Sociology of Sexuality

Sociology 255
Spring 2018
Monday, Wednesday, 2-3:15
Bolton B52

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About the Course

We have been trained to think of sexuality as something governed by biology—eternal and ahistorical. Many college courses teach about human sex as a matter of physiology, covering the menstrual cycle, the mechanics of erection, the months of pregnancy. This is not one of those classes.

In this course, we will look at sexuality from a sociological perspective. This means we will study how social forces shape sexual beliefs and behaviors. We will see how sexuality varies widely in how it is understood and how it is practiced—both over time and between different societies. Sexuality has a history, and we will explore that history. We will also examine the most fundamental assumptions about sex. How many sexes are there? What does it mean to “have sex?” What are genitals for? Who is sexually desirable? Is sexual desire a good thing, or something dangerous?

We will come to see that the way we have been trained to think about sexuality is flawed, reflecting ideologies and myths that we will learn to recognize and dispel. And we will see how shifting ideas about what is “natural” and “proper” sexuality relate to power. Control over ideas about what constitutes “good sex” relates to the power of institutions (like the profession of medicine and religious organizations), and the power of people (including European colonists, slaveowners, middle-class Victorian housewives, feminists, and college students).

We will begin by addressing how sexuality and other phenomena that are often considered “natural” (such as eating and breathing) are shaped by social construction. We will then look at sexuality from the perspective of cultural history, examining the
evolution of the sexual identities and practices that are familiar to us today. We will also examine specific topics in contemporary sexual theory and social practice—including intersex issues, sexual identity development, and the impact of the internet on sexuality.

Course Texts

The texts assigned for this course include two books and supplemental readings. The supplemental readings are available on the course D2L site. The books, available from your favorite online retailer, are listed below. It is fine to get an older edition used, but if you do, please be aware that the page numbers listed in the syllabus may not match up to those in your older edition, and the text itself may vary.


Course Assignments

For logistical reasons, it is typical for instructors of large lecture classes to rely only upon multiple-choice exams to determine course grades. While this is understandable, I believe it does students a disservice: it encourages passive rote memorization of facts rather than conceptualization, and gives few opportunities for critical thinking or intellectual creativity. For this reason, in addition to two scantron exams, I will assign you biweekly papers of 2-3 pages, which will be graded by your TA under my supervision. It is my hope that this will assist you in sharpening your analytic and writing skills, which are important goals of college education. There will be a total of six writing assignments, each worth 50 points; you will be required to turn in five of them. The sixth may be handed in for extra credit; if turned in on time, for a maximum of 50 points, if turned in later, for reduced credit. The maximum number of points you can receive for your paper grade will cap at 250.

In addition to the writing assignments, there will be two multiple-choice examinations, one at the midterm and one during finals period. Each will cover one-half of the subject matter of the course; the second examination is not a cumulative final. A study session will be arranged where you can bring questions that you may have, but please note that this will not present you with a “summary of everything you need to know”—only an opportunity for you to ask questions.

On the days that papers are due, we will have a guest lecture or view a video. Attending these presentations is obligatory and questions about them will appear on the examinations.

Your final course grade will be calculated as follows:
6 Papers (you must write 5 of them): 50 points each → 250 points total maximum

Exams: 75 points each → 150 points total

Attendance: 75 points total

Total possible points: 475

The final course grade will be curved on a B, meaning the average (mean) student score will correspond with a B grade.

Caveat

Please bear in mind that in this class you will be expected to learn and employ the sociological perspective on sexuality. This is neither a “preparation for marriage” course nor a course on sexual techniques; it is not intended to be therapeutic or to instruct you ethically.

Sociologists study real life, which is sometimes raw. In so doing, sociologists display a nonjudgmental stance toward the people and phenomena they study. You will be expected to adopt this professional stance as well.

In relating to sexuality, this course will cover materials that will at times necessarily feel personal. Please be respectful of this in yourself and others—but do always work to connect any personal feelings you have about the materials to the academic theories raised, as we are engaged in an intellectual rather than therapeutic exercise.

