

UGEC 2853 SEXUALITY AND CULTURE 性與文化

2025-2026 Summer Session, Wed 10:30-13:15; Fri 10:30-13:15 (LSK 208)

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Course overview:

Teaching language: Cantonese

Teaching materials: English

This course offers a philosophical and cross-cultural exploration of sexuality as a key site where power, ethics, and identity intersect. Rather than treating sexuality as a matter of personal morality or biological instinct, it examines how ideas about sex, gender, and desire have been shaped by major philosophical traditions, e.g. from Plato and Confucius to Beauvoir, Foucault, and contemporary feminist theorists. Through historical, cultural, and critical perspectives, students investigate how sexuality structures human subjectivity, social relations, and cultural expression. By engaging with both Western and non-Western thought, the course invites reflection on issues such as sexual ethics, pornography, sex labor, and the politics of vulnerability, ultimately asking what it means to be human in relation to desire, embodiment, and difference.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand key ideas about how culture, history, and philosophy shape our views of sex, gender, and sexuality.
- Recognize how concepts of desire and identity are connected to power, ethics, and social norms.
- Compare different cultural perspectives on sexuality, including Western and East Asian traditions.
- Discuss contemporary issues such as pornography, sexual labor, and gender equality with critical awareness.
- Reflect thoughtfully on their own assumptions and experiences in relation to sexuality and culture.

Assessments:

1. Tutorial 30% (10% presentation + 20% discussion):

Students are required to attend three tutorial sessions and give a group presentation on one of the tutorial readings. The presentation should summarize and discuss the key ideas and arguments of the chosen reading. Each presentation will conclude with a Q&A session, where classmates will ask questions and join the discussion.

2. In-class group presentation (10%) and individual follow-up report (20%):

Students will work in small groups to deliver a 10-15 minute in-class presentation. By the end of the semester, each student needs to submit an individual reflective essay (3,000–4,000 words in Chinese / 2,000–3,000 words in English) that revisits the presentation topic through the theories covered in the course.

- Late submission policy for the follow-up report: Unless an extension has been granted by the teacher in advance, late submissions will result in a deduction of 10% of the marks awarded per day, with no marks to be given for a delay beyond 5 calendar days.

3. Exam 30%: End-term exam

4. Participation 10%: Students are expected to attend class and actively participate.

Course Schedule:			
Lesson	Date	Topic/Content	Reference
1	13 May	Introduction: Why study sexuality?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fausto-Sterling, A. (1993). The five sexes: Why male and female are not enough. <i>The Sciences</i>, 33(2), 20–24. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2326-1951.1993.tb03081.x - West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. <i>Gender & Society</i>, 1(2), 125–151. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002
2	15 May	Sexuality in Western traditions: How is sexual desire understood in ancient Greek and Christian traditions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plato. (1972). <i>The symposium</i> (W. Hamilton, Trans.). Penguin Books. - Aristotle. (2004). <i>Nicomachean ethics</i> (R. Crisp, Trans. & Ed.; Books II–III, pp. 23–59). Cambridge University Press. - Augustine, Saint. (1966). <i>Confessions</i> (R. S. Pine-Coffin, Trans. & Intro.; Books VII–VIII, pp. 111–180). Penguin Books.
3	20 May	Sexuality in East Asian traditions: How is sexual desire understood in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hall, D. L., & Ames, R. T. (1987). <i>Thinking through Confucius</i>. State University of New York Press. - Saso, M. (1997). The Taoist body and cosmic prayer. In S. Coakley (Ed.), <i>Religion and the body</i> (pp. 231–247). Cambridge University Press. - Faure, B. (1998). <i>The red thread: Buddhist approaches to sexuality</i>. Princeton University Press.
4	22 May	Modern philosophy of sexuality and decolonial critiques: Whose Sexuality? Whose Culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wood, A. W. (2008). <i>Kantian ethics</i> (Ch. 13, “Sex,” pp. 224–239). Cambridge University Press. - de Beauvoir, S. (1956). <i>The second sex</i> (H. M. Parshley, Trans. & Ed.). Jonathan Cape. (Original work published 1949) - Foucault, M. (1978). <i>The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An introduction</i> (R. Hurley, Trans.). Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1976) - Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system. <i>Hypatia</i>, 22(1), 186–209. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01156.x - Oyèwùmí, O. (1997). <i>The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses</i>. University of Minnesota Press.

