WOMEN'S GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES (WGSS)

* WGSS 027a / HUMS 027a / LITR 027a, Six Pretty Good Selves  Marta Figlerowicz and Ayesha Ramachandran
Through the prism of thinking about the self, this course provides first-year students with an intensive introduction to studying the humanities at Yale. The course is anchored around six trans-historical models of thinking about selfhood: the ideal self, the lover, the revolutionary, the convert, the solipsist, and the social climber. We range widely across genres, media, periods, and geographies: from Plato’s Symposium to Machado de Assis’s Epitaph for a Small Winner, from the ghazals of Hafez to the Kamasutra. We also make extensive use of Yale’s rich manuscript archives, historical object collections, and art galleries and devote sustained attention to improving students’ academic writing skills. Friday sessions will alternate between writing workshops and field trips to Yale collections. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program. WR, RU 1½ Course cr

* WGSS 030b, Neoliberalism and Sexuality  Evren Savci
Sexuality is often imagined as a private and intimate affair, experienced individually, marked by personal histories and preferences. This course argues otherwise. Specifically, we consider the intersections between the current dominant political economic mode, referred to as neoliberal capitalism, and sexuality as a field of power. We analyze how subjectivities are formed under this current system, how desires are produced and discourses incited, and how the particular moralization of economic behavior has implications for a range of issues including reproductive justice, definitions of kinship, sexual liberation movements, and contemporary states of war and emergency. Thinking of sexuality as a field of power that is predicated on notions of normality and abnormality enables us to see what other “undesirable” subjects are produced under conditions of neoliberal capitalist modernity with whom sexual others are always in kinship. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.   SO

* WGSS 032b, History of Sexuality  Maria Trumpler
Exploration of scientific and medical writings on sexuality over the past century. Focus on the tension between nature and culture in shaping theories, the construction of heterosexuality and homosexuality, the role of scientific studies in moral discourse, and the rise of sexuality as a scientific discipline. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program. WR, RU

WGSS 125a / AFAM 115a, “We Interrupt this Program: The Multidimensional Histories of Queer and Trans Politics”  Roderick Ferguson
In 1991, the arts organizations Visual AIDS and The Kitchen collaborated with video artist and filmmaker Charles Atlas to produce the live television broadcast ”We Interrupt this Program.” Part educational presentation, part performance piece, the show was aired in millions of homes across the nation. The program, in The Kitchen’s words, “sought to feature voices that had often been marginalized within many discussions of AIDS, in particular people of color and women.”This course builds upon and is inspired by this aspect of Atlas’s visionary presentation, an aspect that used the show to produce a critically multicultural platform that could activate cultural histories and critical traditions from various communities. In effect, the course uses this aspect as a metonym for the racial, gender, sexual, and class heterogeneity of queer art and organizing. It conducts its investigation by looking at a variety of primary materials that illustrate the heterogeneous makeup of queer and trans politics. The course also draws on more recent texts and visual works that arose from the earlier contexts that the primary texts helped to illuminate and shape. RU RP 1 Course cr

* WGSS 202a / AFAM 230a / AMST 461a / EDST 209a / ER&M 292a, Identity, Diversity, and Policy in U.S. Education
Introduction to critical theory (feminism, queer theory, critical race theory, disability studies, trans studies, indigenous studies) as a fundamental tool for understanding and critiquing identity, diversity, and policy in U.S. education. Exploration of identity politics and theory, as they figure in education policy. Methods for applying theory and interventions to interrogate issues in education. Application of theory and interventions to policy creation and reform. WR, RU

* WGSS 205b, Bodies and Pleasures, Sex and Genders  Regina Kunzel
This seminar engages cultural analyses of embodiment, its pleasures–and by extension its pains–to interrogate sex, sexuality, and gender as analytical categories. Its aim is to critically evaluate formative concepts and theories that have been subject to debates within gender studies, psychoanalysis, philosophy, anthropology, critical race studies, and history. Readings by Freud, Foucault, Berlant, Butler, Rubin, and others help explain how terms like “women” and “men,” “femininity” and “masculinity,” as well as “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality,” “gender” and “transgender” have structured people’s experiences and their perceptions of their bodies. The potential our bodies have for “hanging on to ourselves” occupies a central position within scholarly canons, revealing also how these canons are always already imbricated in racialized hierarchies.   SO

