

**THIS IS THE INTRODUCTION TO THE 2020 SYLLABUS; 2021 WILL BE SUBSTANTIALLY SIMILAR**

## **ANTH 625 HUMAN SEXUALITY IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

Prof. Robin Sheriff Spring 2020 Wednesdays 2:10-5:00 HamSmith G21

Office Hours: Mondays 3:00-4:00 and by appointment and drop-in

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**Please note, this course counts as a Women's Studies major or minor elective, but is not a Discovery course.**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

What is sex? Is it just "doing what comes naturally"? This course investigates human sexuality, using anthropological research and cross-cultural case studies to illuminate the relationships among culture, sex, and gender. It addresses some perennial questions: Are gender and sexual behavior shaped more by natural, biological forces or by cultural and ideological ones? Are there really only two sexes? What, if any, dimensions of human sexuality and gender-related behavior are universal? Are the beliefs associated with sex in our own culture shared by others? What roles do power, domination, and gender stratification play in sexuality? Who decides what is "normal" and what is "deviant"?

We will also ask some new questions, look at multidisciplinary research, and conduct some of our own research: What do tattoos, piercings and other types of body modification mean for people in our culture(s)? Is "hook-up culture" a new way of negotiating sexual encounters, or is it mostly media hype? Have there been generational shifts in how middle-class Americans think about courtship and marriage? And what is really happening on U.S. college campuses? Over the course of the semester, you will interview people in an attempt to answer these questions.

Our readings will range over colonial Africa and the Americas, and contemporary Latin America, Europe, and Asia. Most of the reading will be composed of scholarly articles published in a reader. **Additional reading is posted in MyCourses.** We will also read a memoir about a New England college professor who has experienced a "life in two genders," and we will view a number of documentary films that complement the readings.

### **CENTRAL OBJECTIVES**

--We will question assumptions about what is "natural" and what is "cultural" in the world of sexuality and gender and cultivate curiosity about the world's changing cultures—and thereby enlarge our understanding of the human condition.

--We will develop critical thinking skills through reading, discussion, and ethnographic exercises, placing a firm emphasis on evidence over uninformed opinion—and thereby enhance our capacity for global citizenship.

**COURSE MATERIALS:**

The following required books are available at the Durham Book Exchange.

--LaFont, Suzanne, ed. 2003 *Constructing Sexualities: Readings in Sexuality, Gender and Culture*. Prentice Hall

--Boylan, Jennifer Finney 2003 *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders*. Broadway. (ISBN: 0767914295)

-- **Substitutions, additional readings, and supplemental material may be posted in the Modules section of MyCourses.**

**REQUIREMENTS, COMMUNICATION, AND GRADING**

All of the following components **must be completed** in order to pass the course:

Midterm Exam (take home essay)	20%
Summary/Discussion Questions (Memoir)	5%
First Assignment (Body-Modification)	20%
Second Assignment (Marriage)	20%
Third Assignment (Campus Culture)	20%
Summing Up Assignment	5%
Participation	10%