

First Year Seminar: Race, Sex, Gender (132D)

Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:00 am-10:15 am

Harris Refectory MAIN ST E

Professor: Ariella Rotramel, PhD

E-mail: ariella.rotramel@conncoll.edu

Office Location: Department of Gender & Women's Studies, 740 Williams Street

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30 am-1:30 pm

Course Overview

In this class, we consider how social forces have made race, class, gender and sexual categories legible. In other words, we will explore how and why these terms carry meaning for us as we engage how such categories are relational as well as intersecting. We will be thinking about how social forces not only influence how we understand and represent others and ourselves, but also what we experience and imagine as possible or impossible based on these categories. Finally, we consider how people individually and collectively respond to these forces.

This course draws upon Cathy J. Cohen's insight that "Difference, in and of itself – even that difference designated through named categories – is not the problem. Instead it is the power invested in certain identity categories and the idea that bounded categories are not to be transgressed that serve as the basis of domination and control" ("Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," 47). We will not be seeking definitions of identity categories (to ascertain what is authentic or to learn more about ourselves/others solely through the lens of identity), but to explore how these categories are produced and reiterated, as well as transgressed.

A key concept that drives our course is "intersectionality." Simply put, an intersectional approach always considers multiple identities together (we will examine different approaches to this concept in class). Intersectionality makes clear that while we may use terms like "men" and "women," race, class, sexuality, ability and other identities always inform these categories. In other words, what type of men or women are imagined? What are their social locations? As a class, we will work to more clearly understand the relationships between identities and why it is that certain identities are more or less visible to us. As Allan Berube asks in his essay, "How Does Gay Stay White?" we will uncover the histories and politics that have produced such assumptions. We will consider how academics and activists seek to engage identities in a way that does not erase or overstate the experiences of all people as our identities inevitably crisscross assumed lines.

Learning Goals

This course fulfills components of the Gender and Women's Studies departmental learning goals.

Students in this course will learn to:

- Know how other forces of identity and power such as race, sexuality, class, religion and nationality intersect and interact with gender;
- Understand the concept of "social location," including one's own;
- Grasp the ways that binary modes of thinking about and "doing" gender constrict human possibilities, and appreciate and value the implications of "queer" and "trans" movements and identities;
- Appreciate the power of individual and collective agency, and practice community engagement;
- Refine skills of information literacy and research, both library and web-based, and how to use digital technologies;
- Gain and refine critical reading skills, from the ability to identify an argument or thesis, to following its development through an essay or book; to engaging and critiquing it; to entering into scholarly and intellectual conversations about the key issues and debates in the field.

Disabilities

It is the policy of Connecticut College to provide reasonable accommodations for all qualified individuals with disabilities. If you need an accommodation for your classes, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services: Barbara L. McLlarky, Director
Phone: 860-439-5240 Fax: 860-439-2003 College Center at Crozier-Williams, Room 221 Box 5264
Once your memo is obtained, please speak with me to discuss modifications needed for class.

Academic Integrity

It is crucial that you conduct yourself in a manner that is in line with our college's Honor Code. Former Connecticut College professor, Ariana Hamidi, offers an excellent summation of the work we do here and the practices that will help you ensure that your actions reflect academic values.

At the college we are continually engaged with other people's ideas: we read them in books, hear them in lecture, discuss them with our friends, engage with them on a personal level, and incorporate them into our own writing. As a result, it is very easy to blur the lines between our own intellectual work and the work of others. But, it is important that we give credit where it is due. Plagiarism is using others' ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information. To avoid plagiarism, you must give credit whenever you use: another person's idea, opinion, or theory; any facts, statistics, graphs, drawings—any pieces of information—that are not common knowledge; quotations of another person's actual written words and/or spoken words; or paraphrase of another person's spoken or written words.

It is my expectation that at any time during the semester you are concerned about your work and how best to present others' thoughts that you will seek out assistance. In order to assist you, our college offers numerous resources from the Writing Center to our friendly librarians and myself.

Office Hours

I hold office hours twice a week in order to provide you with an opportunity to discuss course-specific issues that we have not been able to address in class. By September 9th, bring your student index card from the first day of class to my office – if you cannot make my office hours, make an appointment with me to come by. Examples of reasons that you may wish to attend my office hours could include: you want to discuss a course topic further; you have questions or concerns about your work in this course; or a personal issue has begun affecting your work and you need to talk with me about possible ways to address this problem. Please do not hesitate to come to me if you are having difficulties with the course, because if such a problem is not addressed as early as possible, there will be little we can do at the end of the semester.

