

Instructor: Ramzi Fawaz
English 171: American Sex Cultures
Van Hise 159, MW 2:30-3:45

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American Sex Cultures

Course Description This class will explore American sex cultures since 1945. We will ask how a variety of historical and cultural transformations made sex a topic of national concern, and allowed Americans to access new knowledge about sex, form distinct sexual subcultures, and seek out intimate connections beyond the traditional limits of marriage and the nuclear family. In so doing, we will ask what role sex has played in shaping collective life in the modern United States, and why it remains an object of intense titillation, stigma, scrutiny, and controversy despite a variety of movements for sexual liberation. Simultaneously, we will push back against the tendency to stigmatize sex by developing a robust vocabulary for talking about the variety of sexual practices that enrich, complicate, and shape people's lives from the bedroom to the ballot box. This also means that we will extensively explore the role that alternative and non-traditional sexual subcultures have played in expanding the range of possibilities for sex and sexual expression in the modern United States.

The first two-thirds of the course will move historically through a range of primary sources including the Kinsey Reports of the 1950s, the sex manuals and self-help guides of the 1960s, the culture and politics of sexual liberation in the 1970s, AIDS activism and safe-sex education in the 1980s, and the culture wars of the 1990s. The last third of the course will offer an extended case study of recent debates around sex on college campuses: we will discuss the emergence of sexual harassment laws, feminist responses to rape and violence towards women, the sexual cultures of fraternities, and sex-positive youth activism.

Course Expectations This is an introductory seminar in American literature and cultural studies. Each week we will engage a range of primary historical documents and secondary scholarship to explore a particular topic or question in 20th century American sex cultures. These documents will include newspaper and magazine articles, excerpts from medical handbooks and sex manuals, literature, political manifestos, feminist and queer theory, movies, and visual art among others. You will learn how to distinguish between different kinds of cultural, political, and intellectual sources and how to make arguments about those sources using historical evidence to support your claims. We will watch seven movies over the course of the semester. Our course films will be streamed on Learn@UW for your convenience and must be viewed prior to the meeting they are listed under. Alongside three group writing assignments your grade will rest largely on your participation in class. Through your participation you should demonstrate that you have actively engaged our course reading and viewing assignments: this includes taking extensive notes on our assigned texts and coming to class prepared to engage in substantive dialogue about what you have read and viewed. We will review best practices for note taking both in and out of class as part of our course learning goals. All readings marked with * will be available on Learn@UW. **You MUST print out and bring your readings to class with you.**

Attendance at every class session is mandatory and non-negotiable. That means not only showing up, but being awake, attentive, and actively engaged in our meetings. An absence incurs a 10% percent reduction in your participation grade unless otherwise permitted in advance. Inform me of all unforeseeable absences, such as those caused by severe illness or a personal emergency, as soon as possible. Unless you require a laptop as a learning aid, all portable electronic devices need to be discontinued during class sessions. **I will grant each student two excused absence for any reason;** all other unexcused absences will incur the 10% participation grade deduction listed above.

Field Trip In late November or early December we will take a one-day class field trip to Chicago to visit the Leather Archives and Museum. We will decide on the best date to travel and take a chartered bus for the day. This is a required component of the course. If you would like to explore more about the archive in advance, you may visit the official website: <http://www.leatherarchives.org>.

Course Assignments This course has three writing assignments, including weekly online posts, a midterm paper, and a final group collaborative research project. You will be placed into groups of four after the first week of our class. You will work with this group throughout the semester exchanging ideas, sharing drafts of your written work, and developing a collaborative final project.

