

History 389.5: Topics in U.S. History  
*History of Sexuality*  
Fall 2017, George Mason University

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Welcome!

This discussion-based, advanced history course will introduce you to the growing and varied scholarship on the history of American sexuality, beginning with European conquest of North America and ending at the turn to the twenty-first century.

We will start by asking, how do we make history of sex? Then, through a chronological and thematic survey, we will examine how sexual behaviors and attitudes have changed over time and how that study deepens our understanding of U.S. history. To explore such a broad and wide-ranging topic, I have organized the course around two general questions that are of particular interest to historians of sexuality:

1. How do we find out about, and then interpret, something as elusive and intimate as sexuality in the past? What kinds of **sources** have historians found, and what kinds of methods have they employed to analyze them? In other words, what can we know and how do we know it?
2. How do we make sense of the **diversity** of sexual behaviors and attitudes in the past? How have factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, region, religion, etc., affected differing sexual ideologies and actions – and vice versa?

### READINGS

Our main activity during class time will be discussing a variety of secondary and primary texts. A seminar-style course like this one will only be successful if every student comes well-prepared to every class meeting. You *must* always complete the reading before the class for which it is assigned, and you *must* come to class with all the assigned reading along with your notes on it.

Buy:

Kathy Peiss, ed., *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality*  
Helen Horowitz, *Attitudes Towards Sex in Antebellum America*

Download the other required readings through the class Blackboard page available via <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu>

## ADVICE

My favorite college professor used to say that true learning begins when you admit that you're confused. In that spirit, I encourage you to **ask questions** of the professor, other students, and yourself, both in the classroom and out of it. I really enjoy talking with students – please don't hesitate to get in touch with me.

The keys to doing well in this course are to participate actively, keep up with the reading, and bring imaginative questions to course materials and discussions. Class meetings will focus on discussion. To contribute to and benefit from these sessions, you will need to allow enough time each week to prepare for class. Expect to spend on average about seven hours each week, outside of class time, on this course – and sometimes more when written assignments are due. But don't expect to become overwhelmed. If you are averaging considerably more than seven hours a week, or are feeling overwhelmed for whatever reason, TALK TO ME.

## TALKING ABOUT SEX

Sex is not something we usually talk about in an academic setting. Here are some guidelines for making our class discussions reasonable, enlightening, and friendly:

- Anyone, me included, may be embarrassed at times by some questions or discussions about aspects of sexuality – that is normal, expected, and acceptable.
- Everyone has their own personal values about sexuality that are not the same for everyone in the class. We acknowledge and accept our differences.
- Personal boundaries need to be respected. No one should ever feel obliged to disclose information about themselves, their experiences, or their personal values.
- Confidentiality: I would like us to agree that personal opinions, values, or information shared in the class not be discussed with others outside of class.
- Finally, you are always welcome to TALK TO ME in confidence about any concerns you may have about class topics or discussions.

In other words, let's all strive to maintain an open, congenial, and comfortable setting for our academic discussions.

## HONOR CODE

I take my obligations under the University Honor Code seriously and expect you to do the same. All the work you do in this course is subject to the policy. It is especially important that you do not commit **plagiarism** – that is using others' wording *or* ideas without attribution. You can avoid it by **using proper citation methods** and quotation marks when quoting. Remember that summary, paraphrasing, and quoting all require citations. You can review the Mason Honor Code here: <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>

If you are at all worried that you (or a classmate) may be in danger of an honor code violation, you should TALK TO ME immediately. Any suspicions of any kind of cheating will be referred to the Office of Academic Integrity.

## TECHNOLOGY

I expect that all GMU students have basic computer literacy and *daily* internet access. I assume you check your **GMU email** at least once every twenty-four hours. GMU's official policy is to use only Mason email accounts to communicate with students, and you are required to use it for university communications, including this class. Note, when you email me, please include "Hist 389" in the subject line.

Every week you will read and submit materials on our course page on **Blackboard**, available via <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu>.

You may bring a computer to class, but it should remain closed during class discussions except when I say otherwise. Cell phones, etc., should also be turned off. You will, of course, need a **notebook and pen or pencil** every day.

## INCLEMENT WEATHER/CAMPUS CLOSINGS

If campus closes because of bad weather (or any other reason), you are still responsible for **completing all work as scheduled**, and we will be in touch via email and Blackboard – so, you need to make sure you can contact me. If the University is open, no matter what the weather is like, we will be having class as scheduled and all of the rules regarding attendance and punctuality apply.

## RESOURCES

I encourage you to utilize the many support services available to GMU students. For example, **Learning Services** offers workshops in academic skills, some of which are particularly well-suited to the demands of this class: <http://learningservices.gmu.edu/>

You may also want to make use of the **Writing Center's** many resources or work with one of their writing tutors: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>.

