

**The Social Construction of Sexuality**

SYP 4063

3 Credits

Instructor: Dr. Laura Backstrom Term:

Email: [lbackstrom@fau.edu](mailto:lbackstrom@fau.edu) Class Meetings:

Phone: (561) 297-3270 Class Location:

Office: Culture & Society Building (CU) 259

Office Hours:

Pre-requisites: 3 sociology classes at the 1000, 2000, or 3000 levels or permission of instructor.

Requirements fulfilled: This class counts towards the sociology major and minor.

**Course Description**

How do individuals develop attractions, make sexual choices, and enact their sexuality? How do institutions and organizations influence understandings of human sexuality over time? This course is about how sexuality is perceived, defined, and experienced in the context of society. The sexual is both personal and social. Although we may perceive sex to be a biologically driven behavior, sex is shaped by social norms, values, and expectations. Sexuality and its components (desire, pleasure, love, the body) are social constructed. Sexuality has been conceptualized differently across time and place. It is shaped by larger social-historical trends. In this course, we explore how sexuality is constructed and examine theories and concepts of a range of sexual practices and identities. We will examine how categories shape our understanding of sexuality and explore a wide range of topics.

**Required Texts**

None. All readings are posted on Canvas.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

* Discuss and evaluate sociological theories of sex and sexuality
* Apply these sociological theories to various sexual phenomena
* Understand and critically examine the social construction of sexuality and the social organization of sexuality
* Understand how sexuality has been conceptualized historically
* Be familiar with sociological research on various topics such as sexual orientation, gender, and sexuality across the life course
* Have successfully researched the sociology literature on a topic related to sexuality and effectively summarized and synthesized the findings of previous research
* Pose critical research questions about sexuality

**Course Grading Policies**

This is an advanced, 4000 level course which means that the material will be more challenging, the workload will be greater, and the expectations for the quality of your work will be more rigorous than in lower level courses. You will be reading dense theoretical works and empirical sociological research, and you will be writing extensively. **If you “need” to get an A or want an “easy A,” this is not the class for you.**

I do not give grades; you earn them. Grades are based on your performance in this course. If you are concerned about your grade, please talk to me. I am willing to help. If you have a grade dispute, you must meet with me **in person** to discuss during office hours or by appointment at a mutually agreeable time. Under no circumstance will grades be discussed via email or immediately before, during, or after class.

**Course Evaluation**

Your grade will be based on the following:

Exams: There will be two exams (9/26 and 10/31) which will cover lecture material, readings, and videos. Each exam is worth 100 points.

Response Memos: Over the course of the semester, there will be 6 response memos worth 100 points each (600 points total). These essays will typically be three to four typed, double spaced pages in length and will relate to the assigned readings and class topics. Essays are due at the beginning of class on the due date.

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| **Response Paper** | **Due Date** |
| Alternative Sexual Communities | September 5 |
| Discourse Analysis | September 12 |
| Theory | September 21 |
| Practices/Identities | October 17 |
| Social Control | November 9 |
| Sexual Politics | November 16 |

Final Paper: The final paper will be a 12-15 page theoretically informed research proposal on a topic of your choice related to sexuality. The final paper is worth 200 points (including paper workshops), and it is due on November 30.

**Course Grading Scale**

A = 95-100% (950-1000 pts) C = 73-76% (730-769 pts)

A- = 90-94% (900-949 pts) C- = 70-72% (700-729 pts)

B+ = 87-89% (870-899 pts) D+ = 67-69% (670-699 pts)

B = 83-86% (830-869 pts) D = 63-66% (630-669 pts)

B- = 80-82% (800-829 pts) D- = 60-62% (600-629 pts)

C+ = 77-79% (770-799 pts) F = 59% and below (599-0 pts)

**Policy on Make-Up Exams, Late Work, and Incompletes.**

I will only allow make up exams, late assignments, and course incompletes under exceptional circumstances and only if you contact me in advance of the deadline. If granted permission, late work will be penalized one-half letter grade per day.

**Classroom Etiquette Policy**

Please be respectful of your fellow classmates by turning off your cellphone and refraining from using your laptop and other technology during class. Sidebar conversations, sleeping, and reading the newspaper during class will not be tolerated.

**Attendance Policy**

All students must attend class, be on time, and not leave early. An attendance sheet will be available at the beginning of every class and it is your responsibility to sign your name. If your name (signed by you!) is not on the attendance sheet, you will be counted absent. You may miss up to two class meetings with no attendance penalty, regardless of the reasons for the absences. For every class missed after two, *regardless of the reason*, except for university sanctioned absences such as religious holidays, there will be a one step reduction in your course grade (e.g. from an A- to a B+). If you do miss class, you are responsible for the material covered and any announcements that were made in class. My notes will not be available to students, so you should coordinate with a fellow classmate in order to make up notes. If you miss class, you will not be able to make up reading checks or any other graded in-class assignment. Do NOT take this course if you will not be able to meet the attendance requirements.

**Disability Policy Statement**

“In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS)—in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); —and follow all SAS procedures.” *See http://www.fau.edu/sas/*

**Code of Academic Integrity Policy Statement**

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see University Regulation 4.001.