5	27 May	<p>Pornography: How does pornography transform sexuality into a commodity that can be sold, viewed, downloaded, and consumed? Is pornography morally wrong?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nussbaum, M. C. (1995). Objectification. <i>Philosophy & Public Affairs</i>, 24(4), 249–291. - Langton, Rae. “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts.” <i>Philosophy & Public Affairs</i> 22, no. 4 (1993): 293–330. - MacKinnon, C. A. (1996). <i>Only words</i>. Harvard University Press. - Rubin, G. (1985). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In C. S. Vance (Ed.), <i>Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality</i> (pp. 267–319). Routledge & Kegan Paul.
6	29 May	<p>Sex labor: When sex enters the market, can it remain free? Are sex workers victims, autonomous laborers, or marginalized figures shaped by social contradictions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Satz, D. (2010). Markets in women’s sexual labor. In <i>Why some things should not be for sale: The moral limits of markets</i> (pp. 135–154). Oxford University Press. - Nussbaum, M. C. (1998). “Whether from reason or prejudice”: Taking money for bodily services. <i>The Journal of Legal Studies</i>, 27(S2), 693–723. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/468040 - Pateman, C. (1997). <i>The sexual contract</i>. Polity Press. - Kempadoo, K., & Doezema, J. (Eds.). (1998). <i>Global sex workers: Rights, resistance, and redefinition</i>. Routledge
7	3 June	Tutorial 1	Required readings will be announced later in class.
8	5 June	Tutorial 2	Required readings will be announced later in class.
9	10 June	Tutorial 3	Required readings will be announced later in class.
10	12 June	<p>Marriage: What are the relationships between marriage, love, and sex?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wood, A. W. (2008). <i>Kantian ethics</i> (Ch. 13, “Sex,” pp. 224–239). Cambridge University Press. - de Beauvoir, S. (1956). <i>The second sex</i> (H. M. Parshley, Trans. & Ed.). Jonathan Cape. (Original work published 1949) - Illouz, E. (2007). <i>Cold intimacies: The making of emotional capitalism</i>. Polity Press.
11	17 June	<p>BDSM: What kinds of desires count as “transgressive”?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freud, S. (1961). Fetishism (J. Strachey, Trans.). In <i>The standard edition of the complete psychological works of</i>

		How can ethics and pleasure coexist?	<p><i>Sigmund Freud</i> (Vol. 21, pp. 147–157). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis. (Original work published 1927)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lacan, J. (2006). Kant with Sade (B. Fink, Trans.; with H. Fink & R. Grigg). In <i>Écrits: The first complete edition in English</i> (pp. 645–668). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original works published 1966) - Foucault, M. (1978). <i>The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An introduction</i> (R. Hurley, Trans.; Chs. 1–2, pp. 17–50). Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1976) - Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2009). <i>Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia</i> (R. Hurley, M. Seem, & H. R. Lane, Trans.; Preface by M. Foucault, Introduction by M. Seem). Penguin Books. (Original work published 1972) - Rubin, G. (1985). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In C. S. Vance (Ed.), <i>Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality</i> (pp. 267–319). - Califia, P. (1994). <i>Public sex: The culture of radical sex</i>. Cleis Press.
12	24 June	<p>Disability, aging, and non-normative bodies: Discussions of sexuality often assume young, able-bodied, and beautiful bodies. What, then, does sexuality mean for the elderly, people with disabilities, or those with chronic illnesses? Is sexuality merely an expression of desire, or is it also an integral part of human dignity and relational life?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). <i>Women and human development: The capabilities approach</i> (Ch. 1, pp. 34–110). Cambridge University Press. - Kittay, E. F. (2020). <i>Love’s labor: Essays on women, equality, and dependency</i> (2nd ed., Part 1, pp. 27–82). Routledge. - Kafer, A. (2013). <i>Feminist, queer, crip</i> (Ch. 1, “Time for disability studies and a future for crips,” pp. 25–46). Indiana University Press. - Ahmed, S. (2004). <i>The cultural politics of emotion</i>. Edinburgh University Press.
13	26 June	Exam	

