These days, the meaning of sexuality for women - and feminists - is profoundly in question. It is difficult for many of us to speak of and understand it, let alone experience it.

Is sexuality for women the linchpin of Patriarchy and the ground of our oppression? Or is it the basis of a new truth and the source of a liberated identity? Are we rooted in our bodies as the core of self - or incarcerated in them through the socialization of gender and the construction of desire? The nature and meaning of our bodies and desires are deeply ambiguous and contested.

Working from the theoretical approach of Michel Foucault in The History of Sexuality, this course will begin with the view that sexualities, bodies and desire are generated and constructed from within matrices of power, which feminists have called "Patriarchy". We will examine what feminists have discovered about these constructions, identifying, for example, the myth of "romance", sexual abuse, compulsory heterosexuality, the quest for the perfect body, phallocentrism, among others. Our dilemma here is that sometimes what we have taken to be pleasure is discovered to be danger (as well/instead).

We will then look to the work of feminists in reconstructing (creating/recreating?) new sexualities for women. We will look at stories, visions, experiences, practices described by women, perhaps including our own.

Our sexualities are constructed differently depending upon our positions within the matrices of power, and the Women's Movement is still struggling effectively to deal with our own replication of the hierarchies of "Patriarchy". Therefore in both our analyses of the problem and our quest for solutions we will need to be alert to the diversity of voices and the diversity of positions from which they speak, positions marked by race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and other particularities. We will seek out this diversity, just as we will seek out material from a variety of disciplines.

As one formulation of the goal of all this, let's consider these thought of Muriel Dimen:

Sexuality is not the route to revolution. But it is a prime shaper of desire ... Our failures to rebel, our incomplete revolutions, are rooted in the repression of desire that, essential to sexual oppression, truncates hope... We must desire all we can... We may not be able to get everything
we want, but only be wanting everything we can imagine can we get everything we need.

REQUIRED READING


In addition a Xeroxed packet of readings will be provided.

ASSIGNMENTS

Tutorial Presentation - 30%
It’s especially here that we will be attending closely to the diversity of voices speaking from particular positions. Your task will be to present one such particular voice and position: you own, or one drawn from texts, poetry, interviews, or other sources. Reflection questions will be developed to focus the research.

Short Paper - 20%
Michel Foucault provides a "keynote" text which frames the initial approach to this course. This paper will, in 5-7 pages, review this text, his position and arguments. It will be due early in the course.

Midterm Exam - 20%
This exam will review material discussed in the first half of the course. It will be a take-home exam in short-essay format, with optional questions to choose from.

Research Paper - 30%
This paper will be about 15 pages long, due at the end of term, written on a topic of your choosing. You may, for example, research in more depth a topic covered in class, examine a relevant topic that we haven’t touched, or develop a theoretical question or debate that arises from material.

STUDENTS MAY APPLY TO THE SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT TO HAVE THIS COURSE DESIGNATED AS CREDIT TOWARD THE SOCIOLOGY MAJOR REQUIREMENT.