

SOCIOLOGY 2800

Grande Prairie Regional College

HUMAN SEXUALITY

(WINTER 2002)

Course Description:

An inquiry into ideas and behaviour of sexuality, and their personal, cultural, and societal implications.

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Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays: 14.30 - 15.30 Tuesdays & Thursdays: 13.30 - 14.15
Or By appointment

GOALS:

1. To understand how sociological concepts may help us analyze and comprehend human sexuality.
2. To develop analytical and critical thinking skills through discussions of issues relevant to sexuality.
3. To become aware of historical and contemporary attitudes, practices, and values relevant to sexuality.

Course Prerequisite: SOCIOLOGY 1000

CREED AND CAUTION: This course will examine a wide scan of sexual thought, fantasy, portrayal, understandings, considerations, and general behaviour. Its approach assumes that in a mature society no question is beyond scrutiny. No course can withstand entirely the social politics of its content, however, and thus the capacity to offend some who enroll 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," and whether such a distinction helps or hinders 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 offensive, you should reconsider remaining in it.

Required Reading:

Male lust: Pleasure, power, and transformation - Edited by Kay, Nagle, Gould

Skin: Talking about sex, class, and literature - Dorothy Allison

Conceiving Sexuality - Edited by Richard Parker and John Gagnon

Assignments:

Essay or Project:

The due date for this assignment is the last class of the semester.

There is a lateness penalty of 1 stanine per day. A 1-stanine penalty per day will be applied, including weekends. If you hand it in late, or on the due date, but at a time when you are uncertain if I am on campus, 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.

Essays or projects are marked on a 9-point stanine scale.

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. Do not write a descriptive report; think about the ideas you express.

Try to explain why these ideas persuade you.

Research beyond the textbooks 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 books, 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 three, and more than the minima in each category. However, failure to observe each these minimum requirements will result in a 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 1500 words. Your mark will be reduced by a half-stanine for inadequate length. This applies only to papers that are too brief.

All work must clearly stipulate your name, ID number, and course and section numbers. You may hand hard copies of all assignments, or email them to me. Disks are not acceptable. All hard-copy submissions must be double-spaced.

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 stanine per section. All documentation [referencing] must be consistent with MLA style.

Remember that not all disciplines accept the same approach to writing up reference.

You must reference more than quotations. 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.

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 an 800 word statement 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:

Due the first class of each month of the semester, beginning in February.

Each is worth a maximum of 1.5 stanines. **However, a benchmark of 1 will apply to all journals.**

- Each journal is to be one typewritten page or two handwritten pages, double-spaced.
- 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.

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 will have a maximum awards of 3.

Tabulating Grades

The total of all stanine marks available for assignments is 13.5. Your marks will be totaled out of 13.5, a percentage will be obtained, and the percentage will be reconverted to a final stanine grade according to the following table.

Stanine Grade	Percentage Equivalent
9	90 - 100
8	80 - 89
7	72 - 79
6	65 - 71
5	57 - 64
4	50 - 56
3	45 - 49
2	26 - 44
1	0 - 25

NOTE: No class averaging will be done.

DISCUSSION SEQUENCE

1. Introduction to course: General and Sociological

2. Historical background

3. Skin: 'Context' & 'A question of class'

- Discuss the fears Allison refers to. What is their importance? From where or what do we derive our fears?
- What do you think is meant by "what context did he have for people like us" [p.11], and the final sentence on page 12?
- How does social class fit into discussions of sexuality? How does Allison understand its relationship to sex?
- In our mental roamings about our places in the world, why would sexuality be relevant?
- How do we 'know' what is our sexual identity?
- How significant in our lives is sexual mythology? What are we attempting to articulate when we refer to mythology? Do you have a mythology about yourself? Should we include the idea of needing sex in this mythology?
- What do you think Allison tries to convey to us when she says on page 35, "Class, race, sexuality, gender...need to be excavated from the inside"?

4. Conceiving Sexuality: 'Conceiving Sexuality'

- How do you interpret Gagnon's point on page 5, that sexuality was both an exemplary function and an exemplary mode of social resistance?
- If we want to understand sexuality profoundly, is knowledge of the history, and contemporary ideas within, sexology, really valuable to the crystallization of understanding?
- Evaluate the competing theories of sexuality as mentioned in the section, and prepare to discuss them critically.
- What's special about a postmodern perspective of sexuality?

