

# **SOCIOLOGY 2800**

## **Grande Prairie Regional College**

### **HUMAN SEXUALITY**

(3 UT Credits)

(FALL 2007)

Instructor: Alan Segal

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Office Hours: Mondays: 13.00 – 14.00 Or By appointment

Course Prerequisite: SOCIOLOGY 1000

#### Course Description:

An inquiry into (1) ideas about sexuality, (2) sexual behaviour, and (3) the personal, cultural, and societal implications of sexual expression.

**NOTE: This course will examine a wide scan of sexual thought, fantasy, portrayal, understanding, considerations, and general behaviour. Its approach assumes that in a mature society no question is beyond scrutiny. The premise of this course is not to communicate truth or confirm authority of information. The premise is inquiry, and how social authority affects the scope and substance of what we examine. No course can withstand entirely the politics of its content, however, and thus the capacity to offend some who enrol in it. This is true especially of a course in human sexuality. Nevertheless, this course will not treat sexual variety as a series of perversions, nor will it assert the normalcy of one kind of sexuality as opposed to another. It will discuss how, in any society, particular forms of sexuality become "normal" and others "abnormal", how they become acceptable topics of contemplation and conversation, and whether such distinctions help or hinder us. Films and magazines may be shown in class, the subject matter of which might be controversial and offensive. If anything in this statement causes you to think you might find this course terribly offensive, you should reconsider remaining in it.**

#### Required Reading:

Harmful to Minors - Judith Levine  
Virginity Lost - Laura Carpenter  
SO2800 Course Pak

#### Assignments:

**NOTE:** All written work must comply with the College's policy on plagiarism. For a detailed explanation of what it is, refer to page 44 in your Grande Prairie Regional College 2007-8 Calendar.

### **Essay or Project (F, A+ to D) (36%)**

- The due date for this assignment is the first class of December.
- There is a lateness penalty of 1 letter grade per day, including weekends. If you hand in a project when I am unavailable, have another faculty member or regular employee of the college sign and date it. Initials are not acceptable and signatures must be legible. Where the person works in the College must be indicated as well.
- If you are writing an essay, you will choose a topic relevant to a sociological analysis of sexuality.
- Critically analyze the topic, using your own and others' ideas. You must utilize some formal sociological theory or ideas, but don't just fit your writing into the framework of a theory. Do not write a descriptive report; think about the ideas you express. Try to explain why these ideas persuade you.
- Research beyond the assigned books is required. While your own thinking is the most important requirement, research is valuable and therefore obligatory. The research can be from various sources, but other survey texts are not in themselves sufficient.
- *Six sources are required. Two must be academic book; three must be references from articles in an academic journal or academic anthology. And one can be informal, such as something from a newspaper, magazine, or a website. You can use more than six and more than the minimum specified in each category. However, failure to observe each of these minimum requirements will result in a slightly lower grade.*
- The purpose of the research is to enable you to write an analytical paper. You may use first person words like 'I', but the paper is not a large opinion piece. It is intended to be analytical, based on thought and ideas, not quickly-generated opinions.
- The expected standard is 1800 words. Your mark will be reduced by one letter grade for inadequate length. This applies only to papers that are too brief.
- ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SENT BY EMAIL, TO [gprc\\_assignments@yahoo.ca](mailto:gprc_assignments@yahoo.ca) (DON'T FORGET THE UNDERSCORE IN THE ADDRESS) YOU MUST STATE THE COURSE, SECTION, AND TYPE OF ASSIGNMENT IN THE SUBJECT FIELD. ASSIGNMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO LATENESS PENALTIES. ONE GRADE LEVEL WILL BE DEDUCTED FROM YOUR EVALUATION FOR EACH CALENDAR DAY BEYOND THE DUE DATE. THE RECEIPT DATE AND TIME THAT ACCOMPANIES THE EMAIL MESSAGE WILL COUNT AS THE OFFICIAL SUBMISSION TIME. YOU SHOULD ALWAYS REQUEST A RESPONSE FROM ME THAT I HAVE RECEIVED YOUR EMAIL. THIS CAN BE DONE THROUGH YOUR COMPUTER. NO ITEM SHOULD BE SENT AS AN ATTACHMENT. I WILL RETURN IT TO YOU UNREAD.
- *References must appear in the main text of your assignment, and in a Works Cited section at the end of the paper. Both are required. If either is omitted, your assignment will be reduced by one letter grade per section. All documentation [referencing] must be*

consistent with **MLA** style. Remember that not all disciplines accept the same approach to writing up reference.

