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# Sex and Society

SOCI & GSFS 402 / AXN 220 / W 7:30-10:30 / Office Hours: Tuesday 3-6 in Axinn 237

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar is an advanced undergraduate-level exploration of the sociological literature on the pleasures, power, and problems of sex. It is impossible to understand sexuality as separate from other dimensions of the human condition—economics, politics, work, family, race, and gender. Therefore, we will place sexuality in dynamic interaction with larger social issues. In particular, we will examine questions related to morality, sex work, desire and fantasy, the science of sex, and sexual politics. Class materials include sociological, scientific, and philosophical texts and films. Students should leave the course with an appreciation for sexuality as a social, not just personal, phenomenon.

### *Class Participation*

You are expected to attend every class and out-of-class event. Come fully caffeinated, prepared to discuss readings and join group discussions. You are encouraged to have an opinion, be audacious, and risk your pride. Class participation means you regularly attend class and take part in meaningful ways. Since critical dialogue is probably where most learning happens anyway, this should be in our mutual interests. Learning is a conspiracy, a group activity where we work, play, plot, and debate together. Students should be prepared to take notes without laptops. Cell phones and all other non-airplane-approved devices must be switched off.

### *Assignments*

You will write two short papers (~5-7 pages) and participate in a final mini conference on the sociology of sexuality, whereby you will present a paper on a panel of your peers. One of your written papers can take an alternate method—short film, podcast, zine, collaborative project, a series of vignettes, etc. Whatever form you take, the heart and soul of it should be a sociological examination of sexuality. I will give you more specific information on the details of each of these assignments when the time comes, and we will have ample time to discuss them in class. Also, once during the semester you will co-lead the beginning of class with another student. We will discuss this in class, but at the end of this syllabus I have offered some advice about how to be an in-class leader when it is your turn.

### *A Note on Written Work*

Written work is the primary way you will be evaluated, and your writing will be graded according to its readability, grammatical accuracy, and creativity, in addition to the substantive ideas it conveys. We will discuss the challenges posed by different forms of writing, but if you have any concerns about your ability, please see me and consider visiting the CTLR: <http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/resources/ctlr>. All written work should be turned in as a Word document (.doc or .docx) attachment by email. Based on your writing ability I will be suggesting that some of you enroll in courses specifically designed to help improve your writing.

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### ***Grades***

Your grades come from the assignments stated above, plus class participation. Class participation is derived from a combination of attendance, frequency and quality of participation in class discussions, the competency of your five minute introduction, and observed struggle to engage the material. Late work is lowered half a grade for the first week late, and is not accepted thereafter. The course emphasizes writing as the primary mechanism to determine grades and outcomes. My overall philosophy on grading emphasizes struggle, not mastery. The grade breakdown is as follows:

- A - Outstanding: Expectations exceeded.
- B - Excellent: All expectations met with excellence.
- C - Good: All expectations met with moderate success.
- D - Poor: Expectations inconsistently met.
- F - Failure: Work incomplete by culmination of the course.

Most students should expect a grade in the B range, as As signify work that truly exceeds expectations. If you object to a grade you receive in class, email me a detailed explanation as to why you think the grade should be changed. In that email, also include a few suggested times when you can meet me in person as soon as possible to discuss the matter further.

### ***Honor Code and Academic Integrity***

The Middlebury Honor Code forbids cheating and plagiarism. For details on what constitutes these breaches of conduct, please see Middlebury policy here: <http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/administration/newfaculty/handbook/honorcode>

Failure to abide such regulations will result in my notifying the proper college authorities. The academy is not known for its sense of humor, but plagiarism is truly no joke. For information on how to avoid plagiarizing, see Earl Babbie's article: <http://www.csub.edu/ssric-trd/howto/plagiarism.htm>

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## COURSE CONTENT

Note: The course schedule that follows may be revised as the course progresses

### Required Texts:

Maggie Nelson. 2015. *The Argonauts: A Memoir*. Graywolf Press

Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (Vol 1)*

Kristen Ghodsee. 2018. *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism and Other Arguments for Economic Independence*

Eva Illouz. *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*

All other texts are available through the course website:

<http://sites.middlebury.edu/sexandsociety/>

### Week 1—

**9/11:** Read: Kristen Roupenian 2017. “Cat Person.” *The New Yorker*:  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/cat-person>

Listen: Allison Behringer. 2018. “Sex Hurts.” Bodies Podcast:  
<https://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/bodies/sex-hurts>

### Week 2—

**9/18:** Weeks, Jeffrey. 1996. “The Construction of Homosexuality.” Pp 41-63 in *Queer Theory/Sociology*, edited by Steven Seidman. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.

