

GSWS 2301F: The History of Sexuality

Fall 2026 – Preliminary Draft outline



"The New Sexual Revolution" Steve Greenberg, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer Magazine*, 1987

Mondays 10:30am-1:30pm

List of Antirequisites: the former GSWS 2273E

Instructor: Prof. Laurel Clark Shire, GSWS/History, lshire@uwo.ca

Fall 2026 **Office hours:** Mondays 1:35-2:35pm in Lawson 3255 (GSWS Office)

Tuesdays, 1pm-2pm in Lawson 2226 (History Office)

Also available for zoom office hours at other times, email to request a meeting.

Students must use their Western (@uwo.ca) email addresses when contacting their instructors.

Course Description:

In this course, we will consider how marginalization and discrimination have been structured, imposed, and resisted from the 1800s to the present in North America. We will examine a variety of theoretical texts and primary documents, including laws, marriage manuals, erotica, and manifestos, to question the construction or nature of sexual identity and experience. Each week we will focus on a particular Sex Scandal in North American history that will help to illustrate how sexual discourse and norms were constructed and/or changing at that time.

This is an in-person course, and your attendance is expected and required. Students with more than 3 unexplained absences will not be allowed to take the final exam.

Course Objectives and Outcomes:

By the end of this course, a successful student will be able to:

1. Describe and explain how sexuality and sexual norms are socially constructed and historically and culturally contingent, particularly through binaries such as pleasure/danger; safe/unsafe; respectable/disreputable; normal/abnormal
2. Describe and explain how sexuality came to be a category of identity separate from (but still intertwined with) gender, and how it intersects with other categories such as race, class, dis/ability, non/monogamies, age, and gender
3. Describe and analyze historical changes in the social organization and cultural meaning of sexual practices and desires in North America from 1800 to the present, including the establishment of sexual norms in settler colonial USA and Canada, the role of sex during the era of slavery; the contested boundaries drawn between same-sex and different-sex sociability, friendship and eroticism; cultural conflicts over sexual matters such as prostitution, cross-racial sex, sex education, and transgender rights; and the emergence of heterosexuality and homosexuality as the predominant categories of sexual experience, identity and politics in the 20th century
4. Identify and assess the thesis argument of any scholarly source (book, article or film), and the major kinds of evidence used to support that argument
5. Read and analyze primary historical sources

Methods of Evaluation

Attendance and Participation	10%
In-class Quizzes, Writing Assignments, Primary Source Analyses	30%
Discussion Questions (x3)	15%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	25%

Attendance & Participation (10%): You are required to attend class. In this class, there is no replacement for your presence. What you will learn, together in class, is the culmination of all the work you do outside of class. If you skip class, don't expect to pass. Religious holidays, games (for athletes) and documented illness are excusable absences. If you are ill, do not come

to class. If you have a cold, please wear a mask (as will I). If you must miss class, please e-mail me to let me know, and provide documentation to your academic counseling office in your faculty in order to be excused. When you are absent, you are still expected to read, write and do homework. It is up to you to provide explanations and supporting documentation to Academic Counseling in order to be excused, I will not remind you to provide them. Unexplained absences (or excessive tardiness) will negatively affect your participation grade. There are 11 3-hour class meetings in this course, so each is worth 0.909% of your final grade. Attendance is 25% of that mark, participation in lecture and discussions is the other 75%. Quality, not quantity, of participation matters, as does active listening (don't repeat what the person who just spoke said, but feel free to respond to it and build on it). Asking questions is a great way to participate. If you are anxious or shy, please discuss options for participation with Prof. Shire and I will be happy to accommodate you with some prior planning. Come to class prepared and ready to participate in discussion or activities, including pop quizzes, free writes, group work, or analyzing primary sources. If you have an accommodation to use a digital aid for note-taking, please note that all students will get weekly notes taken by the designated note-taker that week. You MUST bring all readings and homework with you to class on the due dates – failing to bring them to class will lower your grade.

Weekly reading: each week students should expect to read (smart skim) 60-100 pages; in some weeks some of those pages will be replaced by time spent watching a film. n historical documentary or account. You spent 3 hours per week in class with me and your tutorial leader, and you should expect to spend about 5 hours outside of class reading, watching, thinking, and writing discussion questions for this course (perhaps more if you have learning challenges with reading and writing). I will teach you in the first few weeks of class how to read history like a historian so that you retain information, focus on the main arguments, and don't fall asleep! You should plan to complete the reading/watching each week BEFORE LECTURE ON MONDAY.