- Referencing means more than giving a source for a quotation. Other authors' interpretations, analyses, perceptions, or ideas, deserve credit in your papers. Mentioning them does not disqualify your view of their analyses.
- If you hand in the assignment before the due date, I will comment fully on your essay, or on your project, and you will have the option of rewriting the paper. Otherwise, I will provide a general comment at the end of your papers or projects.
- Grammar is important to communicating precise meaning. Grammar will not be valued as highly as content, but it will be evaluated and may affect your grade for the assignment.
- Projects can be varied, but in the past people have written short stories or a collection of poems, or created something of an artistic nature, such as collages, sculptures, paintings, etc.
- Accompanying all of these must be a 1000 word essay explaining the sociological intent and message of the work you have created.
- Other projects may be acceptable. Speak to me about what you have in mind.

### **Three Journals (F, C+ to B) (28%)**

Due the first class of each month of the semester, beginning in October. Each journal must be at least 200 words. Anything pertaining to sexuality, ideas introduced in class discussions or lectures, class interaction, etc., is suitable. Observations about, and suggestions for, the course are also suitable. No research is necessary or expected. The journals are an informal type of communication with me. The three grades will be averaged to produce a single grade.

### **Midterm (F, D to A+) (36%)**

The midterm will be written October 25<sup>th</sup>. It will be an essay midterm based on a question given to you in class on the day of the midterm. You may use your course books when composing your answer.

### **Discussion Bonus:**

- Class discussion is a vital aspect of this course.
- Everyone may (but not necessarily will) receive a bonus mark for the **QUALITY** of your class discussion, based on a combination of the frequency and quality of the participation.
- You will be eligible only if you display commitment to the course by doing your reading and completing the required assignments.
- The bonus mark offers an A, B, C, or D. No plus or minus signs will be used. Discussion postings on Blackboard will be considered class participation.  
**Although attendance is not relevant to the regular assignments for the course, it is important to your eligibility for a bonus mark. If you are absent for more than 5 classes, you will not receive a bonus grade.**

### **Tabulating Grades**

A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D

All letter grades correspond to numerical values called grade points. These are explained, and assigned to each of the letters above, on page 37 of your College Calendar. Your final grade will be formulated by adding the grade point values for each letter grade you receive, and dividing the sum by the total number of GPA you could have received (11). The bonus mark is not factored into this total.

**NOTE:** No class averaging will be done. All marks will appear on Blackboard.. If you are unfamiliar with this system, employees of the library will instruct you for access. **You are responsible for monitoring your grade input, and informing me that a mark has not appeared for which you deserve credit.**

### DISCUSSION SEQUENCE

Articles in the course pack, as much as possible, will be read sequentially.

1. **Introduction to course: General and Sociological**
2. **Harmful to Minors: Forward, Introduction, Chapter 1.... by Judith Levine**

In the Foreword of Levine's book, Elders alludes to American culture's uncertainty about sex education, and sexuality in general. And Levine herself introduces a relation of peril and pleasure. Look at the second note of the Foreword in Levine's book, on page 227, and consider what you expect/ed from sex education? Is there a difference between this and sexuality education? If so, what is the difference, and which of these two approaches do you prefer? If you were asked to establish such a program, what principles would frame your "curriculum"?

What is fear? What is it to Levine, who quickly introduces us to her view that fear is pervasive in American society? To the limited degree she so far elaborates on it, why does it exist? What facets of this social condition does she mention? Do you think Canadian society experiences similar apprehension? Would you offer other words than "apprehension" to describe fright?

Can you generalize about our society's perceptions of children? Is any part of the generalization compatible with Levine's early description of it?

Explain Levine's statement that childhood is ideological.

Do you accept a relationship between pleasure and entitlement? Are pleasure, entitlement, and protection mutually exclusive categories? Should risk trump all of them? How do/should we conceptualize risk?

After considering this chapter, do you perceive sexual commodification as Levine does?

What is sexual commodification, and why does Levine include it in her discussion?

Can we have culture without suppression? Is censorship more an act of: suppression, protection, nurturing, or....?

What responses do you have after reading Levine's quote by Penelope Leach on page 18?

How should we evaluate knowledge, protection, entitlement and responsibility, rights, and sexual freedom? Is this list adequate for a discussion of sexuality and children? Is all risk hazardous? Is avoidance of risk critical to our emotional well-being?

Of what political and sociological value is 'risk? How do we learn what is risky and what is not? What messages about risk are 'out there' in society? Do they profoundly inform us about ourselves, our lives, our vulnerability and our possibilities? How does false security fit into Levine's argument?

