

PSY/SXS 456: Psychology of Human Sexual Behavior

Fall 2025, T/H 12:30-1:45pm, BH 28

Professor	Office	E-mail & Phone	Student Hours
Charlotte Tate, Ph.D.	EP 310	ctate2@sfsu.edu 415.338.2267	Mondays 12:30-1:30pm; Tuesdays & Thursdays 11am-12pm; Wednesdays 4-5pm (in-person and on Zoom)

Class website: published on Canvas (<http://canvas.sfsu.edu>)

Course Overview:

This course will cover some basic topics in psychological science as they relate to human sexuality and sexual practices. You will be introduced to the study of human sexuality in the behavioral sciences from the perspectives of researchers in the United States. Throughout the course, though, we will consider conceptualizations of sexuality and sexual practices in different cultures--both historical and current. These considerations will serve as foils to the current understanding in the United States and as illustrations of the variability of sexuality across human cultures and time.

In this course, we will explore issues from genetics, neurology, physiology, and biological evolution but the major focus will be on psychological science—particularly from the perspectives of social psychology, personality psychology, and affective science. For instance, we will examine self-identities, social attitudes, social interactions, and personal belief systems as influencers of sexual feelings, desires, thoughts, and behavior. Lecture material will also draw on studies and insights from the social sciences (e.g., anthropology, sociology) as well as issues in philosophy (e.g., conceptions of love, the impact of U.S. feminism on the understanding of sexuality).

Finally, most human sexuality courses use heterosexuality as the standard for understanding all of human sexuality, and therefore discuss homosexuality and bisexuality as anomalies. Your professor (and the author of your text to a much lesser extent) take the position that there are many sexual orientations (plural)—none of which should be *the standard* for understanding sexuality. Accordingly, homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, asexuality, and heterosexuality (among others) are all equally considered as valid and important expressions of *human sexuality*. Functionally, this stance means that you will be presented with images and descriptions of both other-gender and same-gender relationships and sexual practices throughout the course—basically in every lecture. Similarly, virtually all human sexuality texts use cisgender experience as the standard for understanding all gender experience, which relegates transgender spectrum experience to the margins as anomalies. Continuing the inclusive theme, your professor considers all experiences of gender self-categorization to be equally valid and integrates them throughout the lecture material—basically in every lecture. Functionally, this means that you will become used to terms such as *cis women* and *cis men* in addition to *trans** (or *transgender spectrum*), *trans women*, *trans men*, *non-binary individuals*, *agender*, *genderqueer*, and many more terms and self-labels.

Course Prerequisite: Exposure to U.S. culture in some way. ☺

Course Goals:

This course is designed to acquaint you with the philosophical assumptions of and current research topics within the field of sexology. You will also participate in this field by applying what you learn on exams, by engaging in group activities, and by critiquing extant theories and research. Overall, it is my hope that this course sharpens your analytical reasoning skills, improves your ability to identify phenomena from different perspectives and different levels of analysis, and relate these phenomena to substantive issues in your chosen field of study (e.g., psychology, sociology, gender studies, human biology, apparel design and marketing). By the end of the course you should be able to:

- Think critically about behavioral science concepts (esp. in psychological science), with a broader appreciation of how these issues can be framed and studied
- Understand more fully how data gathering and analysis relate to how psychological issues are studied in behavioral science
- Evaluate behavioral science research in sexology through written critiques

San Francisco State University (SFSU) Academic Policies:

1. **Student Conduct.** Campus rules for plagiarism, cheating, and incomplete grades will be followed. Definitions and consequences may be found in the **SFSU Bulletin** (plagiarism and cheating [under "Student Conduct"] as well as in the incomplete grades and withdrawals sections). Please familiarize yourself with these policies because you will be expected to abide by them. But, it is easy to avoid academic dishonesty, so please do so. ☺

2. **Deadlines for Withdrawing.** Please familiarize yourself with the deadlines for withdrawing from class without a "W" and withdrawing for a serious and compelling reason. (Note: "Serious and compelling" is not your call. The Bulletin explains that you must receive approval from the Professor and Department Chair or College Dean.)

3. **Learning Adjustments.** Please contact Dr. Tate right away (first week of class) if you have a documented difference in learning ability; if U.S. English is not your first language; or if you have some other circumstance that may require adjustments for you to learn/understand the material. Students with disabilities should work with the Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC: 415-338-2472) and Dr. Tate to arrange appropriate support. Visit this office on the web at <https://access.sfsu.edu/>

4. **Statement on Religious Holidays.** The faculty of SFSU shall accommodate students wishing to observe religious holidays when such observances require students to be absent from class activities. It is the responsibility of the student to inform the Professor, in writing (including e-mail), about such holidays during the first two weeks of the class each semester. If such holidays occur during the first two weeks of the semester, the student must notify the Professor, in writing, at least three days before the date that she/they/he will be absent. It is the responsibility of the Professor to make every reasonable effort to honor the student request without penalty, and of the student to make up the work missed.

