

**SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITY**  
**SOCY/WMST 1006 SPRING 2008**

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**You are responsible for everything in the registration handbook, this syllabus, recitation syllabus, the text, and material covered in lecture and recitation.**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course investigates sexuality using a constructionist framework to critically engage with essentialistic and biologically determinist perspectives, dominant in Western society, regarding sexual identity and sexual expression. Contemporary sexual identity, desire, behavior, health, research, and expert advice will be viewed as outcomes and techniques of social control. We will explore the construction of heterosexuality, homosexuality, femininity, and masculinity as they impact our cultural and individual understandings of sexuality. Throughout the course we will be examining and analyzing our own and others' sexualities in a sociological perspective of larger trends and social influences. We will also discuss the sexual basis and consequences of the stratification system in place in this society currently with an emphasis on identifying erotic injustice and oppression.

### **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

#### Honor Code

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 that constitutes academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening or intimidating behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council and those students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member involved and non-academic sanctions given by the Honor Code Council (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Please refer to [www.colorado.edu/honorcode](http://www.colorado.edu/honorcode) to view the specific guidelines. If you have any questions related to this policy, contact the Honor Code Council at [honor@colorado.edu](mailto:honor@colorado.edu). Honor code violations will result in a 0 for the assignment at a minimum and may also result in failing this course, probation, or expulsion.

#### Classroom Behavior

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to disciplinary measures. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion, and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, nationalities, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, and gender variance (a major part of this class).

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](http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code).

#### Discrimination and Harassment

The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment, the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual

orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs 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>.

### Religious Holidays

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, you should notify me at least two weeks ahead of time to request special accommodation if you have a conflict. See full details at [http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac\\_relig.html](http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html).

### Students with Disabilities

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit a letter to me from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322, [www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices](http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices)).

### **COURSE TEXTS**

**Required: Material is available at Word Is Out Bookstore, 2015 Tenth Street, 303.449.1415.**

*The Social Construction of Sexuality*. 2005. Edited by Matthew C. Brown.

#### **Optional:**

*The Good Vibrations Guide to Sex*. Cathy Winks and Anne Semans. 2002.

This text is a great reference for information about the body, health, communication, and sexual information. I highly recommend this book!

### **CLASS PARTICIPATION**

#### **Your participation**

Your participation in class discussion is encouraged. You are welcome to ask questions at any time or even take us a bit off-track in discussion. If something is interesting and important to the class, I do not mind exploring it further. In this class, we will most assuredly express strong opinions and argue over some points. *We critique ideas not people*. No one should be made to feel as if they are being attacked personally over something they express in class.

You respect other students by listening attentively when they are speaking, not rudely interrupting anyone speaking and by not making hurtful insults and/or comments that may silence other people in the class by declaring whole groups of people wrong/criminal/sinful/sick because of ethnicity, religion, politics, gender, ability, age, appearance, consensual sexual choices or decisions about when, why, what, where and with whom to or not to engage in sexual activities. We will be discussing how those attitudes and the enforcement of those opinions have operated to deny some people opportunities and resources that most of us expect and demand. You are encouraged to say whatever is there for you to say, being responsible for the effect your words will have on others. As a theme in this class we will also be discussing how words are social actions themselves with the power to enforce power relations and are reflective of existing power and privilege inequities.

#### **My participation (teaching style and language)**

The constructionist perspective is founded on the principle that language creates our reality and experience of the world in which we live. This class is about sexuality as it is experienced in the everyday world rather than the world of experts and doctors. Because of this, I consciously use language to uncover the implicit meanings about sexuality and gender and how words are used to create our common understanding of sexuality. We will not only be “thinking sex” in this class, we will be talking sex, too. Anyone who does not wish to participate in a classroom where sexuality, identity, behavior, desire, and sexualized parts of the body are discussed in common, explicit language is encouraged to seek alternative courses. This is a difficult class at multiple levels (level of comprehension and integration of material required for tests as well as dealing with strong emotional reactions to