* WGSS 206a / ER&M 257a, Transnational Approaches to Gender & Sexuality  Evren Savci
Examination of transnational debates about gender and sexuality as they unfold in specific contexts. Gender as a category that can or cannot travel; feminist critiques of liberal rights paradigms; globalization of particular models of gender/queer advocacy; the role of NGOs in global debates about gender and sexuality. WR

WGSS 207a / PLSC 298a, Gender, Justice, Power, Institutions  Joseph Fischel
Examination of how inequalities based on gender, race, caste, class, sexuality as well as a host of other identities are embedded in institutions that make up our social world. From the family and the home to the workplace, from the University, and the Corporation, to the Military and Media, we track how inequalities emerge and are sustained by power and institutional structures. We also see how they are challenged and what sorts of instruments are needed to challenge them. In particular, we focus on sexual politics and sexual violence
as a key issue to understanding the gendered workings of institutions, in order to examine structures that sustain inequality. Through the semester, we hope to consider many domains of life—bedrooms and boardrooms, international borders and feminist movements—to understand the stubborn and sticky forms and hierarchies of power that are challenged and contested by activists, scholars, and communities. 

* WGSS 220a / PLSC 220a / PLSC 5220a, Women & Politics Andrea Aldrich

Exploration of theoretical and empirical work in political science to study the relationship between women and politics in the United States and around the world. Topics include women's descriptive and substantive representation in legislative and executive branch politics in democratic regimes; the impact of gender stereotypes on elections and public opinion; conditions that impact the supply and demand of candidates across genders; and the underrepresentation of women in political institutions. WR, SO

* WGSS 222b / AMST 206b / ER&M 221b, Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies Quan Tran

Reconfiguring refugees as fluid subjects and sites of social, political, and cultural critiques. Departing from dominant understandings of refugees as victims, consideration instead of refugees as complex historical actors, made visible through processes of colonization, imperialism, war, displacement, state violence, and globalization, as well as ethical, social, legal, and political transformations. Focus on second-half of the twentieth century. SO

* WGSS 238a, Foucault and the Sexual Self Igor De Souza

This course explores the main ideas and influence of Foucault's History of Sexuality. Alongside the methods and conclusions of the HS, we examine the implications of the HS for feminist studies and queer theory, and the approach of the HS towards ancient Greek sexuality. HU

* WGSS 251a / ENGL 251a, Experiments in the Novel: The Eighteenth Century Jill Campbell

The course provides an introduction to English-language novels of the long eighteenth century (1688-1818), the period in which the novel has traditionally been understood to have "risen." Emphasizing the experimental nature of novel-writing in this early period of its history, the course foregrounds persistent questions about the genre as well as a literary-historical survey: What is the status of fictional characters? How does narrative sequence impart political or moral implications? How do conventions of the novel form shape our experience of gender? What kind of being is a narrator? Likely authors include Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Jennifer Egan, Colson Whitehead, and Richard Powers. WR, HU

* WGSS 260a, Food, Identity and Desire Maria Trumpler

Exploration of how food—ingredients, cooking practices, and appetites—can intersect with gender, ethnicity, class, and national origin to produce profound experiences of identity and desire. Sources include memoir, cookbooks, movies, and fiction.

WGSS 270b / AFAM 170b / HIST 479b / HSHM 241b, Sickness and Health in African American History Carolyn Roberts

A history of American medicine through the African American experience covering the period of slavery through #BlackLivesMatter. Oriented around the complex dynamics of medical abuse and medical resistance, key themes include medicine and slavery; gender and reproduction; medical experimentation and ethics; the rise of racial science; lynching and vigilante violence; segregation and public health; African-descended approaches to health and healing; the rise of the African American medical profession; and black health activism from slavery to #BlackLivesMatter. HU

WGSS 291a / RLST 347a / SOCY 331a, Sexual Minorities from Plato to the Enlightenment Igor De Souza