In-Class Quizzes, Writing, Analyses (30%): at least every other week (more as I see fit) you will have a short writing assignment to complete during the last hour of class. These will help keep you on track with course reading/watching assignments. Their purpose is to help you integrate new information into your narrative of the history of sexuality each week, so that you will better retain and recall that information on the final exam. You can miss ONE of these writing assignments without penalty if you are ill or have an emergency (other in-class assignments will be re-weighted). After that, your grade will be reduced for each one that you miss. Make-up opportunities will not be provided except with documentation of an excused absence.

Discussion Questions (15%): Three times during the term (every third week) you will turn in 2 discussion questions for the class to consider. These are due on Sundays by 4pm so that I have time to put them on slides for class on Monday. These questions should demonstrate that you have read/watched what

Midterm Exam 20%

Final Exam (20%): You will take a final exam in this course. The exam will be open-book, but you will not have access to the internet or any electronic devices (so you'll have to bring print copies of anything you want during the exam). The exam will ask you to analyze and put in historical context a series of primary sources. You will not be given an exam study guide, but the weekly lectures and biweekly tutorial writing exercises will make it clear what kinds of information you might be asked to provide in the final assessment. Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Counselling. Please see https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

I strongly recommend that you take notes by hand, as research clearly shows that is most effective than typing them.

Course Materials

All readings will be available on OWL Brightspace. A full course pack (all the readings in one .pdf) will be available to download and take to a print shop for printing and possibly binding if students would like to read on paper. Since research suggests this is more effective for retention, students are encouraged to print the course pack and bring it to class each week.

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Course Schedule

Sessional dates: Sept. 9 – Dec. 9
 No class 30 September, 10-18 October,
 Exams Dec 11-22

Readings below are possible choices – not yet finalized. Reading will be 50-100 pp per week.

Mondays 10:30am-1:30pm	
Week 1. Sept. 14	Introductions and Small Groups
Introduction	What is History? What is the History of Sexuality?
This week's scandal: Why did Grindr crash during the RNC?	Read in class: Davis, <i>Fierce Desires</i> , Intro and Note on Language. Discuss reverse outlines and general idea of sexual identities not being eternal. 14 pp.

<p>https://www.newsweek.com/grindr-app-crashes-milwaukee-rnc-1927750</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Why are red counties where the most searches occur for trans* content on Porn Hub?</p>	<p>Other possible readings:</p> <p>Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in <i>Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality</i>, ed. Carole S. Vance (London: Pandora, 1992), 267–319</p> <p>Jonathan Ned Katz, <i>The Invention of Heterosexuality</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995);</p> <p>George Chauncey, "What Gay Studies Taught the Court: the Historians' Amicus Brief in Lawrence v. Texas," <i>GLQ</i> 10:3 (2004):509-538;</p> <p>John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," <i>Feminist Frontiers II</i>, eds. Laurel Richardson and Verta Taylor (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989): 183-190.</p> <p>Michel Foucault, "We Other Victorians" and "Invention of the Homosexual"</p>
<p>Week 2. Sept. 21. Booger Dances and Two-Spirits - Indigenous Peoples and Nations meet Early Colonizers/Invaders/Settlers</p> <p>This week's scandal: T. Hall</p>	<p>Possible readings:</p> <p>*Theda Perdue, "Columbus Meets Pocahontas in the American South"</p> <p>*Kathleen Brown, "The Anglo-Algonquian Gender Frontier"</p> <p>*Gregory Smithers, Intro and Ch 1 to <i>Reclaiming Two-Spirits</i></p> <p>Rictor Norton, "The Gay Subculture in Early Eighteenth-Century London", <i>The Gay Subculture in Georgian England</i>. Updated 12 July 2013 <http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/molly2.htm>.</p>
<p>Week 3. Sept. 28. The Sex Lives of Puritan Wives (and Husbands, and the Unmarried)</p> <p>This week's scandal: Nicholas Sension and/or Abortion</p>	<p>Read: *Richard Godbeer, "'Chambering and Wantonising': Popular Sexual Mores in Seventeenth-Century New England," in his <i>Sexual Revolution in Early America</i> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 19-51</p> <p>Hambleton, Else L. "The Regulation of Sex in Seventeenth Century Massachusetts: The Quarterly Court of Essex County vs. Priscilla Willson and Mr. Samuel Appleton". <i>Sex and Sexuality in Early America</i>, edited by Merrill D. Smith, New York, USA: New York University Press, 1998, pp. 87-115.</p> <p>https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814729410.003.0008</p>