Weekly Posts Each week, in advance of our class session, I will pose a question or set a task on the discussion boards at Learn@UW related to our upcoming reading or viewing assignments. Each member of one group will write a 500 word response to the question or task I have posed. These responses should present a compelling argument or take a strong position, and incorporate at least one of the sources we will be discussing in the next class session. Every other student in the class is required to respond to at least one of these mini-essays with a short, but substantive reply that expands upon, questions, or rethinks the ideas presented in the initial posts. Through these posts we will develop skills at substantively responding to one another, disagreeing or developing ideas collaboratively and using those ideas as a basis for class discussion. Every group will be responsible for being primary writers for two week of the semester, but every class member will be required to participate in some capacity every week. We will suspend posts for the one week that midterm papers are due. **All primary responses from a group must be posted by 8 PM on Sunday nights; all replies from other students must be posted by 10 AM Monday morning to give everyone time to review what others have written before our Monday class meeting.**

Midterm Paper For your midterm you will develop a 6 page paper analyzing a particular aspect of 1-2 of the sources we have read or viewed in class. You will choose from a series of prompts, or questions, that will guide you towards a particular source and provide ideas on how to approach it. In your essay, you will need to develop an original argument about the source (or sources) you choose to study, and support that claim with evidence from other materials we have engaged in our weekly meetings. You will develop a rough draft of this essay two weeks prior

to its final submission, and receive feedback from myself and your fellow classmates so that you can incorporate our comments into your revisions.

Final Collaborative Paper For your final paper, you will develop a 10-12 page research essay that explores a film, work of literature, political manifesto, or sexual subculture we did not discuss in class. I will provide you with a list of sources and subjects you may choose from. No group can write about the same source or subject. You will be required to develop an analysis that incorporates at least two scholarly sources we did not read in class, as well as offer a historical overview or background on the text you are analyzing. All groups must meet with me twice during the research and development process. As with your first paper, you will develop a collaboratively written rough draft of approximately 5 pages, and receive feedback to incorporate into the full 10-12 page version of your essay. Assignment sheets with specific instructions for both your midterm and final papers will be handed out separately.

Grade Distribution Participation 40%, Weekly online posts: 20%, Midterm paper 20%, Final group paper 20%

Class Discussion This is a course about sex, culture, and politics. Sex, sexuality and gender are charged subjects that most of us have strong opinions about; talking about those opinions while also encountering new ideas and images about sex and sexuality can be extremely uncomfortable, but also exceptionally rewarding, pleasurable, and life affirming. In fact, the discomfort we will all feel at times will generate fascinating and important conversation, force us to question our assumptions, and develop new approaches to dealing with our culture's generally negative views of sex. It is often difficult to separate one's personal opinions from intellectual discussion when we are dealing with questions of desire, political activism, sexual freedom, community formation, violence and abuse, disease, stigma, pornography, and sexual identity. Our job is to develop a sophisticated vocabulary for grappling with these topics, and the texts that illuminate them, in an open-minded and dynamic way. I want you to be transformed positively by these conversations, which might mean being open to changing your mind, defending your position with substantive arguments, or simply listening and thinking through what others are saying. Sometime it will just involve sitting with your discomfort. Under no circumstance, however, should anyone ever be personally attacked; at the same time, I want to encourage you to take risks and get involved, even when it might feel easier to bow out of a controversial conversation. I guarantee the rewards of participating will be extraordinary.

You should be aware that in talking about sex and sexuality, we will inevitably be discussing, reading about, and viewing, a vast range of sexual practices from traditional monogamous straight sex, to same-sex intimacy, to polyamory, relations of dominance and submission, fisting, masturbation, prostitution and sex work, "safe" sex, condomless sex, open relationships, "hooking up," and much more. If you don't know what some of these things are, you'll find out, but you should know we'll be talking about these topics openly and without censorship. We will also encounter all of these sexual practices across the spectrum of pleasurable, consensual sex as well as instances of violence, oppression, and

abuse. Sex can be exhilarating, and gross, and unsettling, and ecstatic, and transformative, and disappointing, and overwhelming, and boring...even all at the same time. This is what makes it such a rich and important aspect of human experience to explore. It is impossible to address the full range of sexual experience without dealing with all its messy expressions, the good, the bad, the ugly, and the surprisingly electrifying; it is up to you, as an informed adult, to decide how you wish to approach these various materials.