Course Assignments

Participation and Attendance

You are required to come to class on time. Lateness and unexcused absences will count negatively towards your grade. *4 unexcused absences will result in the lowering of your grade by one full letter. 5 or more unexcused absences will result in a failing course grade.* Sustained, astute, and critically engaged class participation is crucial for a successful and productive classroom atmosphere. Class discussion will stay closely aligned with the course readings, thus you must come to class having done all assigned reading to be able to effectively participate. You are required to respectfully engage all members of the classroom and talk only in your turn. Interruptions and hostile remarks will not be tolerated. All cell phones or similar electronic devices must be turned off and put away in class. Throughout the semester, I will share with you opportunities to attend events related to class outside of our formal meetings. You may be able to take advantage of extra credit for your attendance of such events (specific parameters will be provided for each event) and I will consider your effort to participate in these opportunities positively when assigning participation grades.

Class Blog

Two hours prior to each class meeting, at the latest, you will post an entry on Moodle under the day's forum listing. Each of your entries at a minimum should cover a significant question you have about each of the day's readings, as well as provide a synopsis of key arguments and evidence provided in the reading (at least three points). Your entry will properly reference page numbers and make evident your active engagement with the readings. You are expected to read each other's entries and respond as appropriate. This forum is also an opportunity to bring in other materials, such as news or activities on campus that relate to the course themes. There will likely be variation in the length of your entries based on the day's readings, but I will expect a minimum of one typed double-spaced page's worth of material. Blogs will be evaluated cumulatively, and I will look for consistent effort in my evaluation of your work. During the early portion of the semester, we will review blog entries to ensure that we are all on the same page in terms of expectations for this course component. Throughout the semester, your blog entries will open up the course material and serve as a resource for your more formal writing assignments.

Affinity Group Project

On September 13th, you will create an affinity group with at least two other students in our class. You will come together based on a shared interest that relates to our class themes of social identities and difference. Together, you will design a project to be carried out during the semester that studies and acts on your topic. Your approaches may range from artistic to advocacy, but the key is that you work in concert to study and engage your topic. A two page group proposal provided to me on September 25th by your group will include your cursory knowledge of the chosen topic and outline steps towards completing the group project. By October 9th, each group will have arranged to have the majority of its members meet with me outside of class time to discuss your topic and approach. As your projects evolve, we will have weekly report backs in class to problem-solve and learn from each other. On November 27th, our class will meet at 7 pm at the GWS House, 740 Williams Street, to share dinner and have each group present their experiences working on their affinity group project. Please ensure that you are available to participate in this activity. On December 4th you will hand in an individual two-page reflection paper that will give you the opportunity to display your knowledge of the chosen topic and discuss your personal experience.

Baldwin Essay Due

On September 18th, you will hand in a three to five page essay that draws inspiration from James Baldwin's writings in *The Fire Next Time*. Your paper will overtly cite Baldwin's words and engage a point made by him as the basis for your own argument. As Baldwin's text is autobiographical, you are encouraged to use this essay as a means of reflecting on the role of course topics such as gender or race have played in your life, family and communities you are part of thus far. Your paper will be evaluated primarily on your successful use and interpretation of Baldwin, and the quality of your argument and use of supporting evidence that you provide.

Intersectional Analysis Paper

You will choose a topic to investigate using an intersectional approach. The topic may range from a specific cultural object to the work of an artist or a social issue. Through the methods that you identify as the most useful, you will study your topic and develop an analysis of it that is intersectional. Throughout the semester, we will work through the process of developing your research paper. Specific guidelines will be provided for each component of your paper during the semester. On October 2nd, you will provide me with a three to four page paper proposal outlining your key question, methods, and preliminary sources. On October 23rd, you will hand in an annotated bibliography of 10 sources that will summarize each source and its relevance to your paper. On November 13th, you will bring to class a detailed paper outline that will provide us an opportunity as a class to discuss building an argument and analyzing evidence. You will turn in your ten page final paper to me during finals.

Grading

You will receive your final grade based on your performance in class and assignments. The grading scale for this course is: A = 100-93; A- = 92-90; B+ = 89-87; B = 86-83; B- = 82-80; C+ = 79-77; C = 76-73; C- = 72-70; D = 69-60; F= 59 and below.

