

# SELECTED TOPICS IN HEALTH AND SOCIETY: SEX & WELLBEING

## Winter 2023

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**Lecture:** Mon 8:30-10:20am [in-person];  
Wed 8:30-9:20am [asynchronous online;  
watch on your own time!]

**Office:** Kenneth Taylor Hall room 206A  
**Office Hours:** Monday 10:30-11:00 or  
by appointment

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## **Course Description**

This course explores how individual and contextual factors affect our sex lives. The over-arching aim of the course is to demonstrate 1) how our sex lives affect our well-being, and 2) how we can foster sexual health. We will examine these and other questions from various theoretical perspectives, with an emphasis on quantitative research and psychological theories. We will focus on where our scientific understanding of these topics stands, and how it can be improved.

## **Course Objectives**

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Understand how sex relates to well-being outcomes, under which circumstances, and for whom
- Concisely summarize and critique empirical research
- Convey academic literature in a manner accessible to the lay public
- Understand how people's sex lives might change over the course of one's life, and over the course of one's romantic relationship

## **Required Materials and Texts**

- Required textbook: Selected chapters from *The Psychology of Human Sexuality 1<sup>st</sup> edition* (2014) by Justin Lehmiller
- You can access the ebook FREE from the McMaster library [here](#) [Note: Make sure you are accessing the 1<sup>st</sup> edition from 2014, as the university has limited access to the 2018 version]
- Other assigned readings will be accessible through eReserves through Avenue to Learn

## **Class Format**

This course is a combined in-person/online course.

Monday's lectures will be held in-person from 8:30am-10:20am in MDCL 1009. I expect attendance for Monday's lectures; however, the content is captured using Echo360, should you be absent from lecture. The unedited recordings will be posted on Avenue to Learn the day following each lecture.

Wednesday's lectures and activities are asynchronous and online, meaning the content will be pre-recorded and uploaded to Avenue to Learn by Wednesday morning. You can engage with this content whenever you like. However, I encourage you to watch the videos/ complete the activities during the time allocated for our Wednesday lecture so that you do not fall behind. Note. The pre-recorded content may not always total 50

minutes, but it represents the same amount of content I could typically cover in a 50 min in-person lecture period.

Instructor drop-in office hours are after class on Monday (10:30-11:00) or by appointment. I will also answer questions a few times a week via Piazza (see section on “Piazza” for more information). ALL COURSE CONTENT-RELATED QUESTIONS SHOULD BE ASKED OVER PIAZZA, instead of email, to ensure all students have access to the same information.

## **Course Evaluation – Overview**

1. Article Summary and Critique - 10%, due Wed Feb 8
2. Online Midterm Test - 25%, occurring March 1<sup>st</sup> 8:30-9:20am
3. Infographic - 15%, due March 27
4. Participation Activities - 15%, due Sundays by 11:59pm on weeks 3-6 and 9-13
5. Final Exam - 35%, held during final exam period

Specifications for these evaluations, including instructions and rubrics, will be posted on Avenue and discussed in class well before their due dates. Please note that McMaster’s policies on academic misconduct governs all course requirements.

## **Course Evaluation – Details**

### **Article Summary and Critique (10%), due Wed Feb 8<sup>th</sup> 11:59pm**

This assignment is designed to be a low stakes way for you to get feedback early in the term regarding your ability to understand scientific readings and engage in critical thinking—two important skills for your success in the remainder of the course. You are to choose one of the required readings from weeks 2, 3 or 4 (the journal articles with empirical data, NOT THE TEXTBOOK CHAPTERS). In a maximum of 600 words (excluding references), you will summarize the article, then critique its scientific merit.

### **Online Midterm Test (25%), due Wed March 1<sup>st</sup> 8:30-9:20am**

The midterm will consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. It will take place online in the Avenue to Learn Quiz section and will be based on material covered in Weeks 1-6 (i.e., I will not test you on Feb 27 content). The multiple-choice questions will cover all lecture material from Weeks 1-6, as well as the required readings. *Please note that I may assess material covered exclusively in the textbook/readings (and not in lecture) in the multiple-choice questions.* Short answer questions will be based only material covered in lectures. We will go through practice questions in class each week to prepare you for the types of questions asked.

As the midterm is worth 25%, it is not eligible for an online MSAF. If you miss the midterm on March 1<sup>st</sup>, please contact the Associate Dean's Office in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Where appropriate, I will reweight your final exam to 60% of your final mark. There is no make-up test for a missed midterm.

### **Infographic (15%), due Mon March 27<sup>th</sup>**

You will create a double-sided infographic on Canva or another chosen program, providing educational details on a chosen course subject area. You will outline information provided within course lectures and from outside sources. Students should target the infographic at a specific audience (e.g., parents, university students, married couples, teenagers, etc.).

