

PSYCHOLOGY OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

Instructor: Christine M. Curley, PhD, JD (she, her, hers)

Email: ccurley@wesleyan.edu

Student Hours: Available by appointment:

* If you require an evening appointment, feel free to email me!

Course Description and Purpose

This course introduces the psychology of human sexuality in its evolutionary, physiological, reproductive, and social context. We'll explore various psychological theories of human sexuality, as well as sexual motivations, sexual anatomy, sexual response, sexual pleasure, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual behavior, sexuality across the life span, safe sex, and consent.

The emphasis of this course will be on current research in psychology, sexology, and sociology, and will, to the extent possible, be inclusive across cultures, races, ethnic groups, age, gender, sexual orientation, and relationship orientation. This seminar is intended to be responsive to student questions and to provide a brave space for discussions in a non-judgmental and inclusive environment.

This course will include lectures, readings, and video clips about explicit topics. We will cover various relationship structures; sexual violence; sexual anatomy and physiology; masturbation, oral sex and anal sex; sexually transmitted infections; pornography; and atypical sexual preferences, as well as other topics that students express an interest in discussing during the course. ***If you are not comfortable learning about these topics in an open-minded scientific way, this may not be the right course for you.***

Learning Objectives:

- 1) Know psychological theories and models and appreciate they are related to sexuality and are used to understand sexual behaviors, gender, sexual orientation and identity, and sexual norms.
- 2) Become exposed to a broader concept of sexuality across gender, sexual identity, relationships, and age
- 3) Discuss historical and cultural norms and biases towards sexuality and possibilities for social change
- 4) Create a brave space to discuss, reflect on, and debate many aspects of sexuality both personally and in the broader culture
- 5) Debunk myths about sexuality
- 6) Push boundaries of what life experience, culture, or society may have taught us about sexuality

Caveats for this class

Sexuality is an especially sensitive area that people care about passionately. There will be a wide range of sexual attitudes, preferences, orientations, and moral beliefs among your fellow students. When we have class discussions about any class topic, please try to remember this diversity. Some students will have strong conservative beliefs about sexuality while others will have more liberal beliefs. Your fellow students will discuss various sexual and gender identities – some that may be familiar to you, some that are not. Some students may have experienced positive and negative sexual experiences (rape, sexual coercion, harassment, stalking, childhood sexual abuse), and be comfortable discussing these areas in class. Please only share information you are comfortable discussing and be considerate of others' thoughts. Remember we have all walked different paths to get to this moment and consider this notion when we are discussing materials.

Sexuality is one of the most emotionally-charged, controversial areas of human behavior, culture, and morality. ***If you have concerns about materials, please let me know. Please do not hesitate to sign up for student hours, email me, or we can arrange to meet in person before or after class.***

While I do encourage you to discuss what you have learned in class with others outside of class, *please do not engage in discussions about any particular experiences your peers may have disclosed or mentioned in class. This class should be considered a safe space for open discussions without judgment or negative commentary and personal stories must remain confidential.* (Along these lines, think through what you are comfortable disclosing and what you are not comfortable disclosing. You will never be asked to disclose something you do not want to disclose.)

A Note on Language and Terminology

The field of sexuality and gender, orientations, identities, and behaviors are changing and growing rapidly. During this course, we have limited time together, which means that sadly, many identities, groups, and movements are not represented on this syllabus. (Some of this is a function of lack of representation in the research, which is a trend that is fortunately shifting.) Their absence in our explorations is not intended to devalue or marginalize these identities in any way.

Every effort will be made to use language that is as inclusive as possible to respect individual identities and preferred pronouns. For some topics, such as anatomy, it will be necessary to use binary terms, which is not intended to marginalize those outside the binary. ***Please remember that all of us, including myself, are learning in this area and may occasionally slip up while learning and using terminology; please be kind to each other and give each other grace so that we can create a truly inclusive and accepting environment.***

Readings and Materials

It intended for this course will allow students to delve into topics on a more nuanced and detailed level. As such, a main focus of this course will be on assigned readings and videos which may include:

TedTalk: Listening to Shame, Brene Brown, 2012 (discussing vulnerability and shame)

TedTalk: Emily Quinn and Biological Sex

TedTalk: Peggy Orienstein Girls and Sex

TedTalk: Ella Dawson (STIs)

Research Talk: Kristen Jozkowski: Need for Affirmative Sexuality in the Era of Affirmative Consent

Sex Education Videos: Sex in the Netherlands

Sex Education in the United States (John Oliver)

Research Articles and Essays:

Christina, G. (1992). Are we having sex now or what? (Essay on sexual behavior)

Cohen, J.N. & Byers, E.S. (2014). Beyond lesbian bed death: Enhancing our understanding of the sexuality of sexual minority women in relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research* 51, 893-903. doi:10.1080/00224499.2013.795924

Conley, T. D., Piemonte, J. L., Gusakova, S., & Rubin, J. D. (2018). Sexual satisfaction among individuals in monogamous and consensually non-monogamous relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 35(4), 509-531.