	<p>Primary Source: *"1677, May 22; Connecticut: Nicholas Sension, Attempted 'sodomy,'" in Jonathan Ned Katz, <i>Gay/Lesbian Almanac</i> (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 111-18.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>*Cornelia Hughes Dayton, "Taking the Trade: Abortion and Gender Relations in an Eighteenth-Century New England Village," <i>William and Mary Quarterly</i>, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Jan., 1991), pp. 19-49;</p> <p>Primary Source: *[Benjamin Franklin], "The Speech of Miss Polly Baker, before a Court of Judicature, at Connecticut, near Boston, in New England; where she was prosecuted, the fifth Time, for having a Bastard Child," <i>Virginia Gazette</i>, April 1, 1773.</p> <p>See also: https://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~aholton/Dayton/index.html</p>
<p>Week 4. Oct. 5. The Sexual Economy of North American Slavery</p> <p>This week's scandal: Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings</p>	<p>*Adrienne Davis, "Don't Nobody Bother Yo' Principle: The Sexual Economy of American Slavery," in S. Harley, ed., <i>Sister Circle: Black Women and Work</i> (Rutgers University Press, 2002);</p> <p>Annette Gordon Reed, <i>Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy</i> (1997), Intro, The Story, Summary of Evidence, 25pp</p> <p>Something from Aidoo, <i>Slavery Unseen?</i></p> <p>Primary Source: *Madison Hemings' memoir</p>
<p>Week 5. Oct 12.</p>	<p>Thanksgiving, no class</p>
<p>Week 6. Oct. 19</p> <p>Sex Workers and Romantic Friends in 19th Century America</p> <p>This week's scandal: was Abe Lincoln "gay"?</p>	<p>*Timothy Gilfoyle, "Sex Districts," and "Brothel Riots and Broadway Pimps," from his <i>City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920</i> (New York: Norton, 1992)</p> <p>This week's scandal: the Murder of Helen Jewett</p> <p>Primary Source: *"Sketch of the Life of Miss Ellen [sic] Jewett, (By One Who Knew Her), Who Was Murdered in the City of New-York, on Saturday Evening, April 9, 1836"</p> <p>*Carol Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual"</p>

	<p>*Jonathan Ned Katz, "No Two Men Were Ever More Intimate"</p> <p>Primary sources: *Addie Brown, letters to Rebecca Primus, 1859-1860, as transcribed and annotated in Farah Jasmine Griffin, ed., <i>Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends: Letters from Rebecca primus of Royal Oak, Maryland, and Addie Brown of Hartford, Connecticut, 1854-1868</i> (New York: Knopf, 1999), 18-25</p>
<p>Week 7. Oct. 26.</p>	<p>MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS covering weeks 1-6</p>
<p>Week 8. Nov. 2. Utopian Societies, Polygamous Partners, and Gender Inverts</p> <p>This week's scandal: the Murder of Freda Ward, and the Pathologization of Alice Mitchell</p>	<p>Chauncey, <i>Gay New York</i>, Intro and Chs. 2-3 "The Fairy As Intermediate Sex," and "Trade, Wolves, and the Boundaries of Normal Manhood"</p> <p>Lisa Duggan, "The Trials of Alice Mitchell"</p> <p>Primary source: *Case histories from Havelock Ellis, <i>Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Vol. I, Part Four: Sexual Inversion</i> (1897; New York: Random House, 1942), 94-95, 120, 223, 235-244.</p>
<p>Week 9. Nov 9. Obscenity, Science, and Violence in The Emergence of Heterosexuality. 1870s-1920s</p> <p>This week's scandal:</p>	<p>Read: *Siobhan B. Somerville, "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body," in her <i>Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture</i> (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 15-38.</p> <p>Kathy Peiss, "Charity Girls" and City Pleasures: Historical Notes on Working-Class Sexuality, 1880–1920 from <i>Powers of Desire</i>. OR "Charity Girls and City Pleasures" Author(s): Kathy Peiss Source: <i>Magazine of History</i>, Vol. 18, No. 4, Sex, Courtship, and Dating (Jul., 2004), pp. 14-16 Published by: Organization of American Historians</p> <p>*Hazel V. Carby, "'It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime': The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," <i>Radical America</i> (1986): 9-22.</p>
<p>Week 10. Nov 16.</p> <p>The Emergence of Homosexuality and Heterosexuality; Prohibition Culture. 1930s-40s.</p>	<p>Chauncey, <i>Gay New York</i>, Chapter 4</p> <p>Kennedy and Davis. "Oral History and the Study of Sexuality in the Lesbian Community: Buffalo, New York: 1940-1960." <i>Feminist Studies</i> 12 (Spring 1986).</p>

