

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

**Please Note: This class no longer fulfills core curriculum requirements!!!! This course will only count as a Sociology elective.**

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**Office Hours:** TR 9:15-10:45 and by appt

**You are responsible for everything in this syllabus, your recitation syllabus, the texts, the course packet, and material covered in class. This includes knowing and managing due dates, changes in the tentative schedule, and assignments. The syllabus and all information in the course packet are testable materials.**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is an introductory course in the sociological study of sexualities. We'll be examining human sexual desires, experiences, and meanings held in common in a historical and cultural context that takes into account larger trends and social influences.

For the purposes of this course, the theoretical assumptions of social constructionism frame our inquiry and understanding of human sexual phenomena. Throughout the course we will read, discuss, and entertain ideas from queer, feminist, and radical perspectives on sexuality for the express purpose of challenging our taken for granted assumptions about "what's so." Through these controversial and sometimes difficult (emotionally as well as intellectually) readings and discussions, we will be engaging in a critical inquiry into the popular and scientific versions of sexual reality.

We will also discuss the stratification system in contemporary US society where it intersects with our cultural assumptions and values regarding sexual identity and expression. We will be analyzing how this compares with our stated and generally agreed upon "American values" that include equality of respect and opportunity for all people and the belief that people deserve life, liberty, and the freedom to pursue happiness in a way that does not interfere with others' rights and liberties.

In doing this we will be identifying instances of discrepancies between what we say (ideals) and how we act (real) as we structure our society through policies, practices, institutions, rituals, and social control at the collective level and in our individual everyday choices and interactions. The intention of this inquiry and the opportunity provided through the assigned reading material and the class discussions is in working toward alignment of our vision of a just society with our everyday actions.

### **COURSE TEXTS AND RESOURCES**

**Textbooks are available at the Campus Bookstore**

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

This text is a great reference for information about the body, health, communication, and sexual information. This is not required for everyone in the class. However, it is highly recommended, and there will be several extra credit questions on tests and opportunities based upon these readings

*Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns* by Phillip Miller and Molly Devon. 1995

This text is optional, and although we will not be using it directly in class, when we discuss the BDSM community later in the semester, many people become interested in the activities, and this book is the best resource for practicing safely, sanely and consensually BDSM sex.

CULEARN: The course syllabus, assignments, Note outlines, study guides, additional readings, and announcements can all be found here. Check there first for class info before you call or e-mail me or your TA.

### **Course Policies and Environment:**

- You are responsible for material and announcements presented during all lectures and recitation meetings. It is your responsibility to get missed notes and updates from fellow students. If a due date or other administrative changes are announced, that will supercede the "tentative schedule" found in this syllabus.
- Please do not arrive late or leave early or begin to pack up prior to the end of lecture or discussion. This inhibits other students' ability to hear and understand the material.
- Please turn off cell phone ringers, and avoid engaging in side talking, reading, sleeping, texting, or surfing while in class. This is disrespectful of other students and the instructors and disruptive to the learning community. If I notice you doing any of these things the possible reactions range from polite requests to cease to light public ridicule to being asked to leave the room.
- No early or late exams will be given. If you know you will be unable to take an exam on the day scheduled for any reason (religious, university event, or any other reason), please let us know as soon as possible to arrange for the essay makeup or other alternative. If you miss an exam, you have 24 hours to inform your instructor and TA and then you will be given a take-home essay exam that typically takes 8-10 hours to complete. If you do not inform your TA and instructor within 24 hours of missing an exam you will be given a zero for that score. It is in your best interest to be at scheduled exams. Please check the syllabus now to determine if there are any conflicts you need to discuss with me.
- Late papers are not accepted. Exceptions to this policy may be granted for unforeseen and emergency circumstances and carry a heavy point penalty. This should be discussed with your TA, but the instructor is the final authority on granting any extension.
- If you require certain accommodations because of a disability, please let me know by the end of the third week so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation from Disability Services (Willard 322 303-492-8671 [www.colorado.edu/sacs/disabilityservices](http://www.colorado.edu/sacs/disabilityservices))
- If you have any schedule conflicts with the final exam, please let your instructor know by Thursday, November 6. If you have time conflicts with other tests, due dates, or known absences let both your TA and instructor know by e-mail as soon as possible.
- We (the instructor, TA, and students) are expected to adhere to the behavior standards listed in the Rights and Responsibilities Regarding Standards of Conduct. The specific policy may be found at [www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html](http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html)
- Both students and faculty are expected to abide by the University's honor code. The specifics can be found at [www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode](http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode). Cheating and plagiarizing will result in a failing grade. Any questions? Information on what constitutes these behaviors can be found in the honor code document.
- Sexual harassment is not tolerated. For more information on maintaining a fair and safe environment and sexual harassment policies and reporting see [www.colorado.edu/sexualharassment](http://www.colorado.edu/sexualharassment) or call the Office of Sexual harassment at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550.
- Please keep all returned exams (and other returned work) in the event that you have a grade dispute at the end of the semester. If your calculation of your grade does not match our records, it is your responsibility to provide proof of graded work.