Engaging with challenging materials can lead to great intellectual and personal rewards, but is more demanding than studying matters that you can approach with a detached lack of personal investment. Be aware that the materials we will cover involve social inequality related to desire, race/ethnicity, sex and gender, body size, disability, beauty standards, eugenics, and other topics that may at times feel challenging or triggering to consider. In addition, we will view images that will at times be sexually explicit, and at other times relate to disturbing matters such as sexual and racist violence. Engaging with painful and challenging subjects intellectually is one of the cornerstones of collegiate experience. However, if a topic being addressed in class or discussion section proves very upsetting to you, so that you feel unable to engage intellectually, you may step out of class. Leaving a class meeting in the middle to protect your mental health is just as reasonable as leaving early because you become physically ill—it’s not expected that this will happen often, but students are expected to care for their health if it does. If you do leave class due to distress, please contact your T.A. to explain why you left, and get the notes from a classmate, just as you would if you left because you suddenly became ill. (No student in this class has ever tried to abuse this courtesy, but such abuse would not be permitted.)
Ground Rules

Many people learn best when they learn together—you may consider this intellectual symbiosis. You are encouraged to discuss the readings, concepts and assignments with other class members. Plagiarism and cheating, however, constitute intellectual parasitism. They damage the academic community and will not be tolerated. Academic misconduct will be reported and will result in consequences that may include failure of the assignment, or, if sufficiently serious, failure of the class.

In order to facilitate the creation of academic community in the classroom, I will give you opportunities to participate in group exercises and class discussions. This means that the success of the course is dependent upon your preparation, participation, and demonstration of respect for your peers. Please follow the golden rule and treat others as you would wish to be treated. You will find that not everyone will agree with you on principles you consider important—this provides an excellent opportunity for learning if you engage with them respectfully.

Another way in which I expect you to demonstrate your respect for your peers is by staying on task in class and not distracting others by surfing YouTube, poking at a pinging phone, crunching carrots, or chattering.

Finally, I will expect you to complete your work in a timely manner. Unexcused late papers will be downgraded ten points for each day they are late. In cases of illness or emergency, lateness will certainly be excused, but you must contact your TA as soon as you are aware that you will miss a paper deadline or exam to explain the circumstances. If for some reason you have a paper ready on time but are unable to print it out or to make it to class, you may send a copy to the TAs via e-mail to prove it was completed on time, but you must give a hardcopy to a TA at the next class meeting for grading. Department policy prohibits us from printing students’ papers for them.

Credit Hours

As the UW System assumes “that study leading to one semester credit represents an investment of time by the average student of not fewer than 48 hours” (UWS ACPS 4), a 3-credit course such as this one will require a minimum of 144 (3 x 48) hours of your time. You may find it necessary to spend additional time on a course, but this class will require at least 40 hours in classroom, 70 hours for class preparation, and 34 hours for papers and exams.

GER Credit

This course meets the UWM General Education Requirements (GER), as explained in detail below.

Why Sociology of Sexuality carries GER credit:
This course addresses how patterns of sexual behavior and experience are produced by social, cultural, and material forces. It will help students to understand how the patterns of sexual identity and practice with which they are familiar are related to social forces, structures, and institutions—for example, corporate interests, or how families are organized today. The course will address how we are socialized in ways the both give us social identities based in sexuality, and reinscribe patterns of power along dimensions such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. It will examine the relationship between material culture and sexual experience. It will give students basic foundational skills in using sociological methods to address and research sexuality, and introduce them to core social theorists, such as Marx, Foucault, and Durkheim.

**Learning Goals**

Through assigned readings, discussion, groupwork, and writing assignments, students will learn to be able to recognize and describe patterns of sexual identity and practice, to understand how these have been subject to social change, and to explain how they are reproduced during socialization. Students will learn to recognize how central social institutions shape sexual behavior. Students will learn to apply different sociological theories to explain patterns of sexual conformity, diversity and deviance, and to understand how these produce social solidarity and social stigma. Students will be given an opportunity to apply sociological methods and theories to the world via exercises and written work.

**Specific Student Work that will Address a Learning Goal**

Students in Sociology of Sexuality will be assigned six short papers to address six learning goals. A sample of an assignment is a course paper giving students an opportunity to apply ideas from the course to analyze how the material world around them produces sexual beliefs and experiences. Students are given an opportunity to analyze the sexual ideologies embodied in consumer products.

**Assessment Criteria**

The student paper analyzing the ideologies conveyed by sex-related consumer goods will be assigned with the following assessment instructions:

“As usual, you are required to write a paper with a clear introduction and conclusion, to follow the conventions of grammar, and to cite authorities properly. In addition, you should answer the following four questions in your paper:

1. What store/catalog/website did you visit, and what category of product did you select? What made this product sociologically interesting?
2. To whom is the category of products you examined marketed (e.g. women generally, men generally, women who wish to become pregnant, men with a shoe fetish, urban teenagers)? What does this reveal about patterns of privilege and stigma?
3. What messages are sent to that population by the products you studied? What is the general sexual ideology implied by the packaging, product descriptions, and illustrations? Give specific examples, and devote the bulk of your paper to this question. Refer to at least one theory raised in class or in course readings in your analysis.

