

Introduction to WGSS: Art and Culture

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Optional Synchronous Meetings: Week 3, Week 8, Week 15
Zoom Meeting Link: umd.zoom.us/j/7747751724

This class convenes online for the [University of Maryland](#), which is located on the traditional lands of the [Piscataway](#) and [Nacotchtank \(Anacostan\)](#) people, established through [seizure of indigenous land by the Morrill Act](#) of 1862. [[more information on land acknowledgements](#)]

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the interdisciplinary, multi-sited activity of the Harriet Tubman Department of Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies from the vantage point of artists, activists, and cultureworkers. In both content and activity, this class offers a consideration of *the social structures and material conditions which organize our learning*, and of *difference as an embodied experience from which we derive knowledge and understanding*.

Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies convenes academic fields that all learn from difference, and share the premise that *social transformation is connected to our capacity to perceive and understand how difference relates to power, value, and the social structures that organize our everyday lives*. We will be learning from artists, theorists and culturemakers who have always already been critically and creatively resisting oppression and imagining worlds of care and collective liberation, with special attention to feminist genealogies of thought and practice.

In this course, feminism names a location at which multiple discourses of gender and its relationship to social life collect in response to questions of **difference, positionality, power, value, self-determination, and interdependence**. Students will develop fluency in these streams of feminist thought and examine what they reveal about the histories of power that implicate our daily lives. We will consider how multifarious feminist discourses are held together across difference with attention to everyday interactions of power through lived, embodied experiences in public, intimate, and transitional spaces. Engaging texts, artworks, creative exercises, and reflective/analytic activities, students are invited to steep in feminist knowledgeworlds, to find affinities, and to bring your own deep questions into the work.

This class asks some questions that are of particular importance to WGSS as a site of feminist inquiry: How are destructive hierarchies such as patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, and ableism upheld through the everyday infrastructures created by cultural institutions and their normative practices? What techniques, tools, and processes are used to keep in place these operating logics of domination? What relationships to resources and value are enacted through the structures and arrangements of our social worlds? How are people enacting freedom, survival, pleasure and joy within and against the interlocking systems of oppression that organize daily life, in particular places and times? These questions invite inquiry into practice -- how do we learn to be in the world, how do we know how the world works? And they are compositional questions, too -- how do pieces and threads and images arrange to express meaning and create an impact?

The central questions I invite you to take up in your own ways throughout the next fifteen weeks:

How do I know what I know?

What sustains my capacity to care?

What systems and histories have created my current context?

This class aims to support you with a range of materials for exploring your responses to these questions, with invitations to look both inwards and outwards, and to help each other along the way. Activities invite you to notice, appreciate, and cultivate your innate, culturally-situated, and creative ways of knowing; cultural material including texts, films, music and other emerging media offer language, conceptual frames, and descriptive examples for analyzing the social and material structures shaping our lives. The goal is not for you to arrive at a unified agreement about or successful expression of some objective truth/fact/ideal, but rather to cultivate a deeper understanding of your own present context, and leave with tools for observing and refining your own commitments to care for and with the world around you.

Learning Goals

- Grow an understanding of the key histories, themes, and concerns that have shaped the field of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies;
- Grow familiarity with artists, writers, activists, and organizers who have contributed to discourses of intersectional and transnational feminism;
- Grow rhetorical, compositional, and analytical skill in articulating reflections, observations, questions, and activations;
- Grow understanding of ourselves as learners, and of our educational context;
- Cultivate capacity to read and consider the dynamics of power that shape, express, perpetuate, and transform culture in our everyday lives.

I make the following requests to you as a class community:

- We respect that we are each in charge of our own bodyminds and experiences, and that we communicate with each other accordingly.
- We support and honor each other's integrity as we share our creative and intellectual work with one another.
- We do our best to relate to ourselves and each other with openness, humility, and generosity.
- Communicate with me about your experience, so I may do my best to support you.

Course Schedule

All reading materials will be provided by your instructor. Each module includes optional novel or poetic companions – texts that are not required, but which are thematically connected to the module and offer another entry point to the ideas in play.