<p>This week's scandal: Vice Squads, Bar Raids, and the Construction of the Closet in Cold War America</p>	<p>Stephen Valocchi, "'Where Did Gender Go?' Same-Sex Desire and the Persistence of Gender in Gay Male Historiography," <i>GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies</i> 18, no. 4 (2012): 453–479</p> <p>Primary Sources: *James T. Farrell, "Looking 'Em Over," [1930], in <i>The Short Stories of James T. Farrell</i> (Garden City, NY: Sun Dial Press, 1945), 23-35.</p>
<p>Week 11. Nov 23. From Cold War Confinement to the Sexual Revolution – 1950s-60s</p> <p>This week's scandal: the Rise and Fall of Christine Jorgensen</p>	<p>Read: *George Chauncey, "The Post-War Sex Crime Panic" *David Serlin, "Christine Jorgensen and the Cold War Closet," <i>Radical History Review</i> 1995(62):137-165; watch: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ql_GG9cQnos</p> <p>Primary sources:</p> <p>*Louise Fox Connell, "A Woman's Responsibility in Sex Relations," <i>The Reader's Digest</i>, July 1942, 92-95.</p> <p>*G. M. White, "How to Catch a Husband," <i>Ladies' Home Journal</i>, May 1949, 31</p> <p>*John D'Emilio, "The Homosexual Menace;" primary source, watch http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17u01_sWjRE and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZUZKtko4R0</p> <p>*Primary Sources: Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" (1970) online at: http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/vaginalmyth.html;</p> <p>*"No More Miss America!," [August 1968], in Robin Morgan, ed., <i>Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement</i> (New York: Random House, 1970), 521-524.</p> <p>*Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman"</p> <p>*Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement"</p> <p>Extra Credit Film: <i>Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice</i> (watch and write about this for extra credit)</p> <p>Other possible readings:</p>

	<p>^ Horacio N. Roque Ramírez. 2003. "That's My Place!": Negotiating Racial, Sexual, and Gender Politics in San Francisco's Gay Latino Alliance, 1975-1983." <i>Journal of the History of Sexuality</i> 12 (2): 224-58.</p> <p>*John Howard, "Protest and Protestantism"</p> <p>^Carl Wittman, "A Gay Manifesto" (1970)</p> <p>*Laurel A. Clark, "Beyond the Gay/Straight Split: The Socialist Feminist Community of Baltimore," <i>National Women's Studies Association Journal</i>, Volume 19, Number 2, Summer 2007, pp. 1-31</p> <p>^Kimberly Springer, "Black Feminist Organizations and the Emergence of Interstitial Politics"</p> <p>*Becki Ross, <i>The House that Jill Built</i>, Intro, Chapter 3 and Chapters 6-10: pp. 3-22, 57-82, 141-231</p>
<p>Week 12. Nov 30. Sex in the 80s: Pornography, Abortion, Sexual Harassment</p> <p>This week's scandal: The Sex Wars, or, that time when some Radical Feminists Found Themselves Aligned with the Pope (!?!?)</p>	<p>Passion & Power: The Technology of Orgasm (2007): This acclaimed, feature-length documentary is based on historian Rachel P. Maines's groundbreaking book.</p> <p>*Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," [1984] in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin, eds., <i>The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader</i> (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3-44.</p> <p>Primary Sources:</p> <p>*Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs, "The Lust Frontier: From Tupperware to Sadoomasochism," in their <i>Re-Making Love: The Feminization of Sex</i> (New York: Anchor Books, 1986), 103-133.</p> <p>*Andrea Dworkin, "Power," in her <i>Pornography: Men Possessing Women</i> (1981; New York: Plume, 1989), 13-47.</p> <p>*Juicy Lucy, "If I Ask You to Tie Me Up, Will You Still Want to Love Me?" in <i>SAMOIS, Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M</i> (1981; Boston: Alyson Publications, 1987), 29-40.</p> <p>*Karen Sims and Rose Mason with Darlene Pagano, "Racism and Sadoomasochism: A Conversation with Two Black Lesbians," in Linden, et al., eds., 99-106.</p>