Below are my rules of engagement for all class discussions:

1. All students must speak at least once in every class session.
2. Regardless of what we discuss, we will treat one another with respect, knowing that we may not always agree on other peoples' conclusions, interpretations, or claims.
3. Anything you bring up in class is up for discussion and others are free to agree, disagree, or respond to what you have said in a respectful way. If you bring up something related to your personal life that you don't want to be questioned about, let the class know so that we can respect your boundaries; similarly, if you *are* comfortable with people asking questions or inquiring about something you've said, simply say so. I encourage you to discern between when it makes sense to bring up personal experiences in class discussion, and when those experiences are less relevant to the dialogue.
4. Actively practice responding to what other students have said rather than merely stating your own position or argument.
5. Practice making arguments, not stating opinions. This requires you to always have your reading materials with you in class and to be able to point to specific moments or features of a text to support your ideas.
6. Have fun, engage, and actively participate in shaping the discussion.

Disability Support Services At all times, this seminar will be open and accessible to students with disabilities. If you are a student enrolled with the McBurney Disability Resource Center or have a disability but have not used the MDRC, I encourage you to speak with me regarding your rights to accommodation. For more information, contact MDRC, 702 W. Johnson Street, at 608-263-2741. Or refer to <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/services/>.

Required Course Texts

Samuel Delaney, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (2001)

Jennifer Doyle, *Campus Sex, Campus Security* (2015)

Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973)

Jane Ward, *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men* (2015)

Recommended Reading

Note: Below I have listed three important books that provide overviews of the history and theory of sexuality in mid-to-late 20th century America. If you would like more in-depth

historical background to each of our week's readings, you are welcome to follow along by reading any of these books along with our assigned readings (or before class starts).

David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, An Unfettered History* (2001)
Sexual Revolution, edited by Jeffrey Escoffier (2003)
Steven Seidman, *The Social Construction of Sexuality, Third Edition* (2014)

Introduction: Taking Sex Seriously

Week 1: From Sociology 134 to The Pulse Nightclub Massacre

Wednesday, September 7:

Pre-reading (please read the following articles and be prepared to discuss them on the first day of class):

Todd Richmond, "Senator warns UW class essay on gay sex could impact budget"
<http://www.startribune.com/senator-decries-uw-class-essay-on-gay-sexual-desires/385913231/>

Christ Rickert, "There is college level wisdom found in article on gay sex ads":
http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/columnists/chris-rickert/chris-rickert-college-level-wisdom-found-in-article-on-gay/article_786d8562-8126-55b2-bccea32699b41276.html

Alex Rowson, "Not Just a Preference" (2011):
<http://web.archive.org/web/20111016032645/http://www.fabmagazine.com/story/not-just-a-preference>

Rich Juzwiack, Despite Senator's Objections, "There is Educational Value to Studying Grindr Racism":
<http://gawker.com/oh-god-of-course-because-a-highly-educated-population-1783695758>

Wikipedia Entry on Orlando Nightclub Shooting (read overview, First shots and hostage situation, Casualties, Perpetrator, and Reactions):
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Orlando_nightclub_shooting

"The Singular Experience of the Queer Latin Nightclub":
<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/06/orlando-shooting-pulse-latin-queer-gay-nightclub-ramon-rivera-servera-interview/487442/>

The Southern People's Initiative, "From Grief to Power: We Are Stronger Together":
<http://southtosouth.org/from-grief-to-power-full/>

Week 2: Thinking Sex

Monday, September 12:

Michael Warner, "The Ethics of Sexual Shame," from *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (1999)*

Wednesday, September 14:

Laura Kipnis, "How to Look at Pornography" (1996)*

Part I: American Sexual Histories

Week 3: American Sex Goes Public

Monday, September 19:

Selected findings of, and media responses to, The Kinsey Reports, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) & *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953)*

Miriam Reumann, "Introduction" to American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports

"The Second Sexual Revolution," *Time Magazine*, January 24, 1964*

Kermit Mehlinger Jr., "The Sexual Revolution," *Ebony*, August, 1966*

Wednesday, September 21:

Screening: **The Loving Story** (Buirski, 2011)

James Baldwin, "Going to Meet the Man" (1965)*

Week 4: The New Sexual Frontier

Monday, September 26:

Betty Friedan, "The Problem that Has No Name" and "The Sex-Seekers" from *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)*

Selections from Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962)*

Wednesday, September 28:

Screening: **Pillow Talk** (Gordon, 1959)

Elizabeth Frateriggo, "Introduction" and "'Work Hard and Play Hard, Too': Modern Living and the Morality of the Playboy Life" in *Playboy and the Making of The Good Life in Modern America* (2011)*

Week 5: Coming Out

Monday, October 3:

Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973), read pages 1-150.