This interdisciplinary course surveys the history of homosexuality from a cross-cultural, comparative perspective. Students study contexts where homosexuality and sodomy were categorized, regulated, and persecuted and examine ancient and medieval constructions of same-sex desire in light of post-modern developments, challenging ideas around what is considered normal and/or natural. Ultimately, we ask: what has changed, and what has remained the same, in the history of homosexuality? What do gays and lesbians today have in common with pre-modern sodomites? Can this history help us ground or rethink our sexual selves and identities? Primary and secondary historical sources, some legal and religious sources, and texts in intellectual history are studied. Among the case studies for the course are ancient attitudes among Jews, early Christians, and Greeks; Christian theologians of the Middle Ages; Renaissance Florence; the Inquisition in Iberia; colonial Latin America; and the Enlightenment's condemnation of sodomy by Montesquieu and Voltaire, and its defense by Bentham. HU

* WGSS 297b / HIST 418J, Gender Expression Before Modernity Igor De Souza

What are the historical forms of gender non-conformity? This course investigates expressions of gender that were considered non-conforming within their historical contexts. Our point of departure is the idea that gender constitutes a "useful category of historical analysis" (Joan Scott). In this course we ask how deviant gender expression can be a category of historical analysis. How do we write history from the perspective of gender fluidity, non-binarism, and gender transgression? How can this history give us the tools to critique regnant norms of gender expression, then and now? How does this historical approach relate to trans* and non-binary people & movements today? The course is historically wide-ranging, from Antiquity to the Early Modern period, and geographically diverse, including Europe, the Middle East, and the colonial Americas. The breath of contexts enable us to consider broad patterns, continuities, and discontinuities. At the same time, we discuss the specificities of particular contexts, emphasizing the connection between gender fluidity/non-conformity, on the one hand, and local cultural norms around gender and sex, on the other. We investigate intellectual and cultural trends, as well as the lives of gender fluid/non-conforming individuals. We analyze sources drawn from law, medicine, religion, philosophy, visual arts & literature, biographies, and memoirs. All readings are in English translation. No prior background is required. However, it will be helpful to have taken either WGSS 291/HIST 287J or WGSS 306 before or in concurrence with this course. HU
* WGSS 318a / AFAM 309a / ER&M 318a, Race as Spectacle  
Fatima El-Tayeb

In this course, we analyze how race is both naturalized and deconstructed through visual media. We center one aspect: race as spectacle—the multiple ways in which race is produced as a visual mass culture commodity. This happens in political campaigns, music videos, local news reports, fashion, kids’ cartoons, mug shots, and countless other sites. We explore the modes of production of these racialized images as well as the conditions of their reception and political and philosophical analyses of this process—particularly those relating to questions of gender, class, sexuality, religion, and nation. We also explore counterstrategies, which rather than rejecting visual mass culture attempt to use it to undermine dominant images.  

HU, SO

* WGSS 381b / AFAM 397b / ER&M 380b, New Developments in Global African Diaspora Studies  
Fatima El-Tayeb

This course traces recent developments in African Diaspora Theory, among them Afropessimism, Queer of Color Critique, Black Trans Studies and Afropolitanism. We pay particular attention to interactions between theory, art, and activism. The scope is transnational with a focus on, but not restricted to, the Anglophone Diaspora Texts. Each session roughly follows this structure: One theoretical text representing a development in African diaspora studies, one earlier key text that the reading builds on, one theoretical text that does not necessarily fall under the category of diaspora studies but speaks to our topic and one text that relates to the topic but uses a non-theoretical format. Students are expected to develop their own thematically related project over the course of the semester. Preference given to juniors and seniors. Email instructor for more information.  