	<p>Watch: "Tongues Untied" (Marlon Riggs, 1989)</p>
<p>Week 13. Dec. 7</p> <p>The Impact of HIV/AIDS and the Renewed Focus on "Saving the Children", 1980s-2000s</p> <p>This week's scandal: Thomas-Hill or Clinton-Lewinsky</p>	<p>Watch: movie about Anita Hill starring Kerry Washington</p> <p>Watch: "Angels in America," HBO, 2003 (Chapters 1-3, more if you like)</p> <p>*Paula A. Treichler, "Beyond Cosmo: AIDS, Identity, and Inscriptions of Gender," in her <i>How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS</i> (Duke University Press, 1999), 235-277</p> <p>*Gayle S. Rubin, "Elegy for the Valley of Kings: AIDS and the Leather Community in San Francisco, 1981-1996," in Martin P. Levine, Peter M. Nardi, and John H. Gagnon, eds., <i>In Changing Times: Gay Men and Lesbians Encounter HIV/AIDS</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 101-44.</p> <p>Primary sources:</p> <p>*Queer Nation's "Heterosexual Questionnaire" (circa 1990)</p> <p>*Excerpts from Michael Callen and Richard Berkowitz, "How to Have Sex in an Epidemic" (1983), online at http://members.aol.com/sigothinc/h2htext.htm.</p> <p>*"A Perilous Double Love Life; In the AIDS era, bisexuals are becoming the ultimate pariahs," <i>Newsweek</i>, July 13, 1987, 44-46.</p> <p>*Paul Cameron, "Medical Consequences of What Homosexuals Do" (1993), online at http://www.familyresearchinst.org/FRI_EduPamphlet3.html</p> <p>Other options :</p> <p>Ian Lekus, "Health Care, the AIDS Crisis, and the Politics of Community"</p> <p>*Cathy Cohen, "Contested Membership: Black Gay Identities and the Politics of AIDS"</p> <p>*John Andriote, "The Ryan White Care Act"</p> <p>KATIE BATZA</p> <p>Batza, K. (2016). FROM SPERM RUNNERS TO SPERM BANKS: Lesbians, assisted conception, and challenging the fertility industry, 1971-1983. <i>Journal of Women's History</i>, 28(2), 82-102,166. doi:https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2016.0019</p> <p>While scholars from various disciplines examine lesbian assisted conception after 1983, when lesbians had already gained easier access to fertility services and treatments, little historical work</p>

	exists that explores the period before 1983 or the reasons that year proved pivotal for lesbians wanting to conceive. This article focuses on the transformative years from 1971 to 1983, in which medically assisted conception for lesbians transitioned from being inaccessible to a viable option. Using archival material and oral interviews, I chart how a small group of lesbians utilized the tools of the women's health and gay liberation movements to make assisted conception more accessible.
TBA	FINAL EXAM – Comprehensive (covers the whole course)

Electronic Devices

Electronic devices, including cell phones, smart watches/glasses, and laptop computers, are not permitted for class lectures or discussions, or for the exams or in-class writing assignments in this course. Students with disabilities who require assistive devices must be registered with the office of Accessible Education and arrange accommodation with the course instructor through that office. We will designate 2 note-takers each week to record important information from lecture and discussion, and those notes will be shared on OWL. Students should download the course pack and take it to a printing service to have it printed (and perhaps bound) or may print the readings each week and bring them to class. I know this will require us to consume some paper, however, the benefits of reading on paper (you will retain more) and of having fewer distractions in class **far outweigh that cost**.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Everything you need to know to succeed in this course is assigned in this course outline to read, watch, or engage with in class. Therefore, in this course, the use of AI (ChatGPT, Claude, Grok, Gemini, etc.) is prohibited. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for exam study notes, lecture notes, research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them.