### **Participation Activities (15%), due Sundays by 11:59pm on 5 weeks of your choice**

Between weeks 2-6 and 9-13 you must submit participation activities on 5 weeks total. The specific activities vary from week to week, and are posted on Avenue to learn each Monday. They may include for example, reflecting on that week's reading, commenting on a podcast episode, expanding on a research idea, etc. You have up until that Sunday by 11:59pm to submit the week's activity (i.e., the activity for Week 3 can be submitted up until Sunday Jan 29 11:59pm). Each of your 5 activities is marked out of 3 marks. We will not grade more than 5 activities per student. Because you have the choice of which 5 weeks to submit, there will be no extensions or late penalties offered. I recommend you submit your activities early in the semester before other course work gets busy!

### **Final Exam (35%), during the final exam period**

The final exam will be arranged by the Registrar's office. The exam will comprise multiple choice, short and long answer questions. The multiple-choice and short-answer sections are non-cumulative (i.e., cover weeks 7-14 only, including lectures and required readings). The long answer section will assess core course concepts and themes from across the semester. We will go over sample questions and advice on how to prepare in class.

As the exam is worth 35%, it is not eligible for an online MSAF. If the exam is missed, please email your respective Faculty office with appropriate documentation for the Faculty to review.

## **Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings**

### **Week 1 (Jan 9 & 11) Introduction**

#### **Jan 9 – Introduction, Methods & Theories**

Readings: Textbook Chapter 1 "Theoretical Perspectives on Human Sexuality"

#### **Jan 11 – Introduction, Methods & Theories ctd**

Readings: Textbook Chapter 2 "Sexology Research: History, Methods, and Ethics"

## **Week 2 (Jan 16 & 18) Sex & Mood/Life Satisfaction**

### **Jan 16– Sex & Mood/Life Satisfaction**

Readings: Journal article: Maxwell, J. A., & Meltzer, A. L. (2020). Kiss and makeup? Examining the co-occurrence of conflict and sex. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49(8), 2883-2892.

### **Jan 18 – Sex & Mood/Life Satisfaction ctd**

Readings: None

## **Week 3 (Jan 23 & 25) Sexual Orientation and Identity**

### **Jan 23– Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation**

Readings: Journal article: Blair, K. L., Cappell, J., & Pukall, C. F. (2018). Not all orgasms were created equal: Differences in frequency and satisfaction of orgasm experiences by sexual activity in same-sex versus mixed-sex relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 55(6), 719-733.

### **Jan 25– Consensual Non-Monogamy**

Readings: None

## **Week 4 (Jan 30 & Feb 1) Gender/Sex Differences in Sexuality**

### **Jan 30– Gender/Sex Differences in Sexuality**

Readings: Journal Article: French, J. E., McNulty, J. K., Makhanova, A., Maner, J. K., Eckel, L. A., Nikonova, L., & Meltzer, A. L. (2022). An empirical investigation of the roles of biological, relational, cognitive, and emotional factors in explaining sex differences in dyadic sexual desire. *Biological Psychology*, 174, 108421.

### **Feb 1 – Gender/Sex Differences in Sexuality ctd**

Readings: None

## **Week 5 (Feb 6 & 8) Sex & Singlehood**

### **Feb 6 – Sex & Singlehood**

Readings: The Atlantic (online magazine) article: “Why Are Young People Having so Little Sex?” <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/12/the-sex-recession/573949/>

### **Feb 8 – Sex & Singlehood ctd**

Readings: None

Notes: Article Summary & Critique assignment due

## **Week 6 (Feb 13 & 15) Sexual Perception & Communication**

### **Feb 13 – Sexual Perception & Communication**

Readings: None (catchup on any missed readings so far!)

**Feb 15 – Sexual Perception & Communication**

Readings: None

**Week 7 (Feb 20 & 22) Reading Week**

Reading Week: NO CLASSES

**Week 8 (Feb 27 & March 1) Sexual Pain & STIs**

**Feb 27– Sexual Pain & STIs**

Readings: None (prep for midterm!)

**March 1–Online Midterm**

Readings: None

Notes: Online midterm administered through Avenue to Learn 8:30am-9:20am

**Week 9 (March 6 & 8) Sex & Aging**

**March 6 – Sex & Aging**

Readings: Journal article: Kvaalem, I. L., Graham, C. A., Hald, G. M., Carvalheira, A. A., Janssen, E., & Štulhofer, A. (2020). The role of body image in sexual satisfaction among partnered older adults: a population-based study in four European countries. *European Journal of Ageing*, 17(2), 163-173.

**March 8 – Sex & Aging ctd**

Readings: None

Notes: If you haven't started submitting reflections yet, you need to start this week (so that you can submit 5 before the end of course).