Class Requirements and Activities:

1. Readings.

Optional Text: Martha S. Rosenthal (2012). *Human Sexuality: From Cells to Society*. New York: Cengage. (See the last page of the syllabus for the list of topics and corresponding chapters)

Scientific Articles: Various scientific articles will be posted on Canvas. Each article is associated with a particular lecture topic, and this information is available on Canvas.

2. Attendance. For Fall 2025, **in-person attendance is required for Group Discussions**. All (in-person) lectures are recorded via CourseStream and posted to Canvas after the class meeting (around 2pm Pacific Time on that day). Use the lecture recordings as a study aid, not as the main way you learn the material. To engage in real-time learning, polling, and feedback, we will use SFSU's subscription to the PollEverywhere software, which is free to you as a student. More info at this link: <https://at.sfsu.edu/student-response-system-poll Everywhere>

3. Exams. Study guides for the exams for this course will be posted on the course website. The exams have the same general structure but focus on different topics. In brief, each exam consists of multiple choice, true/false, matching, and application questions. Make-up examinations for each exam may be given only under appropriate circumstances where the professor has been notified of your absence *ahead of time* (e.g., serious illness, injury, family death)—*if possible*. In any case, proof of the extenuating circumstance needs to be provided (e.g., doctor's note, death certificate).

4. Group Discussions (Seminar-Style Sessions). There will be two group discussion sessions. Each session will be run in a seminar-style format, meaning that we will have open discussion about relevant issues for that session, with little or no lecture material covered. These sessions will be semi-structured in that you will be required to complete a short assignment (either before or during each session, or both) in order to effectively participate in the discussion. During these sessions you will break into small groups (of no more than five people) and converse about issues before presenting ideas from your small group discussion to the class as a whole. Each seminar-style session has a theme—named on that date in the syllabus—and the discussion will center on that theme. **Attendance is required for Group Discussions. In addition, everyone will submit the individual form for that Discussion to Canvas to get full credit.** **The double failure to submit the individual form for group discussions and attend in-person will result in zero points on your grade for that item.**

5. Assignments. Three (3) assignments will be given in this course. All assignments are graded credit/no credit. Each assignment is due when listed on page 4 of this syllabus. Assignment topics and **directions** will be *briefly summarized in class* and **posted in detail on Canvas**. Assignments will be submitted via Canvas. It is a good idea to bring questions about the assignments to office hours or appointments with Dr. Tate or the teaching assistants (TAs, if applicable). The assignments will focus on issues in psychological science related to the topics discussed, and they range from qualitative sexual histories to quantitative data collection. It is my hope that such assignments will help you think critically about the issues presented in a way that helps you become a better critical thinker, and behavioral scientist—the latter, if relevant.

Grade Breakdowns

Assignments	150 points	(50 points) x 3
Exams	300 points	(75 points each) x 4
Group Discussions	50 points	(25 points each) x 2 (submitted form + attendance)
Total	500 points	

Grading Schedule: Letter grades will be assigned using the following scale (based on the percentage of total points earned):

94-100% = A	73- 76% = C
90- 93% = A-	70- 72% = C-
87- 89% = B+	67- 69% = D+
83- 86% = B	63- 66% = D
80- 82% = B-	60- 62% = D-
77- 79% = C+	00- 59% = F

Assignment & Discussion Upload Due Dates: (Tentative Dates)

<i>Assignment/Upload</i>	<i>Due Date</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Group Discussion #1	Sep. 10 (Wednesday!)	Complete your individual sheet and upload it ; Then attend the next day in-person [both = full credit]
Assignment # 1	Oct. 2	Recruitment of participants for a quantitative sexology survey, the results of which will be summarized in class to illustrate a course topic [alt. is to collect research paper abstracts] [pass/no-pass; partial credit is possible]
Assignment # 2	Oct. 22 (Wednesday!)	Qualitative sexual history interview to introduce you to thinking like a sexual scientist [pass/no-pass; no partial credit]
Group Discussion #2	Oct. 22 (Wednesday!)	Complete your individual sheet and upload it ; Then attend the next day in-person [both = full credit]
Assignment # 3	Nov. 13	Individual participation in a quantitative sexology survey, the results of which will be summarized in class to illustrate a course topic [pass/no-pass; no partial credit]

Cheating or plagiarism, if detected, will earn a **failing grade** in the course.