Grade submission deadline: 9 July

Grade descriptors:

Grade Descriptors for Tutorial Performance and In-class presentation

<p>[Excellent] A (85–92) or [Very Good] A- (80–84)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You concisely explain the relevant material in a way that clarifies how the various pieces are meant to fit together.• You raise and clearly explain your own insightful questions of interpretation about the material.• You raise and clearly explain your own challenging yet fair objections to the material.• You construct charitable replies on the author’s behalf to your points, and provide your own rejoinders.• You carefully discuss the significance of your points and their theoretical or practical implications.• In discussion, you demonstrate a willingness to share newly formed ideas, and you effectively begin to develop ideas on the spot through constructive yet critical interaction with others.
<p>[Good] B+ (76– 79), B (72–75) or B- (68–71)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explanation of material contains minor errors, or is correct but adds little or nothing.• Questions/objections are relevant, but obvious.• Author’s reply is absent or oversimplified.• Implications are not discussed or are only briefly explained.• Good effort at discussion, but hesitant to take risks and has difficulty developing ideas on the spot.
<p>[Fair] C+ (64– 67), C (60–63) or C- (56–59)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explanation of material contains significant errors or oversights.• Questions/objections are often confused or unclear.• Author’s reply is absent or mistaken.• Implications are not discussed or are confused or unclear.• Little or no effort at discussion.
<p>[Pass] D+ (53–55) or D (50–52)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You attend and show a reasonable interest in the discussion and a willingness to participate minimally if called upon.
<p>[Fail] F (0-49)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You rarely attend or do not attend at all. You show little or no interest in the discussion and a general lack of willingness to participate if called upon.

Note: Marks cannot be given for mere “attendance”, but may be deducted for “absences”.

Grade Descriptors for Essays

	Argument	Theory Analysis	Writing Style
[Excellent] A (85–92) or [Very Good] A- (80–84)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You provide a detailed and specific thesis statement that clearly describes the main claim(s) you will be arguing for and indicates how what you plan to say adds something to the discussion, rather than mostly repeating the material we have read. You defend your claims in a well-developed way by giving and explaining your reasons for your position. You identify likely objections, present them charitably and respond to them effectively. You carefully explain the theoretical and/or practical implications of your argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You provide an accurate account of the relevant parts of the theory. You illuminate the relationship between the theory's conclusion(s) and its arguments. You quote relevant key passages with proper citations. You define key terms, and explain their role and how they relate to each other. You discuss what the thinker would probably have said about an issue by drawing on what he/she did say about other related matters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You choose your words carefully. The language is precise rather than vague, natural rather than awkward, straightforward rather than ostentatious. Each piece of the essay is presented in a way that makes it clear to the reader how it is relevant to your thesis. Where appropriate, you use real or hypothetical examples to help illustrate abstract points.
[Good] B+ (76–79), B (72–75) or B- (68–71)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thesis statement is clear, but general and unambitious. The reasons given to support claims are occasionally weak or too brief. Some claims in need of defence are merely asserted. Some key objections are not considered, or the response is weak or too brief. Theoretical and/or practical implications are not explained, or the explanation is vague and imprecise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are minor inaccuracies in the account of the theory. Some small points are overlooked. The theory's arguments for its conclusion(s) are described, but the relationship between them is not explained, or the explanation is vague and imprecise. Use of quotations is sometimes missing or erratic or without proper citations. Some key concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The language is generally clear, but occasionally lacks precision or naturalness or desirable simplicity. The relevance of small parts of the essay is not made clear. Illustrative examples are used rarely or not at all.