HU, SO

* WGSS 383a / ENGL 386a, Queer Writing Before Stonewall  
Michael Warner

The focus of this course is gay, lesbian, and queer writing from the period between Whitman and Stonewall. How did queer writers find an audience in the years before the emergence of a gay/lesbian public? What languages of identity and sexuality did they develop? The course begins with Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, writing before the idea of sexual minorities took hold. We read some late 19C writers in their wake, including Charles Warren Stoddard, and the literary culture of the “Boston marriage,” before turning to the conjunction of sexual culture and modernism. Queer modernism has been much studied in recent years, including such figures as Wilde, Freud, Joyce, Woolf, Stein, Barnes, Firbank, Crane, Thurman, Hughes, and Proust; in the same years, a language of homosexual rights began to develop with such works as In re, by Edward Prime Stevenson. Many of the writers in the period explored unsettled sexualities and worlds of abjection, in ways that can still disturb readers. They influenced one another across the Atlantic and across genres. We touch on the British and Irish writers who came of age after WWI (Isherwood, Auden, Spender, Ackerley, Barnes), as well as the paradigmatically queer writing of those for whom queerness was linked to a language of criminality—notably Jean Genet, Patricia Highsmith, and William Burroughs. Students are encouraged to pursue research projects in each of these moments, reaching up to the Beats (Burroughs, Ginsberg, Kerouac), the New York poets (O’Hara, Ashbery, Schuyler) the San Francisco Renaissance (Spicer, Duncan, Broughton), Southern queer writers (McCullers, Capote, Williams), black queer writing after the Harlem Renaissance (Baldwin, Hansberry), and other figures of the 60s from both high literary and underground backgrounds (Nabokov, Elizabeth Bishop, Joe Orton, and Vidal, but also Jack Smith, Jane Rule, and iceberg Slim). Along the way we talk about the various ways that these writers charted a queer take on the world, including their engagements with criminality and psychopathology—the main connotations of queerness in the period—as well as the development of a queer language of abjection and its advantages for life. Students are encouraged to delve into the rich holdings of the Beinecke for research projects not limited to the writers on the syllabus, including the lesbian pulp fiction collection and holdings in the related fields of photography, film, and other arts.  

WR, HU

* WGSS 388a / AFAM 349a / AMST 326a / HIST 115a, Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation  
Staff

The dynamic relationship between the civil rights movement and the women’s liberation movement from 1940 to the present. When and how the two movements overlapped, intersected, and diverged. The variety of ways in which African Americans and women campaigned for equal rights. Topics include World War II, freedom summer, black power, the Equal Rights Amendment, feminism, abortion, affirmative action, and gay rights.  

HU

* WGSS 390a / ER&M 360a / HLTH 370a / HSHM 432a / SOCY 390a, 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.  

WR, SO

* WGSS 398b, Junior Research Seminar  
Kalindi Vora

An interdisciplinary approach to studying gender and sexuality. Exploration of a range of relevant theoretical frameworks and methodologies. Prepares students for the senior essay.  

WR, SO

* WGSS 407b / ANTH 308b, Feminist & Queer Ethnographies: Family, Community, Nation  
Eda Pepi

This seminar centers the analytics and methods that feminist and queer ethnographic analyses have brought to the fore to revisit a cluster of topical issues, this year assembled around the theme: Family, Community, Nation. As a site in which personhood is distributed and contested, the “family” is one of the building blocks of social scientific analysis—along with “community” and “nation.” Seen as ideological lynchpins for the reproduction of the social order, processes of family-making—like marriage, divorce, childbirth, and intergenerational flows—have been codified differently across historical and cultural contexts. This course engages the feminist and queer ethnographies that revealed the political hierarchies that emerge from seemingly natural categories and distinctions of kinship. We trace the gendered, sexualized, class-making, and racialized concepts, processes, and implicit understandings of family-making that chart the public and private spheres of community and national terrains. Students grapple with the processes of naturalization and denaturalization through which the “political” is mobilized and dyads like kin/kith, blood/soil, human/nonhuman, citizen/noncitizen, us/them, are made to appear. We also engage with feminist and queer methodologies that conjure up speculative fabulations for, what Saidiya Hartman has
called, “the radical hope for living otherwise.” We do so at a time when the global Covid-19 pandemic has demanded the resurgence of the 
state, tested community ties, transformed family arrangements, and isolated most of the world’s population within domestic domains.