How would you describe your childhood knowledge and understanding about relationships, sexuality, or any other relevant realm of human experience you may recall? When we say we understand something, what do we refer to?

Is age-appropriateness a suitable concept for any kind of personal development? Does society constructively differentiate between adulthood and childhood? If so, articulate the difference. Does our society constructively differentiate between adult and child sexuality?

### 3. **Levine: Chapters 2 - 7**

Broadening Levine's comment on page 26, do you think we fear people not because they are deviant, but because they are ordinary?

Levine implies young people who earn 'adult wages' may stretch their social experience to include 'adult sexual license'. Does she have a point? Does sex validate us? What is validation in such a case, and why is it validating? Is this part of adult sexual license?

Is sex a rational experience? Is sexuality receptive to rational intervention? If so, is it entirely receptive, or is it more viable in some contexts than in others? Does therapy count as rational intervention?

Is forced reporting of fantasies a justifiable form of therapy?

Prepare to discuss the quote attributed to Dr. Kutner on page 45, that normal behaviour can be inappropriate. What criteria of normalcy and appropriateness are implicit in this position? Can notions of normalcy, and the power exerted to enforce it, stand up to the range of sexual

identities, sentiments, and expressions we have discussed?

Do you accept 'sexualization' as a reasonable analytical precept? Do you accept 'desexualization' as a reasonable analytical precept?

What might explain the disparate data reported on page 58?

How might we conceptualize, and evaluate, consent, safety, and harm? Have you ever thought of what Mary Douglas is quoted on page 71 as having said: that danger emerges from transitional states? Prepare to discuss interpretations of this.

Does Levine exaggerate the vitality of cultural codes in social learning, and in our social behaviour? Identify as many cultural codes regarding sexuality as you can think of. In what ways do you find them helpful, obstructive, hurtful, liberating, etc.? Is gender a factor in how we construct, communicate, and enforce these codes?

What is Levine saying when she refers to no-sex education? Is the classification of the debate in terms of right and left wing sex education analytically rigorous? What does

either of these substantively mean? Reconsider your earlier thoughts on sex/sexuality education. In light of this chapter, have you changed your ideas or conclusions? Is the sex education described here similar to what you experienced? Is the logic of the abstinence advocated on page 95 solid? Is Debra Haffner's criticism of it [page 109] reasonable? What deliberations are relevant to deciding the boundaries of parental authority, in terms of purposes and their implementation? What is maturity, especially from Levine's perspective? Are there gaps in adult understanding of adolescent sexuality? What is the missing discourse of desire?

4. **Levine: Chapters 8 - 11, and the Epilogue**

Although she offers no evidence of kinds and extent of parent-child discussions, do you agree with Levine that few parents converse about sex with their children? If so, and if she is incidentally accurate, what might this say about adulthood in general? Why does Levine speak of truthful fictions? What are these? Are they sociologically valuable to us? What kinds of narrative is Levine striving for?

5. **Pak Reading: The Invention of Sexuality by Jeffrey Weeks**

What convinces Weeks that sexuality was/is invented? Did he convince you his conclusion is substantial? How might he explain invention to the class? What perspectives does Weeks bring to the argument? Why does Weeks include a discussion of kinship, family, economy, social organization, and politics?

6. **Pak Reading: The Repressive Hypothesis by Michel Foucault**

Discourse is an extremely important concept to Foucault's work. What is this it meant to address? Why is it important to him? How might you explain 'repressive hypothesis', 'perverse implantation', and 'incitement to discourse'? Foucault, early in the Selection, mentions confession, particularly confessions of the flesh. Of what value is this reference to his larger argument? Not long into any of his works, Foucault inserts the idea of power. Explain his understanding of power, and how it fits or not with his ideas outlined in the first reading. What is your interpretation of the comment on page 43 of the Reading, that a "medical category ... was constituted from the moment it was characterized"? Prepare to discuss the paragraph on page 49 of the Selection. Class lecture on Queer Theory and Postmodernism

7. **Pak Reading: Christianity to 1500 by Merry Wiesner-Hanks**

We usually assume that concepts we think ‘originate’ in religion, are stable throughout history. Is this the outlook communicated in this selection? What similarities/dissimilarities do you perceive in the information outlined by W-H, between what you identify as contemporary christian philosophies and those of pre-1500 europe? Is there a christian tenet of sexuality? If so, is it distinct from judaic or pagan principles? Were you surprised by any part of this reading? What relationship does W-H hint at, between culture and sexuality?

Why does W-H discuss the middle ages by dividing it into different periods?

