Social Construction of Sexuality

SOCY/WMST 1006 SPRING 2018

**Instructor:** Matthew Brown

**Office:** 146 Ketchum Hall

**Office Hours:** Tuesday/Thursday 9:30 – 11 a.m.

**Contact Info:** [brownmc@colorado.edu](mailto:brownmc@colorado.edu) (Please put “SOCY 1006” in subject heading)

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

# 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 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](https://exchange2007owa.colorado.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=rgKQdqAaA0aGhELKSY57_tJNxRxvjNFIGDE14m7i8xLBBkQLdbAiQ0jyyfcgKs9N7nSy31m_z8A.&URL=mailto%3ahonor%40colorado.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](https://exchange2007owa.colorado.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=rgKQdqAaA0aGhELKSY57_tJNxRxvjNFIGDE14m7i8xLBBkQLdbAiQ0jyyfcgKs9N7nSy31m_z8A.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.alumniconnections.com%2flinks%2flink.cgi%3fl%3d5898392%26h%3d131100%26e%3dUCBI-20140814145349) **and at** [http://honorcode.colorado.edu](https://exchange2007owa.colorado.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=rgKQdqAaA0aGhELKSY57_tJNxRxvjNFIGDE14m7i8xLBBkQLdbAiQ0jyyfcgKs9N7nSy31m_z8A.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.alumniconnections.com%2flinks%2flink.cgi%3fl%3d5898393%26h%3d131100%26e%3dUCBI-20140814145349) **Honor code violations will result in a 0 for the assignment at a minimum.**

Classroom Behavior

**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**](https://exchange2007owa.colorado.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=rgKQdqAaA0aGhELKSY57_tJNxRxvjNFIGDE14m7i8xLBBkQLdbAiQ0jyyfcgKs9N7nSy31m_z8A.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.alumniconnections.com%2flinks%2flink.cgi%3fl%3d5898389%26h%3d131100%26e%3dUCBI-20140814145349)**and at**[**http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student\_code**](https://exchange2007owa.colorado.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=rgKQdqAaA0aGhELKSY57_tJNxRxvjNFIGDE14m7i8xLBBkQLdbAiQ0jyyfcgKs9N7nSy31m_z8A.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.alumniconnections.com%2flinks%2flink.cgi%3fl%3d5898390%26h%3d131100%26e%3dUCBI-20140814145349)

**I DO NOT ALLOW ELECTRONIC DEVICES FOR NOTE TAKING.**

Discrimination and Harassment

**The University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. The University of Colorado does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities. (Regent Law, Article 10, amended 11/8/2001). CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or veteran status. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against 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://hr.colorado.edu/dh/](https://exchange2007owa.colorado.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=rgKQdqAaA0aGhELKSY57_tJNxRxvjNFIGDE14m7i8xLBBkQLdbAiQ0jyyfcgKs9N7nSy31m_z8A.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.alumniconnections.com%2flinks%2flink.cgi%3fl%3d5898391%26h%3d131100%26e%3dUCBI-20140814145349)

Religious Holidays

**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. Talk with me to make arrangements that allow you to observe and a complete the assignment.** Typically, I’ll reschedule and exam or extend a paper deadline. See full details at [http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac\_relig.html](https://exchange2007owa.colorado.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=rgKQdqAaA0aGhELKSY57_tJNxRxvjNFIGDE14m7i8xLBBkQLdbAiQ0jyyfcgKs9N7nSy31m_z8A.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.alumniconnections.com%2flinks%2flink.cgi%3fl%3d5898386%26h%3d131100%26e%3dUCBI-20140814145349)

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**

*The Social Construction of Sexuality.* 2009. 3rd Ed. 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.
* The D2L 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.

**Evaluation Components**

## Exams: Three 50-question multiple-choice exams will be given during the semester. Each exam is worth 50 points. Rescheduling an exam will incur a 10% deduction from your exam score, so plan accordingly.

**Papers:** Two two-page papers will be assigned during the semester. Each paper is worth 15 points. I will deduct 10% /per day from any late paper. You have one week to turn in a late paper after that I will not accept it.