Module 1 - Difference & Position

January 30th - March 5th

Module Activity

- Week 1 - Watch Orientation & Overview Video; module materials released
- Week 2 - Watch Lecture Video; Partner Exercise and Creative Activity released
- Week 3 - Optional synchronous meeting to complete Partner Exercise (or complete on your own); Culminating Assignment released

DUE February 19th at 11:59pm: Introduction Post

- Weeks 4 & 5 - Work through module materials and complete module components

DUE March 5th at 11:59pm: Partner Exercise, Creative Activity, Culminating Assignment: Process Zine OR Reflection Paper, Refer to a Friend/Teach Your Teacher

Module Materials

Choose 4 to read:

[Combahee River Collective Statement](#) (1977); ([click here to view version with instructor annotations](#))
[Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference"](#) (1980)
[Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century"](#) (1983)
[Adrienne Rich, "Claiming an Education"](#) (1977)
[Chela Sandoval, "US Third World Feminism: Differential Social Movement I"](#) (2000), pgs 19-29 of PDF

Choose 2 to explore:

- Adrian Piper's Mythic Being - [Gallery Description](#) and [images](#), [artist notes](#)
- [Section 504 Sit-Ins](#) and [Patient No More: Virtual Exhibition Tour](#)
- [Harriet Tubman Bicentennial Project](#)

Choose 1 to listen:

[Buffy Sainte-Marie, "It's My Way!"](#) (1964); [Nina Simone, "Nina Simone Sings The Blues"](#) (1967); [Yoko Ono, "Plastic Ono Band"](#) (1970)

Optional novel companions:

[Parable of the Sower](#) by Octavia E. Butler, [The Disposessed](#) by Ursula K. Le Guin

Module 2 - Power & Value

March 6th - April 9th

Module Activity

- Week 6 - Module materials released
- Week 7 - Watch Lecture Video; Creative Collaboration and Creative Activity released
- SPRING BREAK - March 20th - March 26th

- Week 8 - Optional synchronous meeting to work on Creative Collaboration;
- Week 9 - Work through materials and complete module components

DUE April 9th at 11:59pm: Partner Exercise, Creative Activity, Culminating Assignment: Alt Text Image-Essay, Refer to a Friend/Teach Your Teacher

Module Materials (subject to change):

Choose 4 to read:

[Angela Davis, "Closures And Continuities"](#) (2013);

[Silvia Federici, "The Great Witch-Hunt In Europe"](#) (2005) (pgs 5-28 of PDF)

Audre Lorde, ["Uses of the Erotic" \(1978\)](#) and ["Poetry Is Not A Luxury" \(1985\)](#); [listen to Uses of the Erotic](#) as a speech

[Natasha Myers, "How To Grow Liveable Worlds"](#) (2018)

[Susan Stryker, "Transgender Feminism: Queering The Woman Question"](#) (2007);

[Kai Cheng Thom, "Righteous Callings" and "A School For Storytellers"](#) (2019)

[Wages For Students](#) (1975)

Choose 3 to watch:

[My Body Doesn't Oppress Me, Society Does](#) (2017), [Sins Invalid performance highlights 2008-2011](#),

["Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore"](#) (2020), Alexis Pauline Gumbs, [excerpt from "Quantum Particularity"](#) (2020)

Choose 2 to explore:

[Black Power Naps](#), [deadbird](#), [Community Economies](#), [#CripRitual](#) (ongoing projects)

Choose 1 to listen:

[Contra* Maintenance \(podcast\)](#) (2020), [Telling Our Twisted Histories \(podcast\)](#) - episode: DISCOVERY (2021)

Optional novel companions:

[The Gilda Stories](#) by Jewelle Gomez, [The Memory Police](#) by Yoko Ogawa

Module 3 - Self-Determination & Interdependence

April 9th - May 11th

Module Activity

- Week 10 - Module materials released, Visionary Media Project / Analysis Paper released
- Week 11 - Watch lecture video; Peer Feedback activity released

DUE 4/23 at 11:59pm - Visionary Media Project Proposal

- Week 12 - Work through materials and complete module components
- Week 13 - Work through materials and complete module components
- Week 14 - optional synchronous meeting to share Culminating Assignment

DUE 5/7 at 11:59pm - Module Materials, Peer Feedback, Instructor Check-In

DUE 5/14 at 11:59pm - Visionary Media Project OR Analysis Paper

Module Materials (subject to change):