## **CLASS 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 getting off the subject. You are expected to respect each other, your TA, and me. 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 can 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 the kind of opportunities and life 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, products and tools that both enforce and are reflective of existing power and privilege inequities.

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

The social constructionist perspective is founded on the principle that the language we use 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, we will 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” language is encouraged to seek alternative courses. This is a difficult class in many ways. 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**

1. ***I will:*** Provide accurate sources of information about sexuality, practice examining sexual phenomena consciously from the social constructionist and essentialist perspectives, and offer opportunities for developing our ability to evaluate new information, research, and the opinions held by others and ourselves.

### ***You/We will:***

- Gain an understanding of the essentialist and social constructionist perspectives—as theoretical perspectives, and the assumptions both are based on, as they are employed in biological, psychological, and sociological explanations of sexuality and gender.
  - Critically examine heterosexuality as an institutionalized practice within society, with emphasis on the supporting institutions and ideologies that perpetuate this as a “pattern of interaction,” the techniques of social control that are utilized within this institution, the resulting stratification effects, the potential and actual changes occurring within this institution and sources of those changes.
2. ***We will: Get practical personal benefits out of this class—grow and develop as adults.***
    - 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 get some practice “living proudly in a body [and relationships] of one’s own design” to quote Feinberg (1999).
    - 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, our own way of being sexual with integrity (in the engineering sense of the word), and sexual decision making process—as always, within a sociological perspective.
3. **You will: Get practical “professional” benefits--develop skills that will assist in your success in university life and beyond**
- Demonstrate the accomplishment of the above insights on tests, papers, and in class discussions according to academic style and standards. This gives us the opportunity to evaluate your integration of material on several levels, and you learn, among other things, how to play the game you are in the midst of called University degree seeker.

**EVALUATION COMPONENTS**

**Tests:** Two multiple-choice exams and one comprehensive final exam. They are weighted more heavily as the semester progresses so if you improve, it will be reflected in your grade (44 pts, 66 pts, 90pts). There are no early or late exams. It is your responsibility to be in attendance on exam day. If you miss an exam unexpectedly, you must contact your instructor by phone or e-mail within 24 hours or you will be given a zero for that score. If you cannot take a test at the scheduled time, you will be given an out of class essay exam that predictably takes 8-12 hours to complete. It is in your best interest to be at the exams.

**Writing Practice:** These points will consist of the opportunity for you to develop your writing skills, demonstrate your understanding and integration of course material in written form, and get feedback that will assist you in developing skills in written communication. There will be four short (two page) papers due throughout the semester. Details are posted on CU Learn and will be discussed in recitation. (110 pts)

**Recitation:** Your TA will determine this portion of your total grade based on recitation assignments and participation. (90 pts)

**Learning Community Participation:** This will involve on-line contributions that give feedback on students’ and instructors’ contributions to the class meetings, participation in on-line discussion threads through offering insights, provocative questions, and/or new topics. (50 pts)

**Point Distribution:**

Tests (44,66)	110	Grading follows a standard percentage cut-off for letter grades. There is no curving of tests or final scores. I have found that this actually works out to students’ advantage over other methods. You are strongly encouraged to come discuss/argue test questions, grades, pedagogy, or whatever.
Final	90	
Rec	90	
Writing	110	
LC part	<u>50</u>	
Total	<b>450</b>	

This has the dual benefit of improving your argument and communication skills and may even earn you extra points. If you want to discuss my reasoning, methods, or any other aspect of class or life please come see me.

Below is the standard for our assessment of written assignments and overall evaluation for course grades:

Letter Grade	Percentage Grade	Description
A	90-100	Exceeds all required elements of an assignment, and the quality of the work is considerably greater than what was required. The quality of the work is considerably above the class average and impressive to the evaluator.
B	80-89	Meets all required elements of an assignment, and the quality of the work is better than what is required and demonstrated by the class average.
C	70-79	Meets all required elements of an assignment, no more, no less. Quality of assignment is satisfactory for college level work.
D	60-69	Fails to meet all required elements of an assignment, and/or the quality of the assignment is less than satisfactory.
F	Less than 59	Only meets some of the required elements of an assignment, and/or the quality of the assignment is considerably lower than satisfactory. 50% of points are not guaranteed. At this level points are only given if some elements of the assignment are met. If not, very low percentages are likely.
Zero	0	Fails to meet any of the required elements of an assignment, and/or the quality of the assignment is well below basic standards of writing, comprehension, and/or ability to follow instructions; assignment is late or incomplete; assignment is not turned in at all; assignment shows signs of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty. In the latter case, honor code violations will be formally filed.

