Sexuality and Gender: Diversity and Society

Course Description

What are sex, gender and sexuality? How do our experiences of our own genderedness and sexuality define us as people, and shape our opinions about other people who do not share those experiences or who do not express their sexuality in the same ways as we do? In this course, which we believe has the potential to be life-changing, we will look at these sorts of questions. And we will do so while learning about (and in many cases meeting and talking with) people whose gender or sexuality places them on the fringes of mainstream society (in some cases beyond it). People who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or asexual. People who cross dress, or play with bondage, domination, and sado-masochism, use pornography, and/or are involved in commercial sex activities. And other people whose own experiences, known by strange-sounding names such as acrotomophilia and apotemnophilia, have their own story to tell.

In lectures and tutorials we will examine other questions, such as: To what extent are gender and sexuality biologically ‘hard-wired’ rather than learned? What is ‘normal’ in human sexuality and gender? How do we distinguish normal from abnormal, different from deviant, and healthy from sick anyway? When responding (as individuals and as a society) to those whose sexual-ity and gender are different to our own, how do we balance individual rights (e.g. to sexual and gender expression) and responsibility to others (e.g. ‘to protect family values’)? What roles do society and culture play in forming our ideas about ‘normality’ in sexuality and gender? What roles do language, the arts and religion, the family, education, and the media play, not only in forming those ideas, but also in transmitting them? What effect has science and medicine had on the lives of individuals from sexual and gender minorities? How, in an increasingly interconnected world, are our ideas about sex, gender and sexuality changing? We expect students will come out of the course with an informed, open-minded and critical understanding of the issues covered, and better able to join contemporary debates on sexuality and gender: debates that so often stir deep emotions and challenge fundamental beliefs.

Study Load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Number of hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorials</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading / Self-study</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment: Reflective journal</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment: Web presentation</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment: Individual assignment</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>156</strong></td>
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Learning Outcomes

1. Critically evaluate concepts central to the study of sexual- ity and appraise the role that society and culture play in the construction of these concepts and the links and distinctions that are drawn between them and in framing actual development of genderedness and sexuality in individuals growing up in any society.

2. Understand historical changes (and cultural differences) in the ways in which sexuality, gender and diversity have been (and are) viewed.

3. Critically appraise the ways that ideas about sexuality and gender are created and transmitted (and adherence to norms is regulated) within any culture or society, and reflect upon how these ideas (including norms) frame our responses (individual and collective) to sexuality and gender, as well as to forms of sexual and gender diversity and to the behaviour of persons belonging to sexual and gender minority groups.

4. Analyse critically the impact of increasing global interconnectedness in framing ideas about sexuality and gender, norms for sexual and gendered behaviour, and individual and collective responses to sexual and gender diversity.

5. Reflect on ways in which, globally, humanity can reconcile a heightened awareness of cultural differences with a respect for individual differences and preferences, uphold human rights, justice and equality, and improve the well-being of humankind.

6. Reflect and debate on issues of human sexual and gender development and diversity in an informed and rational way, incorporating an awareness of others’ experiences and perspectives and a commitment to fundamental democratic values such as freedom of speech (including expression of ideas), human rights, justice and equality.

Recommended Reading


Recommended Websites

German Society for Social Scientific Sexuality Research
http://www.sexologie.org/
Human Sexuality: An Encyclopedia
http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/GESUND/ARCHIV/SEN/INDEX.HTM
Humboldt University of Berlin. Magnus Hirschfeld Archive for Sexology
http://www.sexology.cjb.net/
The Continuum Complete International Encyclopedia of Sexuality
http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/ccies/