Choose 4 to read:

[Sara Ahmed, "Feminism as Lifework: a dedication to bell hooks"](#) (2022)

[Eli Clare, "Structure of Cure" \(2017\)](#)

[Grace Lee Boggs, "These are the times that grow our souls" \(2003\)](#)

[Aurora Levins Morales, Excerpts from "Essays For Radicals", \(1998/2019\)](#)

[Dori Midnight, "Wash Your Hands", \(2020\)](#)

[Mia Mingus, "Access Intimacy, Interdependence, and Disability Justice" \(2017\)](#)

[Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Care Webs: Experiments in Creating Collective Access", \(2018\)](#)

[Dean Spade, "Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival", \(2020\)](#)

Choose 3 to explore:

Hyperallergic articles on [Decolonize This Place](#) (2018) and [Sam Durant's "Scaffold"](#) (2020)

Virtual exhibit: [Catching Light - Celebrating Black Midwives and Birthworkers](#)

[Moral Docs](#), [Harriet's Apothecary](#), [Building Accountable Communities](#), [Mutual Aid Disaster Relief](#)

[Co-conspirators](#) (ongoing projects)

Watch:

[Layli Long Soldier, excerpt from *Whereas*](#) (2018), [We Move Together: Trans Liberation and Disability Justice](#) (2017)

Optional poetic companions:

[Noopiming](#) by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, [Born Palestinian, Born Black](#) by Suheir Hammad

DUE May 19th at 11:59pm, Learning Analysis

Assignment Details & Grading Scheme

Completion of this course includes Assignments and Engagements. Instructions will be posted to ELMS according to the course schedule, and I will give more info on specifics in Week 1's Orientation & Overview Video.

Assignments (50 points)	Engagements (50 points)
Introduction post (3 pts) Instructor check-in (4 pts) Process Zine OR Reflection Paper (12 pts) Manifesto OR Analysis Paper (12 pts) Visionary Media Project (12 pts) Learning Analysis (7 pts)	<i>5 points each:</i> Materials Shareboards x 3 Creative Activity Shareboards x 2 Refer to a Friend/Teach Your Teacher x 2 Partner Exercise Collaborative Creation Peer Feedback

My goal and intention is for all students to succeed in this course. The class is organized to encourage you to engage in ways that are interesting and satisfying and important to you, that you are excited to spend time thinking about and working on. We focus on process, rather than outcome, in order to challenge paradigms of assessment that evaluate our creative output as right/wrong or good/bad, or along a spectrum of numerically quantifiable achievement. The value of your work does not accord with how well you might have met my expectations; rather, it matters in terms of how it has helped, challenged, and changed you. In other words, I am not the

authority on your learning; you are. I will offer feedback on your work, but all assignments will be graded for completion only. To say that your assignments are assessed “for completion” means that I assume your work has already been subject to your own criteria of evaluation, and so you will receive full credit for whatever you submit. Below, I lay out my basic criteria for evaluation, if they are helpful as you formulate your own.

DO	DON'T
• Spend time on something you care about • Take responsibility for what you find meaningful as you learn from this experience • Communicate your intentions as best you are able, with the materials most readily available to you	Prioritize this class' responsibilities over your own health and safety (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually)

Submit what best represents your learning process and creative engagement at the time the assignment is due, as best you are able. If you encounter barriers to completing the course materials according to the schedule, please let me know and we can make alternative arrangements.

On Time & Format

Although this class is administered online, our activities aim to direct your curiosity into your own embodied experiences, your everyday life and relations, and your immediate environment. The course is structured around three five-week long modules, each including a set of texts and other cultural media to engage, a creative activity, a partner exercise, and a culminating assignment. I will send weekly announcements to guide you through the materials, and the course is designed to be a choose-your-own-adventure sort of experience if that works better for your learning. I will announce pairs for the partnered activities in the second week of each module, and hold an optional synchronous meeting in the third or fourth week of each module to facilitate the activity for any pairs who wish to complete the activity with guidance from me.