These standards may be higher than you've encountered previously in your educational career. The distribution curve of final grades for this class consistently meets the standards for fair and rigorous evaluations. We (the TA and I) are available to offer assistance, feedback, coaching, etc... to assist you in meeting these standards and taking away from this course the ability to perform at this level. You must seek us out and request this assistance, but if you do I promise the benefits of this course increase exponentially.

**TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE-SUBJECT TO CHANGES ANNOUNCED IN CLASS-  
NOT ALL ASSIGNMENTS DUE ARE LISTED HERE!  
SEE YOUR RECITATION SYLLABUS FOR WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES!**

Reading numbers are in the GV – Good Vibrations Guide to Sex or on CULearn (CUL) by number;  
**For your own benefit and the liveliness of discussion please have the readings completed before class or recitation (whichever meets first) for the week they are assigned.**

**Week One-Opportunity to turn in course agreements on Thursday**

Topic – Intro to course and How do we know what we know? It's all perspective.  
Read –syllabus, CUL tips for reading, test taking, and writing guidelines, Week One readings and GV chapter 2

**Week Two- Thursday, September 4- Last day to turn in course agreement to TA. You will be dropped by 3pm if not turned in!**

Topic - Perspectives, Paradoxes, and Radical Theories  
Read –CUL Week Two readings

**Week Three- Short Paper One due Thursday in class**

Topic-Social Control and Social Construction  
Read – CUL Week Three Readings and charts

**Week Four-**

Topic-History of Sexuality Research and Pioneers  
Read- CUL Week Four charts and readings

**Week Five- Thursday, Sept 25 TEST ONE—BRING A #2 PENCIL!**

Topic- wrap up and Study for exam  
Read- study guide

**Week Six- Tuesday, September 30 \*\*SEM Viva La Vulva and Private Dicks**

Topic - Language, Pleasure, Bodies, Health and Social Control  
Read – GV chapter 3, 19 and CUL Week 6 readings

**Week Seven-Short Paper Two due in class Thursday**

Topic- finish STI panic and intro scripting theory  
Read – CUL Week 7 readings

**Week Eight-**

Topic – How to have sex the right way-GSS and DCS  
Read- GV chapter 14 and CUL Week Eight Readings

**Week Nine- Short Paper Three due in class Thursday**

Topic – Deconstructing Hegemonic Heterosexuality as Cultural Script  
Read – CUL Week Nine Readings and GV chapter4

**Week Ten—**

Topic – Het privilege, stratification, and American Ideals  
Read – CUL Week Ten Readings

**Week Eleven- Thursday, Nov 6 TEST 2- BRING #2 PENCIL**

**Thursday is Last Day to request alternative final exam time in writing**  
Read – Study guide for Test 2

**Week Twelve- Short paper Four due in class Thursday**

Topic –Social construction of SEM-pornographication of sexual images and writings

Read – CUL Week Twelve Readings and GV chapter 15, 16, and 20?

**Optional SEM presentation: Sexually Explicit Material Will Be Shown**

Tuesday, November 11 6pm- Location TBA

We will have a sign in sheet for attendance, and if not enrolled in class, the person will need to show identification that proves age (over 18)

**Week Thirteen-**

Topic – The sociological perspective on sexual coercion and consent

Read –CUL Week Thirteen Readings

**Enjoy your Fall Break!**

**Week Fourteen-**

Topic – Transforming sexual scripts/BDSM philosophy and Scripts

Read – CU Week 14 readings and GV chapter 17

**Tentative BDSM Presentation\*\***

Tuesday, Dec 2 6:30-8:30 PM – Location TBA

Anyone attending this special presentation (class members and their guests) is required to do the reading for this week in order to prepare for the presentation.

**Week Fifteen-**

Topic – Sex Pioneer...who me?

Read – CUL 19, 20, 21

**Writing: Final Class Eval/Sexual Utopia due Thursday**

**Final Exam for 8am class: Wed, Dec 17, 7:30-10am in Eckley E1B20**

**Final Exam for 2pm class: Saturday Dec 13, 10:30am-1pm in Eckley E1B20**

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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. Please see a class member for notes or meet with your TA.

\*\*BDSM presentation – The first hour of this presentation will involve a discussion of BDSM practices and philosophy and history of the BDSM Scene. Attendance is important as material covered will appear on the exam. The second hour of the presentation will involve questions and answers as well as a safety demonstration of some techniques by members of the Colorado Scene. Attendance is not required and this material is not testable. We 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 presentation on the history of sexually explicit material will involve the showing of such images. Attendance at the presentation is not required, although it will certainly contain information that would be useful in paper writing and class discussions. You must be enrolled in the class or prove you are over age 18 to attend this presentation.