please note that this course revolves around the readings, class discussion, lecture, videos, guest speakers, and other relevant information. So your attendance, punctuality, preparedness, and participation are essential, as well as expected. This means you are expected to come to class having read the assignments and ready to discuss them. Your presence in class, preparedness, and participation will also account for a total of 15% of your final grade. I define participation as the active and regular involvement in class discussions and exercises. Students with good attendance and who regularly participate, without having to be called upon, will receive all 15 of these points. Students with good attendance, who participate occasionally, without having to be called upon, will receive 11 of these points. Students with good attendance who never participate will receive 7.5 of these points.

Keep in mind that attendance will be taken randomly. Given that life happens, I allow for 3 unexcused absences during the semester. However, at the point you have 4 unexcused absences your final grade will be lowered by 10 points. At the point you have 5 unexcused absences your final grade will be lowered by 20 points. At the point you have 6 unexcused absences you will be withdrawn from the course. If you have a passing course average at the point you reach 6 unexcused absences, and only if it is

prior to the midterm point (10/9), you will be assigned a W. If you have a failing grade average you will receive a WF. All withdrawals after the withdrawal deadline (10/9), regardless of your standing in the course, will result in a WF. Please refer to "Policy on Attendance" in the University catalogue for established standards. Remember, you are also responsible for any and all material missed because of any absences. Please check with the instructor and/or your classmates for that information.

Project Paper: In addition to the exams and quizzes you will take, you are expected to develop a class project from one of several options. Each of these options involves producing a 8-10 page paper that will be double spaced with one inch margins, using 12 point-new times roman font, and including a separate title page and reference page that do not count as one of the 8-10 pages. Each project must also cite at least two references from the course content in addition to three outside sources. Please keep in mind that this assignment is not simply a description of what you did or experienced. It instead involves you providing a sociological analysis connected to the content of the course and those outside sources. Meaning in each of the options you are to provide an analysis that discusses the social construction of sexuality, how social variables like race-class-gender-sexuality-age-etc. impact your topic, how social forces/institutions impact your topic, etc., etc. This project will account for 15% of your final grade and is due at the beginning of the last day of class (12/4). No late project papers will be accepted. Below is a cursory description of the available options and a more detailed outline of the paper expectations will be provided to you the second week of class.

Option 1: Autobiographical Paper

You may choose to do an autobiographical paper where you chronicle your own sexual evolution. This does not necessarily mean a chronicle of your sexual history or sexual experiences. Although you may discuss these, areas you should discuss include the following. When did you come to think about yourself as a sexual being? What and/or who has shaped how you think about sex and your sexuality? When did you first come to think about yourself in a sexual sense? What caused that consciousness? Has your understanding about your sexuality changed and why has it changed (if it has)? What it like for you to document your sexual evolution? What accounts for how you think about feel about the assignment? Again, remember that this is to be a sociological analysis (i.e. identifying and discussing what forces, structures, events, shape and control human sexuality). It is not simply about you describing your views on your sexuality or sexual experience/history.

Option 2: Interview Options

Prior to doing this option you must develop and review your interview questions with me. Failure to approve your interview questions with me will result in a zero for the project. To develop interview questions, you should draw from relevant course material and class discussions. Remember, this is a sociological analysis. The objective is not meant to offend, shock, judge, or belittle anyone about their views on sexuality. Instead, this is your attempt to understand how people construct their beliefs and views on the topic. With that in mind, you must inform interviewees about the purpose of the interview. You must also tell them that they have right to stop the interview at any point

and can decline to answer any of your questions. You must also tell them that you are willing to answer any of the questions you pose to them. Lastly, you must document the entire interview process so you will take detailed notes on the person's responses or tape the interview in order to transcribe it later (either of which are to be turned in with the completed assignment). You should also pay attention to and document; what the interview process was like for you; any significant reactions/emotions that might occur during the interview; where and when it took place; and how who you are (gender/race/age/etc.) might have impacted the interview or the information you gathered.

a) Interview an elder (someone over the age of 50) you know well in order to discuss their views on sexuality. Areas you may wish to explore include the following. What are their views on sexuality? What do they think shaped those views? Have their views changed over their lifetime? If so, how have they changed and what caused those changes? What do they think about contemporary forms of sexuality? What sexual practices do they think are acceptable or unacceptable? Why do they feel certain practices are acceptable/unacceptable? What social forces/institutions/structures/events have shaped those attitudes/beliefs?

b) Interview a religious leader about their views about sexuality. Areas you may wish to explore include the following. What are their views on sexuality? What do they think shaped those views? Have their views changed over their lifetime? If so, how have they changed and what caused those changes? What do they think about contemporary forms of sexuality? What sexual practices do they think are acceptable or unacceptable? Why do they feel certain practices are acceptable/unacceptable? What social forces/institutions/structures/events have shaped those attitudes/beliefs?

c) Interview a romantic partner. Although you might discuss their sexual history, explore how they construct and define their sexuality. What do they think shaped their views? Have their views changed over their lifetime? If they have changed, how have they changed and what caused those changes? What sexual practices do they think are acceptable or unacceptable? Why do they feel certain practices are acceptable/unacceptable? What social forces/institutions/structures/events have shaped those attitudes/beliefs?