Librarians are a historian's greatest allies. I expect you to be familiar with the **GMU library** and its website, <http://library.gmu.edu/>. We will be working with the History Liaison Librarian, George Oberle, whom you can contact at [goberle@gmu.edu](mailto:goberle@gmu.edu)

If you are a student with a disability who needs academic accommodations, please see me privately and contact the **Office of Disability Resources** at (703) 993-2474 (<http://ods.gmu.edu/>). All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Exams: 55% of course grade  
Research Poster: 15%

Reading Journal: 15%  
Quizzes: 5%

Participation: 10%

### **Exams**

These take-home essay exams will allow you to demonstrate your skills of historical analysis, your ability to synthesize the course materials into a cohesive and logical interpretation. If you keep up with the reading and take good notes in class, you will be well-prepared for the exams. We will also go over exam questions during class time.

I will accept the first two exams with a penalty of one half-grade for each twenty-four hours, or portion of twenty-four hours, that I receive it after the deadline. That is, a “B-“ exam will receive a “C+” if I receive it a few minutes, eight hours, or twenty-four hours late. Note that I am only on campus on Thursdays, so you must alert me ahead of time if you will be turning an exam in late. Exam 3 is due when the final is scheduled, on December 14, and I cannot accept it late.

### **Primary Source Research Poster**

During the last third of the class you will sign up for a research project on the 1920s-30s, the 1940s-50s, OR the 1960s-70s. After spending most of the semester reading primary sources collected by others, this assignment is your opportunity to find, and then interpret, some primary sources on your own. You will go to the library and look through magazines, newspapers, or other sources and choose four or five short documents (eg: advertisements, articles, photographs, song lyrics, etc.) that speak to the history of sexuality in the period. You will then create a poster presentation, using PowerPoint, in which you show how your primary sources illuminate the time period under discussion. You will also present the poster in class, and it will help form the basis for discussion that day. We will have workshops on preparing poster presentations and on primary source research, and I will give you further instructions on this assignment.

### **Weekly Reading Journal**

In your Blackboard journal, you will post weekly responses to the assigned readings. The journal helps you – and me -- prepare for the day’s discussion. Rather than summarizing the readings, use the journal to reflect, ruminate, raise questions, clarify your own ideas, and draw connections among the readings and larger themes of the course. It’s also a good place to tell me what especially interested or confused you about the assigned readings, what questions you have, and what you might like to talk about in class.

To get credit, journal entries must be posted by 1:00pm on Thursdays and must demonstrate that you have given *all* the assigned reading that week serious thought. You must post at least two journal entries before the first exam, at least another three before the second exam, and at least ten total by the end of the semester.

## Quizzes

I will occasionally give you an in-class or take-home quiz that will require you to refer to your notes on class discussions and readings. They will always be open-note and open-book. As long as you keep up with all class assignments and meetings and take good notes, you will be prepared for quizzes. Quizzes cannot be made up or rescheduled under any circumstances – in effect, they also serve as an attendance grade.

## Participation

This part of the grade credits you for coming to class well-prepared and for participating actively in discussions. More generally, it reflects my expectation that every student will be a “good citizen,” that is, treat the course and fellow students with attention, respect, responsibility and professionalism.

Different people make different kinds of contributions to a discussion. Some of us are more talkative or assertive than others; sometimes just one, short, thoughtful comment can move a discussion to a deeper level. In figuring your participation grade, I will take into account the quality and thoughtfulness – and to a much lesser degree the quantity -- of your contributions to class discussions. I will note how engaged you are in the discussions, and how well you listen to other members of the class and respond to what they say. Attendance will also be a factor here – after all, it’s hard for your mind to be present when your body is not.

To earn at least a “B-“ for participation you should:

- Always be seated by the beginning of class, with paper/notebook and pen/pencil and all assigned reading and any other assignments in front of you.
- Miss no more than one class meeting and alert me ahead of time if you are going to miss class or are running late.
- Have completed each week’s reading and have ideas for what to say about it.

NOTE: I reserve the right to make changes to the course and to the assignment schedule in ways that I deem in the best interests of the class. I will not, however, add to the work load.

It is **your responsibility** to use the syllabus, to keep track of any changes, and to make sure you have received all instructions.

