

Nomaswazi Mthombeni
Thursdays:16h00-18h00
Winter semester 2024/25

THE BINARY DISRUPTED:
INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF GENDER
Winter Semester 2024/25

DESCRIPTION:

This course offers an introduction to the sociology of gender beyond a binary lens. It will pay particular attention to how the imposition of colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and racism have worked together to shape the construction of gender. Furthermore, it will deliberate on how these intersecting systems, and their residues, have been yoked into institutions such as the family, media and politics etc, and have consequently influenced how we think of gender. These insights will be juxtaposed alongside a vast terrain of perspectives that offer an understanding into how gender is constantly contested, challenged and lived across space-time, and by those who refuse to be bound by its rules. The course is deeply indebted to, and draws extensively from decolonial scholarship on gender, sexuality, race and identity; and is grounded in intersectional feminist theories.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- Analyze the social construction of gender from an intersectional lens, acknowledging how race, class, sexuality, and culture interact to produce diverse gendered experiences.
- Critically examine colonial influences on contemporary gender norms and identities.
- Analyze how gender is experienced differently, and contested across diverse cultural and social contexts.
- Apply intersectional and decolonial frameworks to real-world gender issues and activism.
- Explore the impact of media, politics, and economics on gender representation and roles globally.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Week 1: Introduction to the course:

- In class screening of Disclosure, Sam Feder (2020)
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Week 2: Historical Construction of the Gender Binary

Key Concepts: The gender binary, biological determinism, white supremacy, patriarchy

Readings:

- Oyèrónké Oyewùmí (1997)“(Re)constituting the cosmology and sociocultural institutions of Oyo-Yoruba” in *The Invention of Women: Making of African sense of western gender discourses* (Read pages: 31- 39)
- Pumla Dineo Gqola (2022)“Making the female” in *Female Fear Factory: Unraveling patriarchy’s cultures of violence* (Read pages: 6-12)

Additional readings:

- María Lugones’ “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System”
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Week 3: Paradoxes of gender

Key Concepts: Gender, social construction

Readings:

- bell hooks (2004) “ Understanding patriarchy” in *The will to change, men , masculinity and love . (Read pages: 17-38)*
 - Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman (1987) Doing gender (**Read pages: 137-148)**
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Week 4: Gender performativity at the intersections

Key Concepts: Gender, performativity, intersectionality

Readings:

- Judith Butler (1988), “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”
 - Neo.S.Musang (2014), “In Time and Space” in *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer perspectives on sexual and gender identities (Read pages: 49-54)*
 - **(Trigger warning)** bell hooks (1981) *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Chapter 2, **Read pages: 51-59)**
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Week 5: #Soft boy era, and the social organization of masculinities

Key Concepts: Hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity,

Readings:

- Raewyn Connell (1995), “ The Social Organization of Masculinity” in *Masculinities* (Chapter 3, **Read pages: 67-86)**
- bell hooks (2004), “Popular culture: Media masculinity” in *The will to change: Men , Masculinity and Love.* (Chapter 8, **Read pages: 116-124)**

Additional Readings:

- Kelsey L. Smoot (2023), ‘The Potential of (new) Masculinity: Finding Belonging in a Soft-Boi era. Access:
<https://medium.com/nappy-head-club/the-potential-of-new-masculinity-finding-belonging-in-a-soft-boi-era-b5165ce10f67>)
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Week 6: Mapping the intersections

Key Concepts: Intersectionality

Readings:

- Nash, Jennifer C, (2008), ‘Re-thinking intersectionality’. *Feminist review* 89 (1)

Additional readings:

- Crenshaw, Kimberle (1991), ' Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity , politics and violence against women of color'. Stanford Law review
- Nash, Jennifer C, (2008) A Love Letter from a Critic, or Notes on the Intersectionality Wars
- Puar, Jasbir (2012) "'I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess': Intersectionality, Assemblage, and Affective Politics," European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics,

Week 7: What's feminism got to do with it?

Key Concepts: Foundations of feminist thought

Readings:

- bell hooks (2000) "Feminist Politics: Where we stand" in Feminism is for everybody (Chapter 1 , **Read pages: 1-7**)
- Mikki Kendall (2020) " Solidarity is still for white women" in Hood Feminism: Notes from women that the movement forgot.

Additional readings:

- Chandra Mohanty (1984), Under western eyes: Feminist cholarship and colonial discourses
- **Watch:** She's beautiful when shes angry ,Mary Dore (2014)

Week 8: Witchhunts, the accumulation of capital and gendered labour

Key Concepts: capitalism, commodification of women's bodies and labor.

Readings:

- Federici, S. (2004). Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation. Autonomedia. (**Read Pages: 91-99**)
- Gwyn Easterbrook-Smith (2020) Onlyfans as Gig-Economy Work: A nexus of precarity and stigma
- Watch a short clip on the case of Sarah Baartmann:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQqp7twXvBw>

Additional readings:

- How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class

Week 9: The Body, Identity, and Surveillance

Key Concepts: The body, biopolitics, racialized surveillance.

Readings:

- Micheal Foucault (1978) "Docile bodies" in Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison
- BUJPH (2021) Reproductive Responsibility and the Racial Biopolitics of Choice

<https://sites.brown.edu/publichealthjournal/2021/12/13/reproductive/>

Week 10: Black women and #MeToo: gender, violence and power

Key Concepts: Gender-based violence, femicide, patriarchy

Trigger warning:

This week's seminar will cover themes and discussions of violence and trauma that may be distressing and triggering. Please attend with caution; and make use of the following support services offered at the university if needed.

<https://www.uni-potsdam.de/en/discrimination-free-university/consulting-and-support/overview-of-counseling-and-advising-services>

Readings:

- Pumla Dineo Gqola (2020), Introduction: the Genesis of an idea in "Rape: A South African Nightmare" (**Read pages: xiv-xvii**)
- **Listen to:** Black women and #METOO from Hip Hop to Hollywood: Intersectionality matters!
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/3-metoo-and-black-women-from-hip-hop-to-hollywood/id1441348908?i=1000437770972>

Additional readings:

- bell hooks 2015. "Feminist movement to end violence" in Feminist theory: From Margin to center . New York: Routledge , pp 117-132
 - Sara Ahmed (2018), 'Refusal, resignation and complaint'
(<https://feministkilljoys.com/2018/06/28/refusal-resignation-and-complaint/>)
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Week 11: Workshop

Week 12: Gender ,power and the family

Key Concepts: Family, kinship

Reading:

- Ifi Amadiume, "Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society"; (**chapters tbc**)

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- (TBC)Cathy J. Cohen, Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?
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Week 13: “Controlling images”and Media Representations

Key Concepts: Representation, stereotypes, media visibility.

Readings: (tbc)

- bell hooks (2014) “Is paris burning” in Black Looks: Race and representation
 - Patricia hill Collins (2000), “Mammies, Matriarchs and other controlling images” in Black Feminist thought
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Week 12: Gender and Futurities

Key Concepts: Futurity, abolition, radical imagination.

Readings:

- Saidiya Hartman’s “Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments” (Introduction)
- Audre Lorde (2003) ‘THE MASTER’S TOOLS WILL NEVER DISMANTLE THE MASTER’S HOUSE’
- José Esteban Muñoz’s “Cruising Utopia.”