Conley, T. D., Ziegler, A., Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., & Valentine, B. (2013). A critical examination of popular assumptions about the benefits and outcomes of monogamous relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 17(2), 124-141.

Curley, C. M., & Johnson, B. T. (2022). Sexuality and aging: Is it time for a new sexual revolution? *Social Science & Medicine*, 301, 114865. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.114865

Goldey, K. L., Posh, A. R., Bell, S. N., & van Anders, S. M. (2016). Defining pleasure: A focus group study of solitary and partnered sexual pleasure in queer and heterosexual women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45, 2137-2154.

Koedt, A. (1970). The myth of the vaginal orgasm. In Kolmar, W.K. & Bartkowski, F. (Eds.) (2005). *Feminist theory: A reader* (pp. 227-231). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Koepsel, E. R. (2016). The power in pleasure: Practical implementation of pleasure in sex education classrooms. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 11 (3), 205-265. doi:10.1080/15546128.2016.1209451

Labrecque, F., Potz, A., Larouche, É., & Joyal, C. C. (2021). What is so appealing about being spanked, flogged, dominated, or restrained? Answers from practitioners of sexual masochism/submission. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 58(4), 409-423.

Levin, R. J. (2008). Critically revisiting aspects of the human sexual response cycle of Masters and Johnson: Correcting errors and suggesting modifications. *Sexual & Relationship Therapy*, 23 (4), 393-399. doi:10.1080/14681990802488816

Masters, N. T., Casey, E., Wells, E. A., & Morrison, D. M. (2013). Sexual scripts among young heterosexually active men and women: Continuity and change. *Journal of Sex Research*, 50(5), 409-420. doi:10.1080/00224499.2012.661102

Montemurro, B., Bartasavich, J. & Wintermute, L. (2015). Let's (not) talk about sex: The gender of sexual discourse. *Sexuality & Culture*, 19, 139-156. doi:10.1007/s12119-014-9250-5

Montemurro, B., & Gillen, M.M. (2013). Wrinkles and sagging flesh: Exploring transformations in women's sexual body image. *Journal of Women & Aging*, 25, 3-23. doi: 10.1080/08952841.2012.720179

Nagoski, E. (2015). *Come as you are: The surprising new science that will transform your sex life*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

This is a sample of the research students may be exposed to in this class.

In addition, this course will cover contemporary issues that may arise each week, such as sex education, gender diversity, and sexual orientation. In light of the current political climate, it is anticipated that hot-button topics may be discussed in class to sort out myths from evidence supported by scientific research.

Reading and Writing Expectations

For each class there will 3-5 readings to review and understand, which will be the subject of class discussion, plus an occasional video or podcast. All readings should be completed before the class period for which they are listed.

Attendance: A/K/A Class Engagement

Although I do not grade directly on class attendance, this class is a graduate seminar which requires active engagement with the course material. You are responsible for the information in the readings and the additional information presented in lectures.

This course requires that you complete two projects during the course of the semester, one of which will be leading a class discussion based on new research and the second will be a research paper presented on the last day of class.

If you are a person who cannot class attend regularly, this is not the course for you. Absences will affect your class engagement grade. ***Class engagement is part of your total grade; most points cannot be earned if you are not in attendance.***

Guidelines to class engagement:

1. Strive to be an active listener and provide encouragement and supportive feedback. Strive to create a climate of safety, trust, and active learning.
2. Keep an open mind to allow for nonjudgmental discussions. Strive to imagine why the speaker holds the beliefs and opinions that they do. Strive to avoid comments or reactions that might make others uncomfortable.
3. Strive to foster empathy. An idea that might be abstract to one, could be someone else's reality.
4. Respect confidentiality in the classroom; just like Vegas, what happens in class, stays in class.
5. Be willing to tolerate ambiguity and not having concrete answers or the answers you want to hear. Avoid argumentative questioning. Ask curious questions.

Course Requirements:

Reading – Takeaways and discussion questions (6 (best of 8)): For each required reading, list at least 2 takeaways and one question. Be prepared to share orally with the class. You will have a “grace” of 2 days during the course without submitting discussion questions: one “free day” and the day you are presenting current research as class discussion leader. Your questions could refer to issues or concepts you don't understand, assumptions or arguments you disagree with, or broader theoretical or methodological issues, problems in the literature, or suggestions for future research. The best and most useful questions are usually those that come to mind while you are reading, so take notes as (not after) you read. Due by _____

Research, Reading, & Reflection Assignments (8): These assignments will vary throughout the course, designed to build on the concepts discussed in the readings and to develop your critical analysis and academic writing skills. They will be due by _____ before class. You will be required to complete 4 assignments (1-3 pages). Due by _____-

****** More detail on the Assignments will be provided in class ******

Class Discussion Leader(s): Prepare and present a 15-20 minute slide show discussing (and possibly debating) a chosen topic. Beginning the second week of classes. Individual or teams of 2 or 3 (student option).