* Remember, interviews are not interrogations. They are instead an attempt to understand and learn from others.

Option 3: Field Trips

a) Visit a sex shop and document the process. This is something that should be done at a time and place that does not put you in physical danger. Keep in mind many shops require customers to be 21 or older so respect all laws. You may also choose to have a friend accompany you when you go. I will provide you with the names of local business that sell sex related products/toys/video. To locate such businesses in other cities simply look in their local phone book for "adult book stores" or "adult novelty shops." Be mindful of the locations of stores out of town as well as the time of day you

visit them. On your visit take notes and document the entire experience. Ask questions if you have them. Areas you should think about include; where was the business located; was it obvious from the outside they sold sexually related items; if not why not; what were your reactions to what you experienced; what it was like for you to go in the shop; what items were available in the store; what were the items: where/how were they displayed; what did those items or "toys" actually do; who were they marketed to; did race/gender/class/sexual orientation/age affect what products were available; etc. ; etc. You should also identify and discuss the varying sexual tastes that were marketed to and what the products you saw say about those tastes. If you choose this option keep in mind you are visiting a private business frequented by people from all walks of life. Your conduct should therefore be mature and appropriate. If one or more you choose this option you may want to go to store together, another process you can analyze and discuss in your paper.

b) Rent, view, and analyze one or more adult videos. Again, do this at a time and location where you feel safe. Since there is are many categories/genres of adult videos to choose from think about your choice before making it. Your paper should discuss how and why you chose the video you decided upon. Also discuss how you felt about the process (i.e. going to the store, the renting process, who was in the store, what genres are available, viewing the video, the content of the video, etc.) and why you felt the way you did. Analyze the content of the video and what it says about gender roles/race/class/age/etc.. Who are these videos intended for and why? What were the gender/race/class/age/body image depictions like in the videos? What were the overarching messages about sex communicated in the footage? Also identify and discuss any sociological forces that may have impacted your experience (your own religious/race/class/age/gender identity), the marketing of adult videos, and the content of the video you rented. If one or more you choose this option you may want to go to the video store together, another process you can analyze and discuss in your paper.

Option 4: Exposing and Navigating Heterosexism

Wear a rainbow pin or pink triangle for two or more days. In this assignment you are to wear the pin/triangle on a days you will be interacting with a variety of people. The pin/triangle must be visible at all times. If this assignment might affect your employment wear the pin/triangle on a day you don't have to work. On the days you wear the pin, you must wear it for the full day. Document your thoughts, feelings, and any reservations you may have. Discuss what sociological forces/institutions likely shaped your thoughts, feelings, and reservations. Document all observation you made and reactions of others. Were they positive/negative, overt/covert, etc.? Where and when did they happen (i.e. what was the social context)? Your paper should be constructed from these notes and draw on the content of the course. If you are someone who is G/L/B/T/I/Q and are publicly out please select another project option.

Option 5: Other Suggestions

I am open to other ideas for this project given that they do not cross any ethical boundaries or put you at personal risk. **Again, this assignment is not about getting you to do something you are uncomfortable with or object to morally.** So if you

have other ideas please set up an appointment with me so we can discuss them.
Alternative projects that have not been approved by me will receive a zero.

Total Grade Break Down: Average of Exams = 50 possible pts.
Average of Reading Quizzes = 20 possible pts.
Project Papers = 15 possible pts.
Attendance/Participation = 15 possible pts.
Total Possible Points = 100 pts.

Final Grade: A = 90-100 pts., B = 80-89 pts., C = 70-79 pts., D = 60-69 pts., F = 0-59 pts.

***** Cell Phones/Text Messaging/Laptops:** Please turn OFF (sound & vibrate) all cell phones and all other forms of technology (i.e. mp3 players, microwave ovens, etc.) prior to the beginning of class. Receiving or sending text messages/phone calls during class will result in a 3 point deduction from your final grade (for the first offense). Subsequent occurrences will result in a 5 point deduction (from your final grade) for each offense.

Academic Honesty: Please know that I strongly adhere to University policy regarding academic honesty. Therefore any form of academic dishonesty (e.g. handing in a project you did not actually do, signing roll sheets for other students, cheating, *plagiarism, etc.) will result in an F for the course and possible further University action. Please see your undergraduate handbook for further information about the University's standards on academic honesty.

* Plagiarism involves claiming someone else's ideas/thoughts/writing as your own instead of appropriately citing and giving that person credit for their ideas/thoughts/writing

Students with Disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodations or modifications because of a documented disability must contact the Access Office for Students with Disabilities located in room 1115 Nevins Hall. The phone numbers are 245-2498 (voice) and 219-1348 (tty).

