

The Social Construction of Sexuality
SOCY/WOST 1006
University of Colorado-Boulder
Spring 2015

Class meets in ATLS 1B25 on TuTh 9:30-10:45

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In the contemporary U.S., we are taught to believe that sexuality—with whom and how we experience intimacy and desire—is natural, part of our essential makeup. This course turns those assumptions upside down, using theoretical and empirical developments in sociology, gender, and queer studies to examine the ways in which sexuality is “constructed” instead by social, cultural, and political forces. This perspective views sexuality as a system of social control intimately connected to other axes of social identity, including gender, race, and age. We will interrogate our assumptions about sexuality, and will examine how concerns about sexuality are implicated in other social processes in the United States. We will focus especially on sexuality in adolescence and young adulthood. This is not a “how to” course, but it will ask you to think critically and to listen to and talk openly about issues pertaining to sex and sexuality.

Course Questions

1. What do sociologists mean when they say sexuality is socially constructed?
2. How do sociologists study sex and sexuality?
3. How does a constructionist perspective change how we understand sexual behaviors, patterns, and desires?
4. How is sexuality created and controlled?
5. How do ideas about gender, race, and class effect what we think people do and should do sexually? How do these ideas shape actual sexual experiences?
6. How is sexuality used to achieve other (non-sexual) social ends?
7. How are sexual experiences shaped by space and context?
8. How can we make connections between social research and our everyday lives?

CONTENT ADVISORY

This course deals with themes and content that may make you uncomfortable or disturb you. A certain level of discomfort is typical in many sociology classes. **If you have concerns about your ability to participate in this course, please reconsider your decision to enroll.** If at any point in the semester you have responses or reactions that are difficult to sort out, it can be useful to talk them over with someone you trust.

Campus resources include:

Office of Victim Assistance: 303-492-8855 website:
www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/victimassistance

Moving to End Sexual Assault (MESA) rape crisis team: 303-443-7300

GLBTQ Resource Center is located in C4C N450: 303-492-1377
<http://www.colorado.edu/GLBTQRC/>

Recommended web resources on sex and sexuality:

<http://www.scarleteen.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/sociologyofsex>

<http://thesocietypages.org/sexuality>

Course Materials:

Course readings are available on D2L (learn.colorado.edu). You can log onto D2L with your identikey and password. You should also become familiar with ways to find articles on your own, such as through library databases, jstor.org, or [google scholar](http://google.com). If a link to an article is not working, please contact Professor Wilkins as soon as possible.

Communication Policies

1. I will use D2L to send emails to the class. You are required to check the email account that is registered with the university at least once a day, and you are responsible for the information communicated in such emails.
2. You may contact me via university email. If you have a long question or concern, please use office hours or make an appointment to talk to me.
3. I require that you wait 24 hours to discuss a grade or graded assignment with me. IF you plan to query a specific grade, you must do so in writing. Before our meeting, write out why you think the assigned grade is incorrect and/or your specific questions about the grade.
4. Do not ask individual logistical questions or questions about grades before or after class. Logistical questions can be asked via email or at our offices. Questions

about grades should always be addressed during office hours. I am prohibited via university policy from discussing grades over email.

Expectations and Evaluation

DO NOT leave your cell phone or PDA on. DO NOT set your cell phone to vibrate. Turn it OFF. (The only exception is primary care providers of children or others subject to seizures; please see me.)

Please note that I do not allow laptops, notebooks, or other phones to be used in class. I find that laptops are distracting to both the user and other students, even if students are using them for notetaking. In addition, studies have now confirmed that laptop use in class, even for notetaking, results in lower student grades. In lieu of typing notes, you will need to take notes by hand. Preparing good notes on both lecture and readings will help you better participate in class. I will not ask you to regurgitate small details on any assignment, but instead want you to understand the “big picture” and how specific content helps support, extend, or complicate that picture. If you find that I am talking too quickly or that I have made a complex point that you would like repeated or written on the board, tell me.