	Part & Attend	Class Blog	Baldwin Essay	Affinity Prop	Inter Prop	Inter Annot Biblio	Inter Outline	Affin. Refle	Inter Final Paper
Due	n/a	n/a	Sept. 18	Sept. 25	Oct. 16	Nov. 20	Nov. 29	Dec. 4	Finals
Grade %	10	15	15	10	5	10	5	10	20

Course Texts

Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera* (4th edition, 25th anniversary). San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012. ISBN: 1879960850.

James Baldwin. *The Fire Next Time* (Reissue edition). New York: Vintage, 1992.

Vivian Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martine, eds., *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism*. New York: Anchor, 2004. ISBN: 0385721021. Readings are marked as *FT*.

Birgit Brander Rasmussen, et al eds., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001. ISBN: 0822327406. Readings are marked as *MUW*.

Amy Tan. *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (Reprint edition). New York: Ballantine Books, 2002. ISBN: 0804114986.

Please check the ISBN number of the book you are purchasing or checking out to confirm that is the same edition we will be using in class. All other readings are marked with an asterisk in the course schedule and are available as PDFs or as online sources via our course website.

Course Schedule

Thursday, August 30

Introduction

Why do Lorde and Cervantes argue is it necessary to engage issues of identity?

*Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action."

*Lorna Dee Cervantes, "Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me..."

Tuesday, September 4

Theorizing Identities

What are the key concepts in these readings about engaging race and other identities?

*Gloria Anzaldúa, "To(o) Queer the Writer."

MUW Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray, "Introduction."

MUW Howard Winant, "White Racial Projects."

Thursday, September 6

Constructing and Negotiating Identities

Why is whiteness an unmarked identity? How can we productively engage identity in the classroom?

MUW Ruth Frankenberg, "The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness."

*Paula M. L. Moya, "What's Identity Got to Do With It? Mobilizing Identities..."

Tuesday, September 11

Engaging Identities

How does Baldwin theorize race relations and Black masculinity in the United States?

Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1-47.

Thursday, September 13

How did Baldwin navigate multiple forms of Black identity? What values/practices did he observe?

Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 47-106.

Tuesday, September 18

Binaries and Multiple Identities

Baldwin Essay Due

How can an intersectional approach help us understand social issues beyond binaries?

*Dorothy Allison. "A Question of Class."

*Kimberlé Crenshaw. "Mapping The Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics..."

Thursday, September 20 Making Gender

How is gender culturally produced? Why is the gender binary a core component?

- *Judith Lorber. "Night to his Day": The Social Construction of Gender."
- *Douglass Schrock and Michael Schwalbe. "Men, Masculinity, and Manhood Acts."

Tuesday, September 25 Developing an Intersectional Analysis Affinity Prop. Due

What are the historical roots to divides among women? What do the concerns raised look like today?

- *Aída Hurtado. "Relating to Privilege: Seduction and Rejection..."
- *The Combahee River Collective. "The Combahee River Collective Statement."

Thursday, September 27 Debating Intersectionality Today

What are the varying claims to intersectionality made by McCall and Alexander-Floyd?

- *Leslie McCall. "The Complexity of Intersectionality."
- *Nikol Alexander-Floyd. "Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality..."

Tuesday, October 2 Politics, Conflict and Engagement

How does each author analyze power dynamics and the complexities of privilege and oppression?

- *Cathy J. Cohen. "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential..."
- MUW Mab Segrest, "The Souls of White Folks."

Thursday, October 4 Entwined Sexual and Racial Identities

What are the historical and social factors that make racial and sexual identities often tied together?

- *Siobhan Somerville. "Introduction" and "Scientific Racism and the Invention..."
- MUW Allan Bérubé. "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays."

Tuesday, October 9 Representing Asian Americas

How does Lowe discuss the complexity of Asian America?

- *Lisa Lowe. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Differences."
- Amy Tan, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 1-150.

Thursday, October 11 Translating Book to Stage

- Amy Tan, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 151-303.

In-class screening: *Journey of the Bonesetter's Daughter*. Dir. David Petersen, 60 min., US, 2011

Tuesday, October 16 Meaning Making Intersect. Proposal Due

- Amy Tan, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, 304-403.
- *Amy Tan. "Mother Tongue."