5. Conceiving Sexuality: Selections 1 & 2

- What is discourse?
- In what ways do discourse and silence work together?
- What assumptions underlie Weeks' view that sexuality is a historical construction?
- How might cultural politics affect our awareness and insight into sexuality?
- What counts as a sexual act?
- How might you explain desire and identity?
- Why does Weeks write of the paradoxes of identity?
- What paradoxes does he mention? Do you accept Weeks' reasoning that establishes these items as paradoxes?
- Can we speak logically of needs and desires interchangeably? If so, explain how and why they intertwine. If not, explain the illogic of assuming they are synonymous.
- Why does Weeks say that sexual identities are necessary fictions?

6. Conceiving Sexuality: Selection 6

- Earlier in our cultural history we conceptualized sexuality more simply than we do today. Have we gained culturally from the closer scrutiny of it? Why, for example, does Altman call this essay "political sexualities"? Why pluralize sexuality, and why does he introduce to the discussion a political element?
- Is the linkage of identities and AIDS a plausible connection? Explain the logical reliability or unreliability of it.
- Assuming a plausible suture, is this one dedicated to AIDS alone, or is Altman stating a broader insight into human societies?
- Do you speculate about the future of sexual liberation? Is this a topic you have considered before reading this essay? If you answer 'yes' to either of these questions, is the liberation you imagine similar or dissimilar to what Altman suggests?

7. Conceiving Sexuality: Selection 3

8. Skin: Gun Crazy; Puritans, Perverts, and Feminists; Sex Talk; A Personal History of Lesbian Porn; Survival is the Least of my Desires

- What forms of desire are evident in these selections? Do you think any of them is misplaced in this section of readings?

- When we consider what we search for in other people, how significant is desire to the search? What considerations would you list?
- To what extent do you think desire and fantasy are interwoven?
- Many of the messages in our culture emphasize the imperative of survival. In what sense, then, is Allison writing of survival as the least of her desires? What could 'most' and 'least' mean?
- Do politics as utilized by Weeks and Altman assist our understanding of Allison's ideas?

9. Male Lust: Maps of Desire: Selections 5, 7, 15, 17

- In what ways does each of the items in discussion sequence 10, 11, and 12 fit into a grouping called 'Maps of Desire'? If you think any belongs outside the grouping, identify it and explain why it belongs elsewhere.
- Looking at the entries more precisely, why does Sandip Roy call his entry "Mapping my Desire"?
- Do we need guidelines to help us create a map? If so, from what sources might guidelines emerge?
- What is a guideline and how can we recognize it?
- Prepare to discuss the exercise alluded to at the bottom of page 39.

10. ML: Maps of Desire: Selections 19, 31, 33, 34, 40

- What role do gender-assumptions and the behavioural expectations around them, play in helping us map our desire?
- Can we generalize about when, why, and for whom, maps of desire instill feelings of sexual and emotional entitlement?
- Do we gain personally or culturally from a social system that differentiates populations based on particular sexual acts or fantasies?
- Given that our motives, needs, and desires are not always clear to us, and also that we do not always clearly know how they can best be integrated, is it really futile to talk about maps of desire?
- How would you place Steven Hill's discussion in this 'debate'? Are you persuaded by his statement on page 233 that physical attractions are actually mental mirages?

11. ML: Maps of Desire: Selections 42, 44, 46, 51, 58

- Are you convinced by Jill Nagle's interview with Cleo Manago that Black male lust differs from other forms of male lust? What premise of similarity or difference is outlined here?

In what sense is it possible to have sex outside the box? What is the box? Is it a metaphor for all contexts or some in particular?

In what sense should we aspire to having sex outside the box?

What is ideology? And what is ideological about male lust, or any type of lust? Are some dimensions of lust more susceptible to, or representations of, ideology?

Would you have considered it unusual to include an item on religion generally, and love for Christ specifically, in a book on male lust? Why? If you thought this at the start, but now have a different perspective, what, in these readings, has brought you to this new outlook?

Could we say, reasonably, that these readings communicate ideas on the origins of our fears, uncertainties, and aversions? What other ideas were sparked in your thought about these selections?