“Attending class” is both physical and mental. Tips for good attendance and participations grades:

Listen carefully, without headphones or earbuds.

Respond to others’ questions and comments. Restate, extend, agree, disagree, connect to an earlier point, or connect to the reading.

Ask questions. It is OK to interrupt with questions, but if I’m on a roll, **I’ll get back to you. Questions should pertain to the material at hand.**

Bring either notes on the readings or copies of the readings to class, and be prepared to discuss them. Do quote from or direct collective attention to the reading.

DO NOT use body language to express disagreement or contempt. No eye-rolling, gagging sounds, dismissive or derogatory raspberries or “Bronx cheers,” etc.

DO avoid coming in late, leaving early, and getting up to use the bathroom, text friends, or other activities, as it is distracting to the whole class and disrupts the teaching and learning environment.

I reserve the right to adjust evaluation criteria and weight according to scheduling and assignment changes, if necessary, but the following information will give you a broad sense of how you will be evaluated in this course.

1. Exams (75 points)

There will be **four** exams for this course. These exams will be given in class, and will cover material from lecture and readings. Good answers will be able to make connections between lecture and reading materials. Exams will focus on content introduced since the

prior exam, but you will be expected to be familiar with, use, and build on all material covered thus far. You should not include opinions or personal material in exam answers. Their intention is to help you develop analytical writing skills.

You are required to take three of the four exams. If you take all four exams, I will drop your lowest grade. **Make-up exams will not be available under any circumstance.** Instead, if you will need to miss one of the first three exams because you have a doctor's appointment or court appearance, are representing the university in an athletic or other event, get sick, have travel plans, need to care for a child, get into a car accident, oversleep, or just did not study, you should plan to take that exam as your skip. Exams will be given on the following Thursday dates: **February 5, February 26, March 19, and April 30.**

There is no final exam for this course.

Other Coursework (15 points)

2. Reading Summaries w/ Discussion Questions:

Every week you should prepare for class by writing a summary of the week's readings along with three discussion questions. Your summary of the week's readings should be approximately ½-1 page in length (**typed**). Your discussion questions should be based on the readings for the week. You will use these summaries/questions to facilitate your participation in class and/or group discussions. These summary assignments will be collected intermittently throughout the semester. Collection weeks will be unannounced. You should be prepared every week to turn in your summary/discussion question write up.

Discussion Groups and Peer Evaluations:

At the beginning of the semester, you will form a discussion group with other students in our class (each group should have approximately 4 members). Over the course of the semester, you will meet periodically with your group to discuss the week's readings. You will use your "Reading Summary w/Discussion Questions" weekly assignment to facilitate discussion. Group members will be asked to evaluate one another's participation in and contribution to group discussions. These evaluations will be factored into each student's participation grade.

Participation (10 points) Your participation grade comes from a variety of expectations, including active participation in class discussions. I do not have an attendance requirement, but you must attend class to earn participation points.

In-class work also factors into participation. You will receive participation points based on how seriously you take the assignment, not just on whether or not you complete it. In-class work is designed to get you to think critically about course material. I am not necessarily looking for you to be "right," but I am looking for you to be thoughtful and to take intellectual risks. More thorough and thoughtful answers earn more points. **You may not make up in class work or homework. I do not accept late assignments. PLEASE DO NOT ASK.**

Grading Policies

Below is the standard for the level of assessment of written assignments and overall evaluation for course grades.

Letter	Percentage	Description
A A-	94-100 90-93	Exceptional: Exceeds all required elements of the assignment, and the quality of the work is considerably greater than what is required. The quality of the work is considerably above the class average and impressive to the evaluator.
B+ B B-	88-89 84-87 80-83	Good: Meets all required elements of the assignment, and the quality of the work is better than what is required.
C+ C C-	78-79 74-77 70-73	Average: Meets all required elements of an assignment, no more, no less. Quality of assignment is satisfactory for college level work.
D+ D D-	68-69 64-67 60-63	Below average: Does not meet all the required elements of the assignment, and/or the quality of the assignment is considerably lower than satisfactory.
F	59 and below	Failing: Almost none of the requirements of the assignment are met and/or the quality of the assignment is well below basic standards of writing, comprehension, and/or ability to follow instructions.