**Course Outline**

**PART I: SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF SEXUALITY**

**Week One The Social Construction of Sexuality**

8/22 Course Introduction

Readings: Working in the (Social) Construction Zone by Lars Christianson and Nancy Fischer

8/24 Early American Sexual History

Reading: Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America by John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman

**Week Two Alternative Sexual Communities**

8/29 Morality and Sexual Communities

Readings: Sexuality and Relationships in the Shaker, Oneida, and Mormon Communities by Lawrence Foster

Situational Sexual Behaviors: The Ideological Work of Moving toward Polyamory in Communal Living Groups by Jade Aguilar

8/31 Freudian Theory

Readings: The Sexual Life of Human Beings and The Development of the Libido by Sigmund Freud

“What Happened To The Girls in Le Roy?” by Susan Dominus. *The New York Times*, March 7, 2012.

“Reply All: Letters in Response to ‘What Happened to the Girls in Le Roy?” *The New York Times* March 23, 2012.

**Week Three Foucault and the History of Sexuality**

9/5 The Repressive Hypothesis

Reading: The Incitement to Discourse in The History of Sexuality by Michel Foucault

An Incitement to Discourse: Sociology and The History of Sexuality by Steve Epstein

9/7 Sociological Theories of Sexuality

Reading: Three Models of Sexuality: Drives, Identities, Practices by Arlene Stein

**Week Four The Sexual Revolution**

9/12 Liberated Victorians

Readings: Capitalism and Gay Identity by John D’Emilio

The Stalled Sexual Revolutions of This Century by Ira Reiss and Harriet Reiss

9/14 Sex Research

Reading: None

**Week Five Interactional Theories**

9/19 Scripting Theory

Reading: Sexual Scripts: Permanence and Change by William Simon and John H. Gagnon.

Grinding on the Dance Floor: Gendered Scripts and Sexualized Dancing at College Parties by Shelly Ronen

9/21 Symbolic Interaction

Reading: Symbolic Interactionism and Sexual Conduct: An Emergent Perspective by Ken Plummer

**PART TWO: FORMING SEXUAL IDENTITIES**

**Week Six Sex and Gender**

9/26 ***Exam One***

9/28 Gender/Sex Nonconformity

Readings: Unruly Bodies: Intersex Variations of Sex Development by Sharon Preves

Transforming the Sex/Gender/Sexuality System: The Construction of Trans Categories in the United States by Laurel Westbrook

**Week Seven Adolescent Sexuality**

10/3 Gender

Readings: Adolescent girls’ Sexuality: the more it chaggnes, the more it stays the same by Deborah Tolman

“Guys Are Just Homophobic”: Rethinking Adolescent Homophobia and Heterosexuality by C.J. Pascoe

10/5 Hooking Up

Readings: Is Hooking Up Bad For Young Women? by Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Laura Hamilton, and Paula England

Sex, Love, and Autonomy in theTeenage Sleepoverby Amy Schalet

**Week Eight The Organization of Relationships**

10/10 Gender

Readings: Gender and the Organization of Heterosexual Intimacy by Daniel Satore

Identities, Inequalities and the Partners of Trans Folks by Carey Jean Sojka

10/12 Race and Class

Readings: Interracial Romance: The Logic of Acceptance and Domination by Kumiko NeMoto

The Racial and Sexual Stereotypes of the “downlow” on Craigslist.org by Salvador Vidal-Ortiz and Brandon Andrew Robinson

**Week Nine Sexual Identity**

10/17 The Roots of Identity

Readings: The Cultural Construction of Heterosexual Identities by James Joseph Dean.

The Bisexual Menace Revisited: or, Shaking Up Social Categories is Hard To Do by Kristin Esterberg

Not Born This Way by Shamus Khan

10/19 Social Movements

Readings: Bathroom Battlegrounds and Penis Panics by Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook

U.S. Attitudes toward Lesbian and Gay People are Better than Ever by Tina Fetner

**Week Ten Sexual Desire**

10/24 Asexuality

Readings Coming to an Asexual Identity: Negotiating Identity, Negotiating Desire by Kristin Scherrer

10/26 Fludity

Reading: Learning to be Queer: College Women’s Sexual Fluidity by Leila J. Rupp, Verta Taylor, and Shaeleya Miller

**PART III: POWER AND THE REGULATION OF SEXUALITY**

**Week Eleven Religion**

10/31 ***Exam Two***

11/2 Religion

Reading: Christianity and the Regulation of Sexuality in the United States by Joshua Grove

**Week Twelve Social Institutions**

11/7 Medicine

Reading: Healing (disorderly) Desire: Medical-Therapuetuic Regulation of Sexuality by P.J. McGann

11/9 Marriage

Readings: One is not born a bride: how weddings regulate heterosexuality by Chrys Ingraham

The Marriage Contract by Mary Bernstein

**Week Thirteen The Politics of Sex**

11/14 Nation

Reading: Sexuality, State, and Nation by Jyoti Puri

11/16 Politics

Reading: The Pro-Family Movement by Tina Fetner

Week Fourteen

11/21 Paper Workshop

11/23 Thanksgiving Break

**Week Fifteen Commodification**

11/28 Reading: Intimate Labor in the Adult Film Industry by Heather Berg

11/30 Final Papers Due