Thursday, October 18 Anti-Racist and Youth Organizing

How have Asian Americans and youth challenged cultural assumptions through their engagement?

- MUW Michael Omi. "(E)racism: Emerging Practices of Antiracist Organizations."
- *Cathy J. Cohen and Joseph Kahne. "Participatory Politics: New Media and Youth..."

Tuesday, October 23 Building Social Justice Movements Annotated Biblio. Due

How do the authors' each discuss becoming engaged in social justice activism?

- FT Walker, Labaton and Martin. "Foreword" and "Introduction."
- MUW William Aal. "Moving from Guilt to Action: Antiracist Organizing..."

Thursday, October 25 Transnational Struggles in the US

How are the issues discussed transnational? What inequalities are at play in each case?

- FT Ai-Jen Poo and Eric Tang. "Domestic Workers Organize in the Global City."
- FT Kathryn Temple. "Exporting Violence: The School of the Americas..."

Tuesday, October 30 Producing Cultural Icons

How are women reclaiming, rejecting, or reconfiguring how they are represented in popular music?

- FT Ayana Bird. "Claiming Jezebel: Black Female Subjectivity and Sexual Expression in Hip-Hop."
 - *Murali Balaji. "Why Do Good Girls Have to Be Bad? The Cultural Industry's Production..."
- In-class film: *My Mic Sounds Nice: The Truth About Women in Hip Hop*, dir. Ava Duvernay, 42 min., US, 2010.

Thursday, November 1 Young Women Taking the Lead

How are young women taking on longstanding issues and using new technologies in their activism?

- FT Robin Templeton. "She Who Believes in Freedom: Young Women Defy the Prison..."
- FT Shireen Lee. "The New Girls Network: Women, Technology, and Feminism."

Tuesday, November 6 Election Day

How is the idea of "family" queered, according to Rodriguez? Why is Borderlands groundbreaking?

- *Richard T. Rodríguez. "Making Queer Familia."
- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 3-16 and 231-284.

Thursday, November 8 – Library Research with Ashley Hanson at Shain Library

Tuesday, November 13 Borderlands I

What are key concepts that Anzaldúa develops in her essay?

- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 17-120.

Thursday, November 15 Borderlands II

How does Anzaldúa use poetry to express concerns that are raised in her essays?

- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 121-225.

Tuesday, November 20 U.S. Xenophobia and Environmental Justice

Why are immigrant women of color key targets in the US? What is environmental racism?

- FT Syd Lindsley. "Bearing the Blame: Gender, Immigration, Reproduction, and the Environment."
- *Ariella Rotramel. Excerpts from "Di Algo/Say Something."

Tuesday, November 27 Film and Gender 7:00 pm Dinner and Affinity Group Reports

How does film tend to utilize a "male gaze" and reinforce gender norms?

- Christine Skelton. "Constructing Dominant Masculinity and Negotiating the 'Male Gaze.'"
- Stacie Furia and Denise Bielby. "Bombshells on Film: Women, Military Films..."

Thursday, November 29 "Prove Them Wrong" Paper Outline Due

How do women boxers perform gender? What draws women to sports such as boxing and wrestling?

- Christine Mennesson, "'Hard' Women and 'Soft' Women: The Social Construction of Identities..."
 - Yvonne Lafferty and Jim McKay, "'Suffragettes in Satin Shorts'? Gender and Competitive Boxing."
- In-class film: *Girlfight*, dir. Karyn Kusama, 110 min., US, 2000.

Tuesday, December 4 Playing with Identities in Sport Affinity Reflection Due

What are the assumptions that undergird gender verification? What are the realities of biological sex?

- Claire Sullivan, "Gender Verification and Gender Policies in Elite Sport: Eligibility and 'Fair Play.'"
- Excerpts from news coverage of gender verification and the 2012 Olympics.

Thursday, December 6 "An Indian girl born to play soccer for England."

How do race and gender interact in women's sports? How do women athletes negotiate inequalities?

- Mary G. McDonald, "Queering Whiteness: The Peculiar Case of the Women's National Basketball Association."
- Justine Ashby, "Postfeminism in the British Frame."
- In-class film: *Bend It Like Beckham*, dir. Gurinder Chadha, 112 min., UK, 2002.

Tuesday, December 11 Class Wrap Up