Course Schedule:

The amount and difficulty of reading varies by week. Some weeks require a lot of reading. Others do not. I have tried to lighten the reading toward the end of the semester. Plan your reading schedule accordingly.

All readings are required and due on Tuesday each week. We will discuss readings in class, but lecture material will also supplement and go beyond reading material. You are responsible for every reading on the syllabus, but we will not cover every reading in class. Moreover, we will rarely use class time to discuss the content of reading material. You are expected to learn that content in addition to in-class

content. However, please do ask for clarification of material you do not understand. It is likely others do not understand it either.

Schedule is subject to change with advance notice of the professor. Changes will be announced in lecture. You are responsible for all announcements and changes regardless of your attendance.

Week 1 (Jan. 13 and Jan. 15)

Introduction to the course and to the social construction of sexuality

Introductory assignments

PART I: WHAT IS THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEX AND SEXUALITY?

Week 2 (Jan. 20 and Jan. 22)

What is sex and sexuality?

Gute, Gary, Elaine M. Eshbaugh, & Jacquelyn Wiersma. 2008. "Sex for You, But Not for Me: Discontinuity in Undergraduate Emerging Adults' Definitions of 'Having Sex'."

Carpenter, Laura M. 2001. "The Ambiguity of 'Having Sex': The Subjective Experience of Virginity Loss in the United States." *The Journal of Sex Research*

Week 3 (Jan. 27 and Jan. 29)

How have definitions of sexuality changed over time?

Blanke, Hanne. "Sexual Disorientation" in *Straight: The Surprisingly Short History of Heterosexuality*

D'Emilio, John. "Capitalism and Gay Identity"

Week 4 (Feb. 3 and Feb. 5)

How do ideas about race, class, gender, and age matter for how we construct sexuality?

Collins, Patricia Hill. "Why Black Sexual Politics?" in *Black Sexual Politics*

Fields, Jessica. "Same-Sex Marriage, Sodomy Laws, and the Sexual Lives of Young People." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*

EXAM 1 on FEBRUARY 5

Week 5 (Feb. 10 and Feb. 12)

What is a “politics of sexuality”?

Rubin, Gayle. “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” required up to p. 155

PART II: WHAT ARE SOME WAYS WE CONSTRUCT SEXUALITIES?

Week 6 (Feb. 17 and Feb. 19)

How do institutions construct heteronormativity?

Murphy, Maries. “Hiding in Plain Sight: The Production of Heteronormativity in Medical Education.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*

Sumerau, J. Edward and Ryan T. Cragun. “Why Would Our Heavenly Father Do that to Anyone”: Oppressive Othering through Sexual Classification Schemes in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.” *Symbolic Interaction*

Week 7 (Feb. 24 and Feb. 26)

How do parents teach heterosexuality to their children?

Ward, Jane. “No One is Born Gay (or Straight). Here Are Five Reasons Why.”

Martin, Karin. “Normalizing Heterosexuality: Mothers’ Assumptions, Talk, and Strategies with Young Children.” *American Sociological Review*

Solabello, Nicholas and Sinikka Elliott. “We Want Them to Be as Heterosexual as Possible: Fathers Talk About Their Teen Children’s Sexuality.” *Gender & Society*

EXAM 2 on FEBRUARY 26

Week 8 (Mar. 3 and Mar. 5)

How do people use ideas about gender to make sense of, and police, sexual identities and behavior?

Coleman-Fountain, Edmund. “Lesbian and Gay Youth and the Question of Labels.” *Sexualities*.

Schilt, Kristin and Laurel Westbrook. “Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: “Gender Normals,” Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of

Heterosexuality.” *Gender & Society*

Week 9 (Mar. 10 and Mar. 12)

How does the concept of sexual identities shape the kind of sex we think we can have?