**Discussion Summaries:** There will be five discussion days. Each group will lead two class discussions. Groups will prepare a summary of their questions and answers. Each discussion summary is worth 10 points.

**Save all graded work for this course. If you do not have the original graded copy of you work, you cannot challenge your final course grade after the semester is over.**

## TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

The following provides the class topics, readings and assignments that are due before class. This schedule is tentative and any modifications will be announced in class.

WEEK 1

Tu 1/16 Topic – Introduction & Course Expectations

Read – “Exploring Human Sexuality”

Th 1/18 Topic –Social Control and Privilege

Read – “White Privilege, Male Privilege”

WEEK 2

Tu 1/23Topic – What is sexuality? Why study sexuality? Sexuality Pioneers

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

Th 1/25 Topic – What is sexuality? Why study sexuality? Sexuality Pioneers

**Due: Discussion questions 1 & Course Agreement Form**

WEEK 3

Tu 1/30 Topic – Assumptions of Essentialism

Read – “In the Beginning: Nature”

Th 2/1 Topic – Assumptions of Constructionism

Read – “Is There a History of Sexuality?”

WEEK 4

Tu 2/6 Topic – Radical Theory of Sexuality

Read – “Thinking Sex”

Th 2/8 Topic – Radical Theory of Sexuality

**Due: Discussion questions 2**

WEEK 5

Tu 2/13 Topic – History of Sexual Distinctions

Read – “Homosexual and Heterosexual”

**Due:** Paper One

Th 2/15 Review

WEEK 6

Tu 2/20 **EXAM ONE**

Th 2/22 Topic – Panic Discourse and Moral Contagion Model

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

WEEK 7

Tu 2/27 Topic – Panic Discourse and Moral Contagion Model

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

Th 3/1 Topic – Hegemonic Masculine Sexuality

Read – “Rock Hudson’s Body”

WEEK 8

Tu 3/6 Topic – Hegemonic Feminine Sexuality

Read – “The Egg and the Sperm”

Th 3/8 Topic – Hegemonic Sexual Script & Heteronormativity

Read – “Atypical Sexual Behavior”

WEEK 9

Tu 3/13 Topic – Hegemonic Sexual Script & Heteronormativity

Read – “Atypical Sexual Behavior”

**Due: Discussion questions 3**

Th 3/15 Topic – Disruptions I: Transgressive Bodies

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

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

**Due: Paper Two**

WEEK 10

Tu 3/20 Topic – Disruptions II: Transgressive Desires

Read – “In Praise of Strap-Ons

Th 3/22 **EXAM TWO**

WEEK 11 SPRING BREAK

WEEK 12

Tu 4/3 Topic – Disruptions III: Imperialism, Science, and the Sexual “Other”

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

Th 4/5 Topic – Disruptions III: Science and the Sexual “Other”

Read – “Racism and Research”

WEEK 13

Tu 4/10 Topic – Disruptions IV: Sexual Coercion and Rape Culture

Read – “Tactics of Sexual Coercion”

Th 4/12Topic – Rape Panic Consequences

Read – “Sexual Coercion” and “It’s Only a Penis”

WEEK 14

Tu 4/17 Topic - Sexual Coercion and Rape Culture

**Due: Discussion questions 4**

Th 4/19 Topic – **Guest Speaker –The BDSM Scene (Evening)\*\***

Read – “Over a Knee Willingly”

WEEK 15

Tu 4/24 Topic – Disruption V: Feminism & BDSM

Th 4/26 Topic – Disruption VI: Sexual Utopia?

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

WEEK 16

Tu 5/1 Topic – Sexual Utopia

**Due: Discussion questions 5**

Th 5/3 Review

Our final is Tuesday, May 8 from 4:30 – 7 p.m.

**\***SEM (Sexually Explicit Material) – sexually explicit images in video format or photographs that show exposed genitals. Your attendance is NOT required, BUT you are responsible for any material discussed that day. If you do not attend you will need to see a class member or me for notes.

\*\*BDSM presentation – This presentation will involve a discussion of BDSM 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. If you do not attend you will need to see a class member or me for notes.