Tentative Course Schedule

Dynamics and issues raised in class will likely affect the pace of the class. With that in mind, the following is a tentative outline of the material we will cover. Please note that readings may be added during the course.

* Denotes readings that are posted on WebCT/Vista and

Week 1

Tue. 8/19 - Introductions & Review Course Objectives and Expectations
Thurs. 8/21 – Chapter 1 - Perspectives on Human Sexuality

Week 2 **Researching Sexuality**

Tue. 8/26 – Chapter 2 – Studying Human Sexuality
Thurs. 8/28 – Chapter 2 continued + * Bullough, Vern L. 1998. "Alfred Kinsey and the

Kinsey Report: Historical Overview and Lasting Contributions.” *Journal of Sex Research*. 35 (2) 127-131. – Video Clip: Kinsey

Week 3

Tue. 9/2 - Chapter 2 continued + * Sheff, Elisabeth. 2007. “The Reluctant Polyamorist: Conducting Auto-Ethnographic Research in a Sexualized Setting.” Pp. 111-118 in *Sex Matters*, edited by Mindy Stompler, Dawn M. Baunach, Elisabeth O. Burgess, Denise Donnelly, and Wendy Simmonds. Boston: Allen and Bacon.

Human Anatomy

Thurs. 9/3 – Chapter 3 - Female Sexual Anatomy

Week 4

Tue. 9/9 – Chapter 3 continued + * Burgess, Elisabeth. 2007. “The G-Spot and Other Mysteries.” Pp. 319-322 in *Sex Matters*, edited by Mindy Stompler, Dawn M. Baunach, Elisabeth O. Burgess, Denise Donnelly, and Wendy Simmonds. Boston: Allen and Bacon.

Thurs. 9/12 – Chapter 4 – Male Sexual Anatomy

Week 5

Tue. 9/16 – **Exam #1**

Gendering Sex, Sexing Gender

Thurs. 9/17 – Chapter 5 - Gender and Gender Roles + *Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 1993. “The Five Sexes, Why Male and Female are Not Enough.” *The Science*. March/April. + Video (John/Joan)

Week 6

Tue. 9/23 – Guest Speaker – Dr. Tracy Woodard-Meyers

Thurs. 9/25 – Chapter 5 continued & Guest Speaker – Sarah Riggle

Week 7

Tue. 9/30 - Chapter 6 - Sexuality in Childhood and Adolescence

Thurs. 10/2 – Chapter 7 – Sexuality in Adulthood

Week 8

Tue. 10/7 - Chapter 7 continued + *Donnelly, Denise, Elisabeth Burgess, Regina Davis, and Joy Dillard. 2001. “Involuntary Celibacy: A Life Course.” *Journal of Sex Research*. 38 (2): 159-169.

* Thurs. 10/9 – **Exam #2**

* Midterm – Last Day to Withdraw from Class

Week 9

Tue. 10/14 – **Fall Break – No Class**

The Many Ways Humans “Do” Sex

Thurs. 10/16- Chapter 9 - Sexual Expression + *Bogart, Laura M., Heather Cecil, David Wagstaff, Steven Pinkerton, and Paul Abramson. 2000. “Is it Sex?: College Students’ Interpretation of Sexual Behavior Terminology.” *Journal of Sex Research* Vol. 37 (2): 108-116.

Week 10

Tue. 10/21 - Chapter 10 – Variations in Sexual Behavior + Video: TBA
Thurs. 10/23 – Chapter 10 Continued + Video: Beyond Vanilla

Week 11

Tue. 10/28 – Guest Speaker: TBA

Reproductive Issues

Thurs. 10/30 - Chapter 11- Contraception and Birth Control

Week 12

Tue. 11/4 - **Exam #3**

Sexual Disease & Health

Thurs. 11/6 – Chapter 15 - *Nack, Adina. 2000. “Damaged Goods: Women Managing the Stigma of STDs.” *Deviant Behavior* 21(2): 95-121.

Week 13

Tue. 11/11 – Guest Speaker – John Rogers – Georgia Public Health Dept.
Thurs. 11/13 – Chapter 16 - HIV and AIDs

Week 14

Sexual Violence

Tue. 11/18 - Chapter 17 - Sexual Coercion; Harassment, Aggression, and Abuse
Thurs. 11/20 - Chapter 17 continued +Video Clip (Vagina Monologues)

Sex Workers and the Sex Industry

Week 15

Tue. 11/25 – Guest Speaker
Thurs. 11/27 – **Holiday Break – No Class**

Week 16

Tue. 12/2 – Chapter 18 - Sexually Explicit Materials, Prostitution, and Sex Law
* Thurs. 12/4 – Chapter 18 continued + Video (Dildo Diaries)
* **All Project Papers Due**

Week 17

Tues. 12/9 - Dead Day
Wed. 12/10 - Exam #4 – Wednesday 12/10 – 2:45-4:45 p.m.