Klesse, Christian. “Polyamory: Intimate practice, identity or sexual orientation?.” *Sexualities*

Hayfield, Nikki, Victoria Clarke, and Emma Halliwell. Bisexual women’s understandings of social marginalisation: ‘The heterosexuals don’t understand us but nor do the lesbians’.” *Feminism and Psychology*

Week 10 (Mar. 17 and Mar. 19)

How does policing sexual identities relate to gender, class, and race?

Armstrong, Elizabeth, et al. “Good Girls: Gender, Class, and Slut Discourse on Campus.” *Social Psychology Quarterly*

Bridges, Tristan and D’Lane Compton. “Power, Pomp, and Plaid: Lumbersexuals and White, Heteromasculine Pageantry.” *Feminist Reflections*

EXAM 3 on MARCH 19

SPRING BREAK

PART III: CONSTRUCTING SEXUAL RISKS

Week 11 (Mar. 31 and Apr. 2)

How do adults construct youth (hetero)sexuality and how does it matter for how youth experience sexuality?

Schalet, Amy. “Raging Hormones, Regulated Love: Adolescent Sexuality and the Constitution of the Modern Individual in the United States and the Netherlands.” *Body & Society*

Garcia, Lorena. “Now Why do you Want to Know about That?”: Heteronormativity, Sexism, and Racism in the Sexual (Mis)education of Latina Youth. *Gender & Society*

Week 12 (Apr. 7 and Apr. 9)

What is rape culture?

Belknap, Joanne. "Rape: Too Hard to Report and Too Easy to Discredit Victims." *Violence Against Women*.

Sanday, Peggy Reeves. "Rape-Prone Versus Rape-Free Campus Cultures." *Violence Against Women*.

Week 13 (Apr. 14 and Apr. 16)

Does "it get better"?

Patrick Grzanka and Emily Mann. "Queer Youth Suicide and the Psychopolitics of "It Gets Better." *Sexualities*.

Ward, Jane. "It's Not that 'It Gets Better.' It's that Heterosexuality Is Worse."
Connell, Catherine. "Pride and Professionalism Shape the Lives of Gay and Lesbian Teachers." *Girl w/Pen*

PART IV: CONSTRUCTING COLLEGIATE SEXUAL CULTURE

Week 14 (Apr. 21 and Apr. 23)

How does the collegiate environment "construct" the hook up culture?

Hamilton, Laura and Elizabeth Armstrong. "Gendered Sexuality in Young Adulthood: Double Binds and Flawed Options." *Gender & Society*

Sweeney, Brian. "Masculine Status, Sexual Performance, and the Sexual Stigmatization of Women." *Symbolic Interaction*

Week 15 (Apr. 28 and Apr. 30)

How does the lore of "hooking up" marginalize some college students?

Allison, Rachel and Barbara Risman. "It Goes Hand in Hand with the Parties?: Race, Class, and Residence in College Student Negotiations of Hooking Up." *Sociological Perspectives*.

Hamilton, Laura. "Trading on Heterosexuality: College Women's Gender Strategies and Homophobia" *Gender & Society*.

EXAM 4 on APRIL 30

University Policies

1. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs can be

addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Center for Community N200, and <http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices>. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see guidelines at

<http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/go.cgi?select=temporary.html>

Disability Services' letters for students with disabilities indicate legally mandated reasonable accommodations. The syllabus statements and answers to Frequently Asked Questions can be found at <http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices>.

2. Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please notify me one week in advance of any religious conflicts to ensure accommodation.

3. Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code.

4. The University of Colorado at Boulder Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures, the University of Colorado Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedures, and the University of Colorado Conflict of Interest in Cases of Amorous Relationships policy apply to all students, staff, and faculty. Any student, staff, or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of sexual harassment or discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at <http://www.colorado.edu/odh>.

5. All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the

Honor Code can be found at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html> and at <http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/>.