WOMEN’S, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY STUDIES

315 William L. Harkness Hall, 203.432.0845
http://wgss.yale.edu

Chair
Margaret Homans

Director of Graduate Studies
Greta LaFleur

Professors Julia Adams (Sociology), Carol Armstrong (History of Art), Seyla Benhabib (Political Science), Jill Campbell (English), Hazel Carby (African American Studies; American Studies), Kang-i Sun Chang (East Asian Languages & Literatures), Jacqueline Goldsby (English; African American Studies), Inderpal Grewal (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies; American Studies; Anthropology), Margaret Homans (English; Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies), Jennifer Klein (History), Marianne LaFrance (Psychology; Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies), Kathryn Lofton (American Studies; Religious Studies), Mary Lui (American Studies; History), Joanne Meyerowitz (History), Sally Promey (American Studies; Institute of Sacred Music; Religious Studies), Ana Ramos-Zayas (Ethnicity, Race, & Migration; Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies; American Studies), Naomi Rogers (History of Science & Medicine), Alicia Schmidt Camacho (American Studies), Michael Warner (English), Laura Wexler (American Studies; Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies)

Associate Professors Rene Almeling (Sociology), Crystal Feimster (African American Studies; American Studies), Joseph Fischel (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies), Moira Fradinger (Comparative Literature), Zareena Grewal (American Studies; Religious Studies), Angel David Nieves (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies)

Assistant Professors Marta Figlerowicz (Comparative Literature), Greta LaFleur (American Studies), Edi Pepi (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies), Dixa Ramirez (American Studies), Evren Savci (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies)

Senior Lecturers Becky Conekin (MacMillan Center; History), Andrew Dowe (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies), Maria Trumpler (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies)

Lecturers Melanie Boyd (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies), Igor De Souza (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies; English), Karen Foster (Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations), Graeme Reid (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies), George Syrimis (Hellenic Studies)

FIELDS OF STUDY

The Program in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies considers gender and sexuality as fundamental categories of social and cultural analysis and offers critical perspectives upon them as a basis from which to study the diversity of human experience. Gender (the social and historical meanings of the distinction between the sexes) and sexuality (the domain of sexual practices, identities, discourses, and institutions) are studied as they intersect with class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and other axes of human difference. The introduction of these perspectives into all fields of knowledge necessitates new research, criticism of existing research, and the formulation of new paradigms and organizing concepts.

The Certificate (previously known as the Qualification) in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies is open to students already enrolled in a Ph.D. program at Yale. Interested students are strongly encouraged to register for the certificate by meeting with the director of graduate studies (DGS) during their first year. Students who wish to receive the certificate must (1) complete a graduate course on the theory of gender and sexuality; (2) complete two electives, including one course that must be drawn from the WGSS curriculum; (3) complete one term of WGSS 900, WGSS Certificate Workshop; (4) demonstrate the capacity to pursue independent, interdisciplinary research in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies by presenting a qualifying paper at a meeting of the WGSS Colloquium; and (5) fulfill a teaching requirement. Each of these requirements must be met in consultation with the DGS and the individual WGSS graduate adviser. Students who fulfill these expectations will receive a letter from the DGS, indicating that they have completed the work for the certificate.

Program information and the requirements for the certificate are available on the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies website, or by contacting 203.432.0845 or wgss@yale.edu.

COURSES

WGSS 529a / GLBL 529a, Sexuality, Gender, Health, and Human Rights Alice Miller
This course explores the application of human rights perspectives and practices to issues in regard to sexuality and health. Through reading, interactive discussion, paper presentation, and occasional outside speakers, students learn the tools and implications of applying rights and law to a range of sexuality and health-related topics. The overall goal is twofold: to engage students in the world of global sexual health and rights policy making as a field of social justice and public health action; and to introduce them to conceptual tools that can inform advocacy and policy formation and evaluation. Class participation, short reaction papers, and a final paper are required.
WGSS 625b, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Human Rights  Graeme Reid
Examination of historical, cultural, and political aspects of sexual orientation, gender identity, and human rights in the context of globalization.

WGSS 629b / AMST 690b, Politics of Reproduction  Rene Almeling
Reproduction as a process that is simultaneously biological and social, involving male and female bodies, family formation, and powerful social institutions such as medicine, law, and the marketplace. Sociological research on reproductive topics such as pregnancy, birth, abortion, contraception, infertility, reproductive technology, and aging. Core sociological concepts used to examine how the politics of reproduction are shaped by the intersecting inequalities of gender, race, class, and sexuality.