		are not defined, or are defined carelessly.	
[Fair] C+ (64–67), C (60–63) or C- (56–59)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis statement is absent or insignificant or confused. • The reasons given to support claims are usually weak or too brief. Many claims in need of defence are merely asserted. • Objections are not considered, or they are only a straw-man version, or the response is ineffective. • Implications are not identified, or they are asserted without explanation. • The argument is likely to contain contradictions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are significant inaccuracies in the account of the theory. Some major points are overlooked. • The theory's conclusion(s) are described without reference to its arguments. • Use of quotations is missing or erratic or without proper citations. • Key concepts are not defined, or are defined incorrectly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The language is often unclear, due to being vague or awkward or ostentatious. • The relevance of significant parts of the essay is not made clear. • Illustrative examples are used incorrectly or not at all.
[Pass] D+ (53–55) or D (50–52)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You demonstrate an awareness of what an argument is, and try to make one. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You grasp at least the main features of some of the theory's most important points. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The language is intelligible more often than not.
[Fail] F (0-49)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You show little awareness of what an argument is, fails to make an argument, and shows almost no effort to make one. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You fail to grasp any of the major features of the theory. You have a fundamentally flawed and distorted understanding of the major points of the theory. On the whole, you demonstrate almost no effort in representing the theory accurately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The language is more unintelligible than not and the meaning of the language is very hard to discern. The essay is thoroughly unorganized.

Grade Descriptors for Examination

<p>[Excellent] A (85–92) or [Very Good] A- (80–84)</p>	<p>Argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You faithfully reconstruct the author’s positions, and prove this knowledge by knowing the argument(s) supporting the theses in the text. You evidence independent and self-initiated thinking and understanding of the arguments and philosophical problems through your ability to present your own counter-arguments and possible replies to counter-arguments. <p>Theory Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You exhibit thorough understanding of the relations of the themes presented in the various texts. You demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the relations between the various subjects and authors discussed in the course. You demonstrate an above-average facility in judgment by applying the various theories to cases and situations presented in the course of the exam.
<p>[Good] B+ (76–79), B (72–75), or B- (68–71)</p>	<p>Argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can faithfully reconstruct the author’s positions, and demonstrate a basic comprehension of the arguments supporting those positions. You show some independence in thinking, but have difficulty developing your own criticisms and rebuttals to criticism. <p>Theory Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You exhibit relatively complete understanding of the relations between the authors and the themes presented in the various texts. You show some basic, though average, facility in judgment by applying the various theories to cases and situations presented in the course of the exam.
<p>[Fair] C+ (64–67), C (60–63), or C- (56–59)</p>	<p>Argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You demonstrate an ability to properly relay information about the various texts and the positions contained therein, but have difficulty re-constructing the arguments, presenting counter-arguments, and criticism. You can faithfully relay information, but you show no independence in philosophical thinking, fail to show basic competence in philosophical argumentation and have a difficulty understanding arguments. <p>Theory Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You show an incomplete understanding of the relations between the authors discussed in the course as well as the themes presented in the various texts. You demonstrate competence to memorize information, but you have some difficulty applying various theories to cases and situations presented in the course of the exam.

<p>[Pass] D+ (53–55), or D (50–52)</p>	<p>Argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You demonstrate some understanding of the course content, but have difficulty relaying accurate information about the positions and the arguments for such positions in the text. <p>Theory Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although the answers are readable, you exhibit seriously incomplete understanding of the content as well as the relationships between authors and themes covered in the readings and discussed in class. You fail to demonstrate facility in the application of various theories to cases and situations presented in the course of the exam.
<p>[Fail] F (0-49)</p>	<p>Argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You demonstrate no understanding of the course content. You relay inaccurate information about the positions and arguments for those positions in the text. <p>Theory Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The answers are unreadable, and your answers exhibit a complete lack of understanding of the relationships between authors and themes covered in the readings and discussed in class.

AI Tools Usage Approach:

Use only with explicit acknowledgement. Students are allowed to use AI tools in any learning activities and/or assessments as long as they explicitly cite or otherwise acknowledge the use of these tools.

Academic honesty and plagiarism:

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via **VeriGuide**, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students’ uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teacher. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.