4. Critique the group of products you selected. If you were “in charge,” what changes would you make in the design and marketing of the products?” Explain how this relates to patterns of power and privilege.”

The TA will employ a grading rubric to assess how well students have addressed each required element. That rubric will be:

**Style – 10 points**
- 2pt. Introduction
- 2pt. Conclusion
- 2pt. Structural clarity and organization of ideas
- 2pt. Spelling and grammar
- 2pt. Correct citation (no plagiarism)

**Content – 40 points**
- 5pts. Topic choice discussion
- 5pts. Target audience discussion
- 20pts. Analysis of messages sent (including reference to lecture or reading)
- 10pts. Critique

Points earned __/50

**Readings and Assignments**

22 January: Introduction

**The Social Construction of Sexuality**


7 February: Davis. 2013. “‘Bringing Intersexy Back?’ Intersexuals and Sexual Satisfaction.” Also Tobin, 2013, “The Perils and Pleasures of Sex for Trans People.” Also, the Terminology Handout written by the professor under Handouts in D2L course content.

**Historical Evolution of Contemporary Sexual Arrangements**

12 February: Katz, ch. 3 (“Before Heterosexuality”).

14 February: Katz, ch. 4 (“Making the Heterosexual Mystique”)

19 February: Katz ch. 5 (“The Heterosexual Comes Out”).


26 February: D’Emilio and Freedman ch. 1 and ch. 2 (on the regulation of sexuality in colonial America).

28 February: D’Emilio and Freedman ch. 3 and ch. 4 (on Victorian American sexuality).


12 March: D’Emilio and Freedman ch. 5 and ch. 9 (on the history of race, sex and “vice” in America).

14 March: First Examination.


**Issues in Contemporary Sexuality**


**What’s Love Got to Do with It?**


8
7 May: Guest Lecture TBA


10 May: Conclusion and course evaluations.

Saturday 12 May: Second exam, 10 AM, in our regular classroom.

UNIVERSITY AND SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT POLICIES

The Secretary of the University maintains a web page that contains university policies that affect the instructor and the students in this course, as well as essential information specific to conduct of the course. The link to that web page is: http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf

**Students with Disabilities.** Verification of disability, class standards, the policy on the use of alternate material and test accommodations can be found at the following: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/DSAD/SAC/SACltr.pdf

**Religious Observances.** Policies regarding accommodations for absences due to religious observance are found at the following: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S1.5.htm

**Students called to active Military Duty.** Accommodations for absences due to call-up of reserves to active military duty are found at the following: http://www4.uwm.edu/current_students/military_call_up.cfm

**Incompletes.** You may be given an incomplete if you have carried a course successfully until near the end of the semester but, because of illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond your control, have been unable to take or complete the final examination or to complete some limited amount of course work. An incomplete is not given unless you prove to the instructor that you were prevented from completing the course for just cause as indicated above. The conditions for awarding an incomplete to graduate and undergraduate students can be found at the following: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S31.pdf

**Discriminatory Conduct** (such as sexual harassment). Discriminatory conduct will not be tolerated by the University. It poisons the work and learning environment of the University and threatens the careers, educational experience and well-being of students, faculty and staff. Policies regarding discriminatory conduct can be found at: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S47.pdf

**Academic Misconduct.** Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors. Policies for addressing students cheating on exams or plagiarism can be found at: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/OSL/DOS/conduct.html

**Complaint Procedures.** Students may direct complaints to the Sociology Department Chair or the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Sciences. If the complaint allegedly violates a specific university policy, it may be directed to the Sociology Department Chair, the Associate Dean for Social Sciences in the College of
Letters & Sciences, or to the appropriate university office responsible for enforcing the policy. Policies may be found at:
http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S49.7.htm

**Grade Appeal Procedures.** A student may appeal a grade on the grounds that it is based on a capricious or arbitrary decision of the course instructor. Such an appeal shall follow the established procedures adopted by the department, college, or school in which the course resides or in the case of graduate students, the Graduate School. These procedures are available in writing from the respective department chairperson or the Academic Dean of the College/School. Procedures for student grade appeal can be found at:
http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S28.htm

**Final Examination Policy.** Policies regarding final examinations can be found at the following:
http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S22.htm

**Book Royalties.** In accord with Department of Sociology policy, the royalties from the sale of faculty-authored books to students in their classes are donated to a UWM Foundation/Sociology Account to support future awards and activities for UWM students in Sociology.