Sex, Science and Culture

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Course Description

This course is an interdisciplinary introduction to the study of human sexuality and its variations. It invites students to critically examine some of the most taken-for-granted aspects of human life and locate sexual acts, desires, relations and identities within historical and cultural contexts. We will read about the relation of sexuality to the state, economic exchange, colonialism, marriage, pleasure and epidemics. We will explore how biological and social sciences have approached, and been challenged, by the study of human sexuality as a locus of embodied phenomena. How have scientific studies of sexuality been shaped by, and in turn shaped, cultural ideas and practices around sex? What is the relation of sexuality to power and why sexual matters, often perceived as personal, become politically contested? What role does scientific expertise play in these contestations? How has sex intersected with race in the scientific models? To answer these questions, we will draw on a range of material from sexological and historical texts to contemporary ethnographies of sexuality.