* WGSS 408a / AMST 345a / ER&M 409a, Latinx Ethnography  Ana Ramos-Zayas
Consideration of ethnography within the genealogy and intellectual traditions of Latinx Studies. Topics include: questions of knowledge production and epistemological traditions in Latin America and U.S. Latino communities; conceptions of migration, transnationalism, and space; perspectives on “(il)legality” and criminalization; labor, wealth, and class identities; contextual understandings of gender and sexuality; theorizations of affect and intimate lives; and the politics of race and inequality under white liberalism and conservatism in the United States. 

* WGSS 427b / AMST 427b / PLSC 269b, Politics of Gender and Sexuality in the United States  Dara Strolovitch
The 2016 Presidential election made clear that gender matters a great deal in American politics, but it also revealed that how gender matters is far from obvious. This course explores the ways in which gender and sexuality shape and are shaped by American politics and public policy. We explore the history, findings, and controversies in research about gender and sexuality in American politics from a range of approaches, examining what political science research helps us understand about questions such as: Does gender influence political campaigns and whether people will vote for particular candidates? Once elected, are gender and sexuality related to legislators’ behavior in office? How are norms related to race, class, gender, and sexuality reflected in and constructed by public policy? We also explore feminist, queer, and intersectional theories and methodologies and important work from other disciplines and interdisciplines, paying particular attention to the implications of intersectionality for understanding gender, sexuality, and politics. We also analyze the ways in which gender and sexuality intersect with other politically salient categories, identities, and forms of marginalization, including race, ethnicity, class, and ideological and partisan identification, paying particular attention to their implications for the 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections.

* WGSS 430a / ANTH 441a / MMES 399a / MMES 430a, Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East  Eda Pepi
This seminar explores the gendered and ethnic-based social processes and forms of power that citizenship, statelessness, and migration crises fuel, and are fueled by, in the Middle East and North Africa. The history of gender and citizenship in the region is imbricated in ethnosexual and orientalist colonial legacies that articulate a racialized problematic of “modernity.” Part of these legacies involve obscuring the role that women, sexual minorities, and gender, more broadly, have played in framing citizenship and statehood in the Middle East in global, regional, and local imaginaries not only as border policing and legal doctrine, but as signifier—and reifier—of culture, race, and ethnicity. By examining the gendered and sexual dimensions of war, conflict, and partition, and the formation of modern citizenship in the Middle East, the seminar presents ethnographic, historical, literary and visual scholarship that theorizes the role of kinship and citizenship in gendered and racialized narratives of the nation and political sovereignty.

* WGSS 432a / PHIL 444a, Social Ontology  Robin Dembroff
Study of conceptual and methodological foundations of social ontology, as well as particular topics within social ontology, such as the nature of gender and race. Prerequisites: at least one, but preferably two philosophy courses. 

* WGSS 448a / HIST 177Ja / HSHM 448a, American Medicine and the Cold War  Naomi Rogers
The social, cultural, and political history of American medicine from 1945 to 1960. The defeat of national health insurance; racism in health care; patient activism; the role of gender in defining medical professionalism and family health; the rise of atomic medicine; McCarthyism in medicine; and the polio vaccine trials and the making of science journalism. 

* WGSS 463b / AMST 462b / PLSC 269b, The Study of Privilege in the Americas  Ana Ramos-Zayas
Examination of inequality, not only through experiences of the poor and marginal, but also through institutions, beliefs, social norms, and everyday practices of the privileged. Topics include: critical examination of key concepts like “studying up,” “elite,” and “privilege,” as well as variations in forms of capital; institutional sites of privilege (elite prep schools, Wall Street); living spaces and social networks (gated communities, private clubs); privilege in intersectional contexts (privilege and race, class, and gender); and everyday practices of intimacy and affect that characterize, solidify, and promote privilege.

* WGSS 471a or b, Independent Directed Study  Staff
For students who wish to explore an aspect of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies not covered by existing courses. The course may be used for research or directed readings and should include one lengthy or several short essays. Students meet with their adviser regularly. To apply for admission, students present a prospectus to the director of undergraduate studies along with a letter of support from the adviser. The prospectus must include a description of the research area, a core bibliography, and the expected sequence and scope of written assignments.

* WGSS 490a, The Senior Colloquium  Dara Strolovitch
A research seminar taken during the senior year. Students with diverse research interests and experience discuss common problems and tactics in doing independent research.