WGSS 645b / AFAM 723b / AMST 645b / CPLT 949b, Caribbean Diasporic Intellectuals  Hazel Carby
This course examines work by artists and writers of Caribbean descent from different regions of the transatlantic world. In response to contemporary interest in issues of globalization, the premise of the course is that in the world maps of these black intellectuals we can see the intertwined and interdependent histories and relations of the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Thinking globally is not a new experience for black peoples, and we need to understand that what is represented as “Caribbeaness” is a condition of movement. Literature and art are most frequently taught within the boundaries of a particular nation, but this course focuses on the work of writers and artists who shape the Caribbean identities of their characters as traveling black subjects and refuse to restrain their work within the limits of any one national identity. We practice a new and global type of cognitive mapping as we read and explore the meanings of terms like black transnationalism, migrancy, globalization, and empire. Diasporic practice embraces and represents the geopolitical realities of the modern, modernizing, and postmodern worlds in which multiple racialized histories are inscribed on modern bodies.

WGSS 652a / AMST 637a / ANTH 647a, Transnationalism and Mobility: Theories and Paradigms  Inderpal Grewal
This course focuses on transnational research by examining its theoretical and methodological reliance on paradigms of “mobility.” Based on concepts coming from migration studies, ethnic and race studies, postcolonial studies, and critical theory, transnational research has now become ubiquitous. Much of this work in its most exciting manifestations works against traditional approaches to nation, area, and migration, providing new ways to conceptualize subjects, states, epistemologies, and ontologies. It has also emerged within the disciplines with practitioners who think not in terms of comparative or area research, but through flows, movements, networks, and unstable boundaries. The course examines the importance of this body of research in understanding histories and genealogies of colonialism and modernity. We also look at how historians are producing exciting work that refuses to remain within the boundaries of international area studies; anthropologists who are redrawing the “field” of research; and, importantly, the emergence of a feminist approach to transnationalism and mobility that has also impacted WGSS. The course brings together a broad area of research that looks at the ways in which modernity—especially Western modernity—has included conceptualizations of movement and speed, travel and mobility. We investigate these mobile modernities to understand also what is seen as outside such modernity. In doing so, the course brings an interdisciplinary feminist cultural analysis to theories of transnationalism and postcoloniality.

WGSS 660b / ANTH 684b, Men, Manhood, and Masculinity  Andrew Dowe
Cultural and historic constructions of masculinity through an investigation of male bodies, sexualities, and social interactions. Examination of multiple masculinities and exploration of the relationships among hegemonic, non-hegemonic, and subordinate masculinities.

WGSS 661b, Queer Theology  Linn Tonstad
This course provides an introduction to queer theology, its theoretical grounding in queer theory, and some of the controversies and possibilities that make up its current shape. Questions considered include whether Christianity can or should be queer; the implications of contemporary debates in queer theology over temporality, futurity, sociality, and spatiality for the shape and possibility of queer theology itself; how to use art and performance as theological sources; and the way queer theory’s anti-essentialist stance shifts the stakes of debates over the theological and political status of LGBTQ+ persons. The course also considers the impact of HIV/AIDS on notions of community formation, risk, and finitude. Prerequisites: at least one term of theology at the graduate level (introduction to theology or systematic theology) or permission of the instructor; and preferably at least one course in gender studies.

WGSS 667b / FREN 900b / HIST 667b, History of Sexuality in Modern Europe  Carolyn Dean
An introduction to the various lines of inquiry informing the history of sexuality. The course asks how historians and others constitute sexuality as an object of inquiry and addresses different arguments about the evolution of sexuality in Europe, including the relationship between sexuality and the state and sexuality and gender.

WGSS 677a / PHIL 677a, Feminist Philosophy: Theories of Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation  Robin Dembroff
This course surveys several feminist frameworks for thinking about sex, gender, and sexual orientation. We consider questions such as: Is there a tenable distinction between sex and gender? Between gender and sexual orientation? What does it mean to say that gender is a social construction, or that sexual orientation is innate? What is the place of politics in gender and sexual identities? How do these identities—and especially resistant or transgressive identities—impact the creation and revision of social categories?

WGSS 716a / AFAM 738a / AMST 706a / HIST 711a, Readings in African American Women’s History  Crystal Feimster
The diversity of African American women’s lives from the colonial era through the late twentieth century. Using primary and secondary sources we explore the social, political, cultural, and economic factors that produced change and transformation in the lives of African American women. Through history, fiction, autobiography, art, religion, film, music, and cultural criticism we discuss and explore the construction of African American women’s activism and feminisms; the racial politics of the body, beauty, and complexion; hetero- and same-sex sexualities; intraracial class relations; and the politics of identity, family, and work.
Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

WGSS 722a, Feminist and Queer Theories  Evren Savci
A graduate introduction to feminist and queer thought, organized according to a number of key terms and institutions around which feminist and queer thinking has clustered, such as the state; the law; family and kinship; religion; capitalism and labor; the body; language; knowledge; globalization and imperialism; militarism and security; knowledge; affect. The “conversations” that happen around each term speak to the richness of feminist and queer theories, the multidimensionality of feminist and queer intellectual and political concerns, and the “need to think our way out of these crises,” to paraphrase Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty. The class aims to leave students appreciating the hard labor of feminist and queer thought, and understanding the urgencies out of which such thinking emerges.