See the [definitions of Academic Dishonesty as defined by the Office of Student Conduct](#)

Mandatory Title IX Reporting: SFSU policy is that professors (and employees) must report any allegations or instances of sexual violence that they hear about or witness. For more information, about Title IX rights and protections at SFSU, please visit: <http://titleix.sfsu.edu/reporting>

Class Culture (Norms and Expectations)

- Treat your fellow students and your professor with respect; you do not need to voice every thought or feeling you have—especially, it only comes from a place of personal discomfort with learning about experiences that you don't personally have
- SILENCE your cell phone during class (or put it on vibrate with some legitimate reason)
- Ask questions and speak up during class, especially when the question advances learning
- Be patient with the technology :)

Tentative List of Lecture Topics, Readings, Exam[‡] and Group Discussion Dates^{} (v.12-alt.)**

Date	Content/ Information Covered	Powerpoint Deck [Opt. Book Chapter]
Aug. 26	Orientation // Introduction // Why Study Human Sexual Behavior Scientifically?	Lecture 0 [Ro-Ch. 1]
Aug. 28	The Scientific Method and the Study of Sex	Lecture 1 [Ro-Ch. 2]
Sep. 2	Sex Chromosomes and Human Biological Development	Lecture 2 [Ro-Ch. 5]
Sep. 4	Sex Chromosomes and Human Biological Development	Lecture 2 [Ro-Ch. 5]
Sep. 9	Sex Chromosomes and Human Biological Development	Lecture 2 [Ro-Ch. 5]
Sep. 11-R	Group Discussion #1 (Gender)	Upload + Attendance
Sep. 16	The Masculinity-Femininity Heuristic (aka “the Gender Binary”) vs. Gender as a Bundle of Constructs	Lecture 3
Sep. 18	Gender as Self-Categorization	Lecture 4 [Ro-Ch. 5]
Sep. 23	Gender as Self-Categorization	Lecture 4 [Ro-Ch. 5]
Sep. 25	Gender as Social Stereotypes & Self-Other Evaluations	Lecture 5 [Ro-Ch. 5]
Sep. 30-T	Exam #1 (Scientific Method and Human Bio Devo)	---
Oct. 2	Sexual Anatomy I: Vulval and Vaginal Structures (cis & trans* inclusive)	Lecture 6 [Ro-Ch. 4]
Oct. 7	Sexual Anatomy II: Penile and Scrotal Structures (cis & trans* inclusive)	Lecture 7 [Ro-Ch. 3]
Oct. 9	Sexual Anatomy III: Anal and Breast/Chest Structures (cis & trans* inclusive)	Lecture 8
Oct. 14	Sexual Arousal and Response	Lecture 9 [Ro-Ch. 6]
Oct. 16	Sexual Arousal and Response	Lecture 9 [Ro-Ch. 6]
Oct. 21-T	Exam #2 (Gender and Sex: Convergences & Divergences)	--
Oct. 23-R	Group Discussion #2 (Researching Sexual Histories)	Upload + Attendance
Oct. 28	Sexual Orientations: Conceptualizing Attraction & Behavior	Lecture 11 [Ro-Ch. 10]
Oct. 30	Sexual Orientations: Conceptualizing Attraction & Behavior	Lecture 11 [Ro-Ch. 10]
Nov. 4	Dynamics of Human Sexual Relationships	Lecture 12 [Ro-Ch. 8]
Nov. 6	The Variety of Human Sexual Relationships	Lecture 13 [Ro-Chs. 7,8]
<i>Nov. 11</i>	<i>No Class Sessions (U.S. Veteran's Day)</i>	--
Nov. 13	The Variety of Human Sexual Relationships	Lecture 13 [Ro-Chs. 7,8]
Nov. 18-T	Exam #3 (Arousal, Sexual Orientations, Relationships)	--
Nov. 20	Assignments #1 and #3 Recap: New Empirical Findings	Slides
<i>Nov. 24-28</i>	<i>No Class Sessions (Fall Recess)</i>	--
Dec. 2	Lifespan Highlights: Myths and Realities about Sexuality in the U.S.	Lecture 15 [Ro-Ch. 16]
Dec. 4	Sexual Behaviors: Sex with Self & Others	Lecture 16 [Ro-Ch. 11]
Dec. 9	Psychology of Contraception & Safer Sex Methods and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)	Lecture 17 [Ro-Ch. 14]
Dec. 11	Pornography and Psychology (The Data-Driven Account)	Lecture 18 [Ro-Ch. 17]
Dec. 18-R	Exam #4 (Lifespan Psychology of Sexual Behaviors and their Associates) Final Exam Timeframe: 12:30-2:30pm, BH 28	--

[‡]Note: All exams occur on Tuesdays, but the Final Exam is on a Thursday.

^{**}Note: Both discussions occur on Thursdays. (**In-person attendance + upload of individual form required**)

T = Tuesday; **R** = ThuRsday

[Ro - ...] = completely optional Rosenthal (2012) book chapters