****** More detail on the Class Discussion Leader assignment will be provided in class ******

Individual Project and Presentation: In lieu of exams, each student will be preparing a research paper (6-10 pages) either: (1) debunking a myth about sexuality; (2) discussing sexuality in a cultural context (inside or outside of US); or (3) examining sexuality & history (select a period in history or discuss the origins of an aspect of sexuality) supported by peer-reviewed research. The presentation of your research (6-10 minutes) will take place on the last day of class. The research paper will be due on July 31.

****** More detail on the Individual Project and Presentation will be provided in class ******

Class Engagement: These points will be assessed based on the quality of engagement. Students will be evaluated based on their effort to substantively take part in class discussions whether in person (in class or during meetings) or online (such as by emailing me).

GRADING:

The grading scheme is broken down as follows (see below):

		<u>Semester Grade Value</u>
Readings: Takeaways	10 points x 6 (6 of 8)	60 (21.4 %)
RRR Assignments	10 points x 6	60 (21.4 %)
Class Discussion Leader	40	40 (14.3 %)
Individual Project & Presentation	80 (60+20)	80 (28.6 %)
Class Engagement	40	40 (14.3 %)
Total		280

Grade Scale

Final Grades calculated as a percentage of total points:

A+	= 98.1 to 100%	C+ = 78.1 to 81%	E+ = 58.1 to 61%
A	= 95 to 98%	C = 75 to 78 %	E = 55 to 58%
A-	= 91.1 to 94.9 %	C- = 71.1 to 74.9%	E- = 51.1 to 54.9%
B+	= 88.1 to 91%	D+ = 68.1 to 71%	F = 51% or below
B	= 85 to 88%	D = 65 to 68%	
B-	= 81.1 to 84.9 %	D- = 61.1% to 64.9%	

Class Learning Environment

Every class is a group learning environment and as such, each person enrolled in this class deserves the opportunity to learn without distraction or interference from classmates. Cell phones must be turned off during or placed on vibrate during class time. You can use your laptops for

the purposes of participating in in class assignments, but not for Facebook, Instagram, email, Google etc.

Students have the right to have input in their classroom environment and it is my responsibility to support this process. If you would like me to add detail to a section or assignment description, let me know so I can integrate your interests or address your concerns as much as possible during class time.

Let me know what's going on! I want to help you, and I will do my best, within reason, to accommodate personal issues in order to make sure you get the most you can out of this course. Please do not hesitate to contact me by email or ask to meet during student hours. ***Bring your questions, your readings, your curiosities!***

STATEMENT OF SUCCESS

Success in this course depends heavily on your personal health and well-being. ***Recognize*** that stress is an expected part of the college experience, and it often can be compounded by unexpected setbacks or life changes outside the classroom. I strongly encourage you to ***reframe*** challenges as an unavoidable pathway to success. ***Reflect*** on your role in taking care of yourself throughout the term, before the demands of exams and projects reach their peak. Please feel free to ***reach out*** to me about any difficulty you may be having that may impact your performance in your courses or campus life as soon as it occurs and before it becomes too overwhelming. In addition to your academic advisor, I strongly encourage you to contact the many other support services on campus that stand ready to assist you.

General Course Outline (Proposed)

Day	Class Dates	Topics	Readings	Assignment
1		Review syllabus, class policies, defensiveness, what is sex?	Syllabus; Are we Having Sex Now? Social Construction of Sexuality	Assignment #1 (Defensiveness Workshop)
2		Theory and Research	Gender differences in sexuality - meta analysis; Why humans have sex	
3		Sexual Anatomy, Sexual Response & Sexual Pleasure	Come as You Are (Chapter 1); Mintz "Becoming Cliterate"; Koedt "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm"; Goldey et al., "Defining Pleasure"	Assignment #2; Class Discussion Leader (2)
4		Gender & Gender Identity; Sexual Orientation	Frye, "Lesbian Sex"; Mesasuring Sexual Orientation; Byers, E.S., "Beyond lesbian bed death"	Assignment #3; Class Discussion Leader(s)
5		Intimate Relationships/ Monogamy & Consensual (Ethical) Non-Monogamy	Conley, et al., "A critical examination of popular assumptions about the benefits and outcomes of monogamous relationships"	Assignment #4; Class Discussion Leader (s)
6		Sexual Behavior/ Sexual Variety/ BDSM Kink	Tiefer, "Am I normal?"; Labrecque, F., et al. "What is so appealing about being spanked, flogged, dominated, or restrained?"	Assignment #5; Class Discussion Leader (s)
7		Sex Across the Lifespan	Curley, C. M. "Sexuality and aging: Is it time for a new sexual revolution?"; Montemurro, B., & Gillen, M.M. "Wrinkles and sagging flesh: Exploring transformations in women's sexual body image."	Assignment #6; Class Discussion Leader(s)
8		OPEN TOPIC: [Sexual Norms in the Bedroom/ Hook-Up Culture/Sex Education/ Sexuality & Law/Pornography]	Masters, N. T. et al. "Sexual scripts among young heterosexually active men and women"; Montemurro, B. et al., "Let's (not) talk about sex: The gender of sexual discourse."	Class Discussion Leader(s)
9		Individual Presentations	Individual Presentations	Individual Presentations
FINALS WEEK		NO EXAM	Final Project Due - Paper	31-Jul