WGSS 737b, Gendering the Modern Subject  Eda Pepi
This seminar familiarizes students with how the analytical categories of sex and gender interrogate “classic” philosophical texts and restructure key debates on the nature of the human subject as a locus of unmarked, universal reason and purposeful action as well as embodied perception and passion. From Spinoza and Descartes to Hegel and Merleau-Ponty, we engage an overview of the conceptual and historical development of modern, Western ideas of personhood and the emergence of liberalism as the basis of new technologies of the self. We read these texts alongside feminist, critical race, and postcolonial commentaries that highlight the sexual and racial constitution of a seemingly universal subject of modernity. These commentaries trace how practical theories of “lower” or minor selves – the subject people of the colonies, slaves, and others – were integral to the very development of ideas of the modern, autonomous, and acting self in the Western world.

WGSS 746b / AMST 720b / FILM 810b, Visual Kinship, Families, and Photography  Laura Wexler
Exploration of the history and practice of family photography from an interdisciplinary perspective. Study of family photographs from the analog to the digital era, from snapshots to portraits, and from instrumental images to art exhibitions. Particular attention to the ways in which family photographs have helped establish gendered and racial hierarchies and examination of recent ways of conceiving these images.

WGSS 782b / HIST 940b / HSHM 770b, Disability Histories: Research Seminar  Naomi Rogers
This course introduces students to the major issues in current disability history as well as theoretical debates in disability studies. We discuss cultural, social, and political meanings of citizenship; efforts to define and classify disabled bodies; contested notions of bodily difference; and the ways disability has and continues to be used as a metaphor for socially defined inferiority like gender, race, or sexuality. By the fourth week students have identified the topic for their research papers and discussed them in class. The next month is devoted to research and writing. We start meeting again after spring break to read and discuss a draft of each paper.

WGSS 852b / AMST 852b / ANTH 852b, Reading the Americas, Reading Ethnography  Ana Ramos-Zayas
The course uses ethnographic approaches to understand “America” as a hemispheric formation, while simultaneously examining “ethnography” as methodological, epistemological, and representational craft. Complemented by critical readings and seminar discussions about some of the trademarks of ethnographic research – e.g., participant observation, life history, field notes, and field sites – the course is designed to encourage students to interrogate the theoretical and methodological models that have been used in the production of knowledge about the Americas. Emphasizing ethnography’s concern with everyday life, practices, routines, and relationships, it analyzes how micro-processes and manifestations of race, sexuality, class, and gender entwine with macro-processes of empire and nation-state building, globalization, neoliberalism, transnationalism, urbanism, and social inequality in the United States, Latin America, and parts of the Caribbean. While this is not a “how to” course on ethnographic research, we use classic and contemporary ethnography to understand the region and gain greater knowledge about the process, epistemology, and politics of fieldwork. We analyze a number of aspects and approaches to doing and writing ethnography, including the challenges of entering, being in, and leaving the field; and as we build familiarity with the components of ethnography, we consider its applicability to an array of topics, settings, objects, cultural dynamics, and relationships.

WGSS 853a / AMST 853a / FILM 806a, Archives: Histories, Practices, Theories, and Formations  Laura Wexler
This seminar studies the co-constitution of objects-with-documents and undocumented people. We explore theoretical, historical, material, practical, methodological, and curatorial questions related to the operation and status of the archive in this migration of objects and people. Students are asked to work collaboratively in and with archives as sources and tools, and to experiment with creating archives of their own. The seminar involves some travel to Brown and some irregular hours that are mentioned in the syllabus.

WGSS 900a, WGSS Certificate Workshop  Greta LaFleur
Built around the WGSS graduate Colloquium and Working Group series, with the addition of several sessions on topics of interdisciplinary methodology, theory, and professionalization. Offered annually in either the fall or spring. Enrollment in one term of WGSS 900 is required of all students for completion of the certificate in WGSS. Graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory.

WGSS 960a / CPLT 881a / ENGL 960a, Literary Theory  Marta Figlerowicz and Jonathan Kramnick
What is literary theory today, and what is its history? The aim of the course is to introduce students to central concepts in theory and explore their relation to method. We examine the variety of approaches available within the field of literary studies, including older ones such as Russian formalism, New Criticism, deconstruction, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, as well as newer ones like actor-network theory and digital humanities research. We explore the basic tenets and histories of these theories in a way that is both critical and open-minded, and discuss their comparative advantages and pitfalls. The focus is on recurrent paradigms, arguments, and topics, and on transhistorical relations among our various schools of literary-theoretical thought. Readings might include work by René Wellek, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, Bruno Latour, Judith Butler, Northrop Frye, Fred Moten, and many others.