**Week 10 (March 13 & 15) Sexuality & Adolescence**

**March 13 – Sexuality & Adolescence**

Readings: Textbook Chapter 10 "Sex Education, Contraception, and Pregnancy" Pages 256- 272 (Subsections on Sex Education and Contraception—don't need to read Pregnancy)

**March 15 – Sexuality & Adolescence**

Readings: None

Notes: (Pre-recorded) Guest lecture from Dr. Diana Peragine, University of Toronto Mississauga

**Week 11 (March 20 & 22) Keeping the Sexual Passion: Individual Factors**

**March 20 – Individual Factors**

Readings: Journal article: Muise, A., & Impett, E. A. (2015). Good, giving, and game: The relationship benefits of communal sexual motivation. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 6(2), 164-172.

**March 22 –Individual Factors ctd**

Readings: None

**Week 12 (March 27 & 29) Keeping the Sexual Passion- Contextual Factors**

**March 27 – Contextual Factors**

Readings: None (catchup on previous weeks' readings!)

**March 29 – Contextual Factors ctd**

Readings: None

**Week 13 (April 3 & 5) Pornography...Good or Bad?**

**April 3 – Pornography**

Readings: Journal article: Grubbs, J. B., & Perry, S. L. (2019). Moral incongruence and pornography use: A critical review and integration. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 56(1), 29-37.

**April 5 – Pornography ctd**

Readings: None

Notes: This is the last week you can complete a participation activity for.

**Week 14 (April 10 & 12) Variations in Sexual Behaviour & Review**

**April 10 – Variations in Sexual Behaviour**

Readings: Textbook Chapter 13 “Variations in Sexual Behavior”

**April 12– Course review and Q & A over Zoom**

Readings: None

Notes: This review will be a live Zoom session where you can ask questions prior to the exam. (The session will also be recorded and made available afterward)

**Course Policies**

**Submission of Assignments**

All assignments will be submitted electronically via the appropriate assignment dropbox in Avenue to Learn (e.g., Assessments → Assignments → HLTHAGE 2K03 Article Summary and Critique). For all assignments, the dropbox is Turnitin-enabled. Emailed



assignments will NOT be accepted. The Article Summary & Critique assignment should follow APA formatting guidelines (see the template provided on Avenue).

## **Grades**

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

<b>MARK</b>	<b>GRADE</b>
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

## **Late Assignments**

Extensions for course assignments will only be granted under conditions of medical, family, or other extraordinary circumstances. All other late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 5% (of the available marks) per day (including weekends). For example, if you submit the Article Summary and Critique on Feb 10<sup>th</sup> you would receive a 10% deduction for two days late, or 1 mark deducted out of 10 marks. Late assignments will not be accepted after 7 days beyond the original deadline without appropriate documentation from the Office of the Associate Dean of Social Sciences.

## **Course Modification**

The instructor reserves the right to modify elements of the course during the term. If any modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

## **Avenue to Learn**

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

## **Piazza**

Piazza is a free online gathering place where students can ask, answer, and explore 24/7 under the guidance of their instructor. If you have a question about the course, please use Piazza (<https://piazza.com/mcmaster.ca/spring2023/hlthage2k03>). I will give more instructions about signing up and using Piazza during our first lecture. I will only respond to emails about personal private matters (e.g., extension requests).

Piazza will be used so that:

(1) Students have an online learning community based on student-led discussion and feedback, and

(2) Instructor responses to student questions will be available for everyone.

### **1. An online learning community based on student-led discussion and feedback**

Students are encouraged to both ask and answer questions on Piazza. When you are struggling to understand a concept, you can ask a question anonymously to your fellow students. Do not be shy about asking an 'easy/simple' question. Some of the greatest learning experiences come from discussing *why* a certain answer is correct/incorrect, particularly to the seemingly straightforward questions that you may be struggling with. If you have a question, somebody else likely does as well.

Students are then encouraged to answer each other's queries. Peer feedback and discussions are a great way of learning how to articulate your understanding and discuss central topics that form the basis of your assignment and the exam. Again, don't be shy about suggesting an answer you think may not be correct. The discussion that follows (and any input by the instructor; see below) offers a great learning opportunity, and may often demonstrate that there are different ways to answer depending on the theory or research you apply.

### **2. Instructor responses to student questions**

All queries should be posted to Piazza (as opposed to email) so that all students have access to the student discussions as well as the instructor's responses to these questions.

- The instructor will first allow the opportunity for student discussion/responses to general questions before correcting any misunderstanding or endorsing students' answers.
- The instructor will also answer questions related to the lecture content, assignments, and exam on Piazza.

The instructor will check Piazza approximately three times a week. You should have ***realistic expectations regarding the time frame in which the instructor addresses***

**your query** – don't leave your assignment and exam-related questions to the last minute!

## **University Policies**

### **Academic Integrity**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### **Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection**

**Some courses may** use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

**All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

### **Courses with an On-line Element**

**Some courses may** use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware

that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

### **Online Proctoring**

**Some courses may** use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

### **Conduct Expectations**

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

### **Academic Accommodation of Students With Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

### **Requests For Relief For Missed Academic Term Work**

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the [Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](#).

## **Academic Accommodation For Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

## **Copyright And Recording**

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

## **Extreme Circumstances**

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

## **Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy**

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.