Why mention heresy and confession in an academic treatment of sexuality? What is orthodoxy?

Does anything expressed in this article endorse Weeks’ or Foucault’s understanding of sexuality?

8. **Pak Reading: The Pre-Enlightenment Legacy by Rudi Bley**

What is the substance of the legacy presented by Bley? What are its ideas, assumptions, and motives?

Why were specific sexual acts associated with cultural, or what we now call ethnic, groups?

What explains Bley’s title on page 22 - “Constructing the new World’s Sexuality”? How can sexuality be constructed? Weren’t people sexual before the arrival of the europeans? Explain the idea of ‘the other’.

Do contemporary beliefs regarding sexuality contain ideas of paradise? If so, what does paradise refer to? What ideas of paradise were active, according to Bley, in the time periods discussed by him?

On page 45 of the Reading, Bley writes of the mapping of mankind. What is or was the mapping of mankind? Are we still mapping?

9. **Pak Reading: The Five Sexes Revisited by Anne Fausto-Sterling**

In a society which accepts two genders and a little bit of drift, how might the general public react to Fausto-Sterling’s five sexes? What are they? Do F-S’s assumption[s] of gender hold in each category?

What is meant by the section title on page 13 of the Reading, “Moving beyond the Sexes?”

10. **Pak Reading: The Naked Subject.... By Rob Cover**

Cover differentiates between nakedness and nudity. Does he clarify the difference, and why does he consider the distinction necessary to his main point[s] in this article? What is

the premise of the difference? Do you agree with the distinction he has outlined, and the basis for it?

How is our culture affected by the ideas written about in this selection?

The author criticizes postmodern thought for its impact on how we conceptualize sex, sexuality, and especially contexts without clothes. What is the substance of his criticism?

Class lecture on The Body

11. **Pak Reading: Sociocultural Representations of the Vagina by Braun and Wilkinson**

How can a part of the body be subject to sociological and cultural variations/representations? Does this indicate body parts are only points of interpretation? What about the vagina do the authors think is sociocultural?

What is meant by “the vagina as absence” (page 19 of the Reading)? In what sense can identity be over-determined?

When people say they are knowledgeable about their bodies, what do they ordinarily refer to? What general criteria for this kind of knowledge would you stipulate?

12. **Virginitly Lost: Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2**

Before reading the first sections of this book, what would you have assumed about ‘loss’ in general? ...about ‘loss’ specifically from the view of the culture in which you now live and participate? What does Carpenter tell you about how we assess and have assessed loss, especially the loss of virginity?

What is virginity?

13. **Virginitly Lost: Chapters 2 and 3**

From your own and also Carpenter’s perspectives, what significance is given to sexual desire? Why do we ever think of our bodies as a form of gift? What concepts do we associate in our society with gifts and gift-giving? Are there problems implicit in our ideas about our bodies as a gift?

Why does Carpenter refer to stigma, and is this connected in some way to our notions of gift-giving? What social or ideological purpose is served through stigmatizing sexual experience, and are there particular aspects of virginity and sexuality that become the bases of stigma?

14. **Virginitly Lost: Chapters 5, 6, and 7**

How and why does our society instill cultural importance into personal development?

What examples of this kind of development can you think of, that are also seen as natural steps? Can you think of such developments that are not considered to be natural steps?



What explains our different interpretations? What meaning does Carpenter to this phrase? What understanding of 'virginity lost' do you think Carpenter wants you to have by the end of her book?

What comments about this book do you imagine Braun and Wilkinson would have?

15. **Pak Reading: Sites, Settlements, and Urban Sex.... by Gayle Rubin?**

Why apply archaeology to a study of gay leathermen? How does Rubin justify her combing of demography, settlement patterns, urban environments, and sexuality? What additional concepts does she introduce as elements of her position?

16. **Pak Reading: Sexual Culture and Politics in Contemporary Russia by Igor Kon**

In what sense can we say that a country possesses a sexual culture? How can such a culture diverge from the predominant culture of any society? Isn't sexuality universal, and therefore unjustified as a supposition of discussion that focuses only on one country? Explain the connection between sex, sexual expression, nationalism, religion, and politics.

17. **Pak Reading: Outercourse: Body and Self in Text Cybersex by Waskul, Douglass, and Edgley**

How can any author write about the body and the cyber world at the same time? Aren't they incompatible concepts, one being virtual?

What are outercourse, and "enselfment"? (page 29 of the Reading)

18. **Reading 20: Of Shit and the Soul.... by Allison Muri**

What is cybernetic disembodiment? How can anybody become disembodied? Why mention souls and shit in the title of this article?