course content and presentation styles). In my opinion, it demonstrates a high level of maturity to recognize your limits of comfort and what you are willing to take on this semester and act appropriately as quickly as possible.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Gain an understanding of the essentialist and constructionist perspectives, and the assumptions both are based on, as they are employed in biological, psychological, and sociological explanations of sexuality and gender;
- Provide an understanding of social influences on the individual experience and meaning of sexuality and foster an ability to employ the sociological imagination;
- Critically examine hegemonic sexuality, with an emphasis on the supporting ideologies that perpetuate this as a “natural expression,” the techniques and agents of social control that support these ideologies, the resulting stratification effects, the potential and actual changes occurring within hegemonic sexuality and sources of those changes;
- Achieve a broader understanding of the sociocultural dimensions of human sexualities with increased appreciation of the possible and manifest variation in human expression of desire, intimacy, pleasure, and love.
- To be knowledgeable, appreciative, and proud of our bodies as sources of pleasure and beauty.
- To be able to discuss sexual matters with appropriate levels of sensitivity, respect, comfort, and humor (because let’s face it, talking about sex can be fun—and funny);
- To realize and clarify our individual sense of sexual self, individual way of being comfortably and morally sexual, and sexual decision making process—as always, within a sociological perspective;
- Demonstrate the accomplishment of the above insights on tests, papers, and in-class discussions according to academic style and standards.

## **Rules of the Game**

- Please arrive in the classroom and be prepared to begin on time. Please stay for the entire class period.
- Please turn off phones and beepers or switch to vibrate if you have a childcare or emergency situation.
- Please participate in the main conversation by being attentive, abstaining from reading other materials, and not carrying on side conversations during class.
- Turn in assignments on time. **All work is due by end of lecture for each assignment.**
- Adhere to university policies regarding academic honesty and failure to comply may result in your expulsion for the university, failing this class, and/or a zero for the assignment.
- The CULearn page for this class is an official forum for posting updates and presentation information, so please check it regularly during the semester.
- If you have any suggestions, feedback, or some aspect of the course requirements or material is not clear, let me know.

## **Strategies for playing the game successfully**

- Even though this is a large class, attend and participate (if only with your attentive listening). Studies suggest that this is highly correlated with the grade you earn.
- Keep up with the reading. You cannot participate or fully get the class material or have fun with the discussions if you have not done the readings and thought about them.
- Become a person to your instructor and TA. You can do this by asking questions, coming to office hours, and engaging with the material.
- Read and follow instructions carefully.
- Ask for assistance when you need it.
- Speak up and participate in discussions by asking questions, answering questions, giving opinions, or tying together others’ comments. Do this even if you do not think you have the right or best thing to say. You will learn something by doing it.

## EVALUATION COMPONENTS

**Three Exams:** Three 50-question multiple-choice exams will be given during the semester. Each exam is worth 50 points. Rescheduling an exam will result in five points being deducted from your exam score.

**Question Paper:** A two-page paper will be due during the first part of the course. This assignment will be given in recitation. This paper is worth 25 points.

**Group Presentation:** A final group presentation will be given at the end of the semester. You will be put into groups in lecture and are encouraged to rely upon group members for missed class notes and study partners. This presentation will be 15 minutes long and be worth 50 points.

**Utopian Vision Paper:** A three-four page paper based on class themes presenting your vision of a sexual utopia. This paper will be worth 50 points. *No late papers will be accepted due to the late due date.*

**Recitation:** This semester you may earn 75 points in your recitation.

## TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Monday, January 14

Topic – Introduction & Course Expectations

Read – “Perspectives on Sexuality”

Wednesday, January 16

Topic – Basic Sociological Concepts and Social Control

Read – “Introduction” and “White Privilege, Male Privilege”

Monday, January 21

NO CLASS: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Wednesday, January 23

Topic – Reading Media Representations

**View – *Cultural Criticism and Transformation***

Monday, January 28

Topic – What is sexuality? Why study sexuality? Sexuality Pioneers

Read – “Are We Having Sex Now or What?” and “Understanding Human Sexuality”