What impact has colonialism had, in its various guises, on people's maps of desire?

12. ML: Fantasy: Selections 1, 12, 20, 22, 26, 27

In what ways do the selections in discussion sequence 13 and 14 explain, reveal, discuss, or challenge, our understanding of sexual fantasy?

Explain the intricacies of fantasy in selection 1.

What cultural dynamics allow us to express our sexualities, fantasies, and desires, even when they are prohibited?

How can we say reliably that we know ourselves or others sexually, that we understand what a man or a woman wants?

What differentiates a sexual narrative from an intimate sexual communication? Does selection 20 adequately outline both?

Is any sexuality monstrous? Can you detect monstrousness in those sexualities you consider acceptable?

Does the initiation described in number 26 resonate with any of your dreams?

Regardless of our particular sexuality, do gym/athletic/sport cultures infiltrate those sexualities uniquely, in ways that other aspects of culture do not?

13. ML: Fantasy: Selections 33, 36, 37, 39, 43

Why does Greg Adams entitle his entry "Difference"?

Can aural lust alone affect sexual responses? If so, could we make a similar statement about lust coming to us through any of our other senses, one at a time?

How does this particular point connect with that of items 39 and 43?

14. Conceiving Sexuality: Selection 7

- What can we learn from this item, about how we construct our sexuality?
- How closely are violence and sex related in our sexual mores, assumptions, and cultures?
- How persuasive are the points cited in this entry?

15. Skin: Shotgun Strategies; Skin, Where She Touches Me

- How important to our expression of sexuality is lying to people?
- What is the sociological value or detriment of lying? Do cultural and social politics influence the rate, context, and purpose of lies?
- Can sexual fantasies comprise part of an approach to social change?
- Is there violence in the second selection? If so, what is it?

16. Male Lust: Battered Eroticism: Selections 3, 6, 11, 16, 25, 29, 38, 53

- Can you understand Roy's thought that some wounds, and some paths to surmounting them, can be helpfully considered a gift?
- How does Roy's thought compare to what is expressed in selections 6 and 16?
- Do you think the category I have used for these selections is too pessimistic? Would Marks in number 11 agree with being classified this way? Would Justin Chin in selection 29 agree?
- Consider how pornography and our fears may be related. What types of fear might emerge from this relationship? How would such a relationship come to exist to begin with, and what would sustain it?
- Are men obsessed with sex?
- Do you agree with the statement on page 219 that repression is the origin of the problem? To what problem does this refer?
- What purpose does shame play in the development of our sexualities? In what sexual 'arenas' are we most likely to experience shame? If we are not sexually ashamed when others around us are, what social responses to our behaviour can we expect?

17. Conceiving Sexuality: Selection 10

- What do Laumann and Gagnon mean by sexual action? Why do we need a sociological perspective of it, and what is the perspective they present?
- What is a master status? Does any aspect of your sexuality fit with this status?

18. CS: Selections 12, 13, and 14

What kinds of risk are discussed in these entries?

Is all risk hazardous? Is avoidance of risk absolutely critical to our emotional well-being?

Of what political and sociological value to various groups in the society 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, and our possibilities?

In light of all this, do you agree with the suggestions outlined in selection 14?

19. Male Lust: Emotion as Sexual Pleasure: Selections 2, 18, 30

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

Why talk about god being a bullet?

Is all emotion a form of lust? When might desire and lust be equivalent, if ever?

Do you think sexual desire can civilize rage? What does Carol Queen mean by this?

Does sex validate us? What is validation in such a case, and why is it validating?

20. Conceiving Sexuality: Selection 15

Can sex research after modernity offer a concrete opportunity for cultural and structural change? Explain your answers.

21. Skin: Neighbours; Conceptual Lesbianism; Believing in Literature; Bertha Harris, a Memoir

Do these final selections from Allison's book tell us anything about everyday social interactions and possibilities for change?

What does Allison mean by conceptual lesbianism? Might her ideas apply to all forms of sexuality?

In what sense is literature a system of lies? And why describe it as a system? How does Bertha Harris fit into Allison's awareness of literature, and of its power and transformational possibilities?

22. Course Wrap-up:

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?

What kind of sexuality education would we have if you were asked to establish such a program?

What principles would frame your "curriculum"?