John Gagnon and William Simon. 2004. The Social Origins of Sexual Development. In *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*. Eds Kimmel and Plante

Jon D’Emilio. “Capitalism & Gay Identity,” from *Culture Society & Sexuality: A Reader*, 2nd ed. Routledge

Jonathan Ned Katz. “The Invention of Heterosexuality”: [http://ieas.unideb.hu/admin/file\\_9700.pdf](http://ieas.unideb.hu/admin/file_9700.pdf)

**9/20:** Which side are you on? Global Climate Strike info: <https://globalclimastrike.net>

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### Week 3—

**9/25:** Thomas Laqueur. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from Greeks to Freud*. Chapter 2 (whole chapter) and Chapter 6 (only pgs 227-243)

Lisa Wade. “The New Science of Sex Difference.” *Sociology Compass* 7/4 pgs 278-293

Lisa Wade. 2017. “Unequal Pleasures.” From *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*. WW Norton and Co.

Anne Fausto-Sterline. The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough. In *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*. Eds Kimmel and Plante

### Week 4—

**10/2:** Beth Schwartzapel. “Born This Way?” *The American Prospect*. <http://prospect.org/article/born-way>

Brandon Ambrosino. 2019. “I am Gay—But I Wasn’t Born This Way.” In *Sex Matters: The Sexuality and Society Reader Fifth Edition* WW Norton

Rebecca Tuvel. 2017. “In Defense of Transracialism.” In *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*.

Andria Bianchi. 2019. Something’s Got to Give: Reconsidering the Justification for a Gender Divide in Sport. *Philosophies* 4(2), 23: <https://www.mdpi.com/2409-9287/4/2/23>

### Week 5—

**10/6:** Assignment #1 due at 11:59pm by email

**10/9:** Michel Foucault. 1978 [1990]. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (Vol 1).

### Week 6—

**10/16:** Eva Illouz. 2012. *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*. Polity.

### Week 7—

**10/23:** Skype discussion with Pigeon, former porn actress

Kipnis, Laura. 1996. “Disgust and Desire: Hustler Magazine.” Pp 122-160 in *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*. New York: Grove Press.

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Roger Lancaster. 2017. "The New Pariahs: Sex, Crime and Punishment in America." In *The War on Sex*

Yasmine Nair. 2014. "Why Hate Crime Legislation is Still Not a Solution." In *Against Equality*, edited by Ryan Conrad

Kimberly Kay Hoang. 2015. "Autonomy and Consent in Sex Work". In *Dealing in Desire*. University of California Press.

Wendy Chapkis. 2019. "Performing Without a Net? Safer Sex in Porn."

#### Week 8—

**10/30:** Dagmar Herzog. "Saved from Sex" and "Soulgasm." in *Sex in Crisis: The New Sexual Revolution and the Future of American Politics*. Basic Books

Kristen Ghodsee. 2018. Chapters 5&6. *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism and Other Arguments for Economic Independence*

#### Week 9—

**11/6:** Myrl Beam. 2018. "Chapter 4." *Gay, Inc.: The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics*

Gayle Rubin. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (beginning-165)

Nancy Fraser. "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History"

Brenda Cossman. 2002. "Sexing Citizenship, Privatizing Sex." *Citizenship Studies*, Vol 6:4

Cohen, Cathy. "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ* 3.4 (1997): 437-465.

#### Week 10—

**11/11:** Second Assignment due by email at 11:59pm

**11/13:** Jamie McCallum. Carol Rifelj Lecture: "This is What Democracy Looked Like! The Long Shadow of American Radicalism Since the Battle of Seattle"

Mini-conference meetings by appointment

#### Week 11—

**11/20:** Nelson, Maggie. 2015. *The Argonauts: A Memoir*. Graywolf Press

#### Week 12—

**11/27:** Give thanks, y'all

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**Week 13—**

**12/4:** Mini Conference on Sex and Society

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## THINKING ABOUT TALKING: NOTES ON CLASS DISCUSSION

This class depends on us having open, honest, and critical conversations. How can we do that? I'd like to suggest you consider a few tips that I think will improve our chances. Think about what makes you feel encouraged to join a conversation with a group of people you don't know. Assuming that some of those things might be true for other people, try to participate in ways that expand them. Here are a few ways that I think can enhance our conversations. Feel free to add to this list.

1. **Learn people's names and use them.** When you speak in class, especially for the first few weeks, say your name so that others can remember it. When you refer to someone's point, either to agree or disagree, use their name. "As Janice said a minute ago..."
2. **Look at each other.** Since this is a conversation among all of us, it makes sense to look at more than just the front of the room. Eye contact can help bring people into a conversation.
3. **Be critical and respectful.** "Calling people out," denouncing them, is a quick way to shut down a conversation. It generally leads to one person feeling cut off without understanding why, and others feeling less confident to speak up. Critique ideas, not individuals.
4. **Affirm others.** Say "thank you" when people clarify your question, and speak up when others share your question or concern to support them asserting something they don't know.
5. **Step up, step back.** If you find yourself talking a lot, try to be quiet for a bit and focus on listening. If you find yourself not speaking up, challenge yourself to weigh in.
6. **Ground rules.** Together we will set ground rules for our discussions, but my suggestion is that we err on the side of openness. A safe space—one in which all points of view are welcome and open to critical evaluation by all others—should be a goal. A space in which some people aren't offended by some points of view is unlikely and undesirable in a classroom environment.