Wednesday, October 5:

Finish *Rubyfruit Jungle*.

Week 6: The Power of Female Orgasm

Monday, October 10:

William Masters and Virginia Johnston "The Female Orgasm" from *Human Sexual Response* (1966)*

Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" (1970)*

Erica Jong, "The Zipless Fuck" from *Fear of Flying* (1973)*

Jane Gerhard, Revisiting "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm": The Female Orgasm in American Sexual Thought and Second Wave Feminism."*

Wednesday, October 12:

Screening: **Barbarella** (Vadim, 1969)

****Midterm paper rough draft due by Sunday October 16 by 11:30 PM****

Week 7: Seeking Sexual Knowledge

Monday, October 17:

Selections from *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, ed. The Boston Women's Health Collective (1970)*

Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman" (1970)*

Gay Activist Alliance, "20 Questions About Homosexuality: A Political Primer" (1970): <http://paganpressbooks.com/jpl/20Q.HTM>

Wednesday, October 19:

Selections from *The Joy of Sex* (1972) and *The Joy of Gay Sex* (1977).

Week 8: Reconsidering Race and Class in 1970s Sexual Cultures

Screening: **Midnight Cowboy** (Schlesinger, 1969)

Monday, October 24:

Michael Moon, "Outlaw Sex and the 'Search for America': Representing Male Prostitution and Perverse Desire in Sixties film" (1993)*

Wednesday, October 26:

Selections from *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (The Moynihan Report) (1965)*

Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" (1981) and "Racism, Birth Control, and Reproductive Rights" (2003)*

****Midterm Paper due by Saturday October 29 at 11:30 PM****

Week 9: Gay Sex in the 70s

Screening: **Gay Sex in the 70s** (Lovett, 2005)

Monday, October 31:

Gayle Rubin, "The Catacombs: A Temple to the Butthole" (1991)*

Wednesday, November 2:

Samuel Delaney, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999), Part 1.

Part II: The Politics of Sexual Risk

Week 10: The Feminist Sex Wars

Monday, November 7:

Selection from Catherine MacKinnon, "Pornography, Civil Rights, and Speech" (1985)

Wednesday, November 9:

Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes For a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1984)

Week 11: The Cultural Politics of AIDS

Monday, November 14:

Screening: **United in Anger** (Hubbard, 2012)

Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic" (1987)*

Wednesday, November 16:

Cindy Patton, "Around 1989" and "The Erotics of Innocence" in *Fatal Advice: How Safe Sex Education Went Wrong* (1996)*

Week 12: Risking Contact

Monday, November 21:

Samuel Delaney, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999), Part 2.

Wednesday, November 23: *Thanksgiving Break*

Part III: Documenting Sex Today

Week 13: "Not Gay"

Monday, November 28:

Jane Ward, *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men* (2015), chapters 1, 3 and 4.

Wednesday, November 30:

Not Gay, chapters 5 & 6.

****Final Paper Rough Drafts Due Saturday December 3 at 11:30 PM****

Week 14: Campus Sex

Monday, December 5:

Jennifer Doyle, *Campus Sex, Campus Security* (2015)

Wednesday, December 7:

Kathleen Bogle, "Introduction," "The Hookup," and "The Campus as a Sexual Arena," in *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus* (2008)

Week 15: Inventing Sexual Futures

Monday, December 12:

Screening: **Thelma & Louise** (Scott, 1991)

Wednesday, December 14:

Screening: **Shortbus** (Mitchell, 2002)

****Final Papers Due by Saturday December 17 at 11:30 PM****