If you have any questions, concerns, confusions, or worries about the course at any point . . . **TALK TO ME**

Aug 31 Introductions – How do we make history of sex?  
Read: *Major Problems* (MP) pp. xv-xvii, 1-9

### **I. Early America**

Sep 7 Sexualities in American History  
Read: Roscoe, "Strange Country This" on Blackboard (Bb)  
Perdue, "Columbus Meets Pocahontas" in chap 2 of MP  
Documents in chap 2 of MP  
Hurtado, "Sexuality in California's Franciscan Missions" on Bb  
Spear, "Interracial Unions" in chap 2 of MP

Sep 14 Regulating Sexuality in the Anglo-American Colonies  
Read: Documents 1 and 3 in chap 3 of MP  
Murrin, "Things Fearful to Name" on Bb  
Doc 4 in chap 3 of MP  
Brown, "Changed. . . Into the Fashion of Man" in MP, chap 3  
Documents on Bb  
Dayton, "Taking the Trade" on Bb  
Doc 2 in chap 3 of MP  
Finkelman, "Crimes of Love, Misdemeanors of Passion" on Bb

### **II. Industrializing America**

Sep 21 Sexual Conversations and Conflicts **EXAM I**  
Read: Horowitz, *Attitudes toward Sex in Antebellum America*,  
pp vii-xv, 1-31, 35-123  
Doc 1 and Stansell, "Male License and Working-Class Women's  
Sexuality" in chap 4 of MP

Sept 28 Love and Intimacy in Victorian America  
Read: Documents 1-4 in Chap 6 of MP  
Smith-Rosenberg, "Female World" in chap 6 of MP  
Lystra, "Sexuality in Victorian Courtship" in chap 6 of MP  
Hansen, "An Erotic Friendship" in chap 6 of MP  
Duberman, "Writhing Bedfellows" on Bb

Oct 5 Making Love and Making Race in and after Slavery  
Read: All Documents in Chap 5 of MP  
Stevenson, "Slave Marriage" in chap 5 of MP  
Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, selections on Bb  
Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law" on Bb

Oct 12 Regulating Sexuality – Reform, Medicine, and the State  
Read: Docs 1 and 2 in chap 7 of MP (pp. 239-243)  
Smith-Rosenberg, "The Abortion Movement and the AMA" on Bb  
Docs 3-5 in chap 7 of MP  
Horowitz, "Victoria Woodhull, Anthony Comstock" on Bb  
Tone, *Devices and Desires*, chap 2 ("Limits of the Law") on Bb

### III. Modern America

Oct 19	Inventing Sexuality – Sex, Class, and Neighborhoods Read: Katz, “Invention of Heterosexuality” in chap 10 of MP Chauncey, “Christian Brotherhood” on Bb Docs 4-7 in chap 8 of MP Docs 1-6 in chap 10 of MP Meyerowitz, “Sexual Geography” on Bb Chauncey, “Gay Men’s Strategies” in chap 10 of MP	<b><u>EXAM II</u></b>
Oct 26	From Smut to Science - Making Sex Modern Read: Docs 3, 5, 6 in chap 9 of MP Tone, <i>Devices and Desires</i> , selections on Bb Reagan, <i>When Abortion Was a Crime</i> selections on Bb	
Nov 2	Sex, Science, and the State Read: Doc 4 in chap 9 of MP Docs 1 and 2 in chap 13 of MP Ladd-Taylor, “Eugenics, Sterilization, and Social Welfare” in chap 9 of MP Brandt, “Tuskegee Syphilis Study” in chap 13 of MP	
Nov 9	In Love, In War & Open Secrets Read: “Keeping Love Alive” on Bb Bailey and Farber, “Prostitutes on Strike” on Bb All Docs in chap 11 of MP Meyerowitz, “How Sex Changed” on Bb Cahn, “Mannishness” on Bb	<b>1920s-30s posters</b>
Nov 16	Sexual Revolutions Read: Solinger, “The Population Bomb” on Bb Bailey, “Prescribing the Pill” on Bb All Docs in chap 12 of MP Allyn “Fomenting a Sexual Revolution” in chap 12 of MP Wolfson, “Clenched Fist Open Heart” on Bb	<b>1940s-50s posters</b>
Nov 23	THANKSGIVING	
Nov 30	Here, There, and Everywhere Read: Stein, “Sex Politics” in chap 12 of MP National Register of Historic Places, “The Furies Collective” on Bb Docs 3-6 in chap 13 of MP Bayer, “AIDS and the Bathroom Controversy” in chap 12 of MP Additional Documents on Bb	<b>1960s-70s posters</b>
Dec 7	American Sexualities, American Identities Read: Docs 1, 2, 3 in chap 14 of MP Weston, “Gay Families,” in chap 14 of MP AHA and OAH Obergefell amicus briefs on Bb Kaiser Family Foundation, “Sexual Health of Adolescents and Young Adults” and “Sex Education in America” links on Bb House, “Navajo Warrior Women”	
Dec 14	The View from the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	<b><u>EXAM III</u></b>