**Due – Course Agreement Form (If you do not turn in an agreement form, you will be dropped from this class. NO EXCUSES!)**

Wednesday, January 30

Topic – Assumptions of Essentialism

Monday, February 4

Topic – Assumptions of Constructionism

Read --- “Social Constructionism”

Wednesday, February 6

Topic – History of Sexual Distinctions

Read – “Homosexual and Heterosexual”

Monday, February 11

Topic – Radical Theory of Sexuality

Read – “Thinking Sex”

Wednesday, February 13

Topic – Charmed Circle and Democratic Morality

Read – “Thinking Sex”

Monday, February 18

**EXAM ONE**

Wednesday, February 20

Topic – Panic Discourse and Moral Contagion Model

Read – “Heterocopulative Syndrome” and “Sexually Transmitted Diseases”

**Guest Speaker – Rodger McFarlane: AIDS, America, and Sex (Evening)**

Monday, February 25

Topic – Hegemonic Masculine Sexuality

Read – “Rock Hudson’s Body” on CULearn

Wednesday, February 27

Topic – Hegemonic Feminine Sexuality

Read – “The Egg and the Sperm”

**Due – Question Paper**

Monday, March 3

Topic – Erotic Bodies

Read – “All Together Now” and “Our Cunts Are Not the Same”

**View: *Viva La Vulva and Private Dicks\****

Wednesday, March 5

Topic – Hegemonic Sexual Script & Heteronormativity

Read – “Atypical Sexual Behavior”

**Guest Speaker: Dr. Claudia Panzo, Fellow in Sexual Medicine (Evening)\***

Monday, March 10

Topic – Disrupting Heteronormativity: I

Read – “In Praise of Strap-Ons”

**View: *Bend Over Boyfriend\****

Wednesday, March 12

Topic – Disruptions II: Imperialism and the Sexual “Other”

Read – “Black Sexuality”

**View – *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman***

Monday, March 17

**EXAM TWO**

Wednesday, March 19

Topic: Rape Panic and Sexual Coercion

Read – “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist”

Monday, March 24

NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Wednesday, March 26

NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Monday, March 31

Topic – Rape Culture

Read – “Conversations of Consent”

Wednesday, April 2

Topic – Rape Panic Consequences

Monday, April 7

Topic – Disruption III: Sexual Variance

Read – “Over a Knee Willingly”

Wednesday, April 9

Topic – BDSM & Hegemonic Heterosexuality

**Guest Speaker – William: The BDSM Scene (Evening)\*\***

Monday, April 14

Topic – Disruption IV: Sexually Explicit Images

Read— “Aroused,” “Grading,” and “Sex For Sale”

**View – SEM Video Collage\***

Wednesday, April 16

Topic – Sexual Utopia?

Read – “My Mother Liked to Fuck” and “Sluts in Utopia”

**Due – Utopian Vision**

Monday, April 21

Group Presentations

Wednesday, April 23

Group Presentations

Monday, April 28

Group Presentations

Wednesday, April 30

**EXAM THREE**

Monday, May 5

**10 AM Final Group Presentations at 4:30 – 7 PM.**

Tuesday, May 6

**12 PM Final Group Presentations at 7:30 – 10 AM.**

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\*SEM (Sexually Explicit Material) – sexually explicit images in video format or photographs that show exposed genitals and/or explicit sexual activity. Your attendance is NOT required, BUT you are responsible for any material discussed that day. First, see a class member for notes, then your TA, and finally, talk with me.

\*\*BDSM presentation – This presentation will involve a discussion of BD/SM practices and philosophy as well as a safety demonstration of some techniques by members of the Colorado Scene. I do NOT allow any cameras or recording devices of any kind during this presentation in order to protect the confidentiality of the guest speakers. The first half of the presentation will be an examination of the history and values of the Scene. The second half is the safety demonstration and your attendance is NOT required, BUT you are responsible for any material discussed during the presentation. First, see a class member for notes, then your TA, and finally, talk with me.