You will be introduced to many different artists, activists, theorists, and dreamers, and you are invited to notice when you find an affinity with someone's work and lean into that interest. The course includes reading, responding, creative, and partnered activities so that you can take in the ideas in a variety of ways, and engage the course concepts in your bodies, minds, spaces, and landscapes. I encourage you to pay attention to what most connects you to your curiosity in this full-body approach, and also instances when you feel resistance – what activates your care? What summons your commitments? When do you feel connected to yourself? Why do you want to avoid or not do some things? Does one activity or assignment or text or artwork interest you more than others? As much as you are able, I invite you not to judge your reactions, but rather to be curious about these different experiences and allow them to inform how you take responsibility for your own learning.

Course Ethos

Ask for what you need, communicate to the best of your ability, respect each others' differences.

"Bring yourself as you are. We are all working under duress, whether it's a pandemic, late capitalism, white supremacy and all of those things at once. Let's not pretend that the very things we discuss in the course aren't the very things we live with, in our bodies, in our worlds. Let's take care of each other in class through kindness and support." from Dr. Laura Maldin's [Ethos of Care](#)

On Accommodations – At no time are you required to present a doctor's note or any official documentation of any other kind regarding a diagnosis for any condition of your life to prove that you need accommodations. All that is required is for you let me know that you need them. You can ask for access to a course text in a different format or more time for an assignment, to talk through an assignment or text you don't understand, for alternative options for an assignment that poses barriers for your learning. Please, ask for what you need.

On Communication – Sometimes things come up in life that make communication challenging. If we are ill or in crisis, tending to someone who is ill or in crisis, navigating an unexpected challenge, experiencing depression and/or anxiety, overwhelmed by school and/or life, etc, it can be difficult to express what is going on, and especially difficult to ask for help. If you are in a circumstance where you cannot participate in or complete course activities because life is too complex, you are invited to let me know in whatever way you feel safe and comfortable enough, so we can make new arrangements or expectations for your coursework. You do not have to disclose what is going on, you can just ask for what you need.

On Respect – I cannot fully know what is going on in your mind/heart/experience, just as you cannot fully know what is going on for me or anyone else. Everyone in this class, your instructor included, is learning in different ways, in different contexts, in relation to different life experiences. As we inhabit this learning space together, we will be developing ideas and sharing creative work and building a set of references, which involve both vulnerability and generosity, and which can be challenging and uncomfortable in many different ways. Remember: we are each the experts on our own life experiences, and our goal is not to be right or wrong, but to learn how to listen and engage with experiences different than our own. As you ask for what you need and communicate to the best of your ability, please respect each others' differences.

COVID Considerations – As COVID-19 and its effects on our lives continue to change, we must be kind and flexible with ourselves, and with each other. This course has been designed to provide structure and support while making space for the uncertainty we are all experiencing. As your instructor, my responsibilities are to create a supportive learning environment and to navigate University compliance as your advocate. I promise to respond to your needs as best I

am able. As students, your responsibilities are to have a learning experience and to take care of yourselves as best you are able. Please let me know as soon as possible if you encounter obstacles to your responsibilities, and I promise to do my best to make necessary changes.

Citational Practice – I encourage you to always be finding ways to appreciate, name, and give credit/recognition to the people, organizations, and bodies of knowledge that inspire and inform your own work. If you ever have questions about appropriate citation of a source, resource, or inspiration, please contact me.

Religious Observance – You are encouraged to notify me if you anticipate conflicts with assignment due dates as soon as possible.

ADS Accommodations – I am committed to effectively facilitating learning accommodations for *all students*, whether you have an institutionally-recognized and/or documented disability or not. If you are interested in obtaining official documentation via the university, please contact the Accessibility and Disability Service (ADS), a division of the University Counseling Center via 301-314-7682, adsfrontdesk@umd.edu, or visit the Shoemaker Building for more information.

Learning Assistance Service – If you are experiencing difficulties with the academic demands of this course (or any course!), you are encouraged to contact the Learning Assistance Service, 2202 Shoemaker Building, 301-314-7693. Their educational counselors can help with time management, reading, math learning skills, note-taking and exam preparation skills. All their services are free to UMD students (www.counseling.umd.edu/LAS).

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Syllabus Subject to Change – This syllabus is subject to change at any time according to the instructor's discretion. However, all changes will be communicated to students in a prompt and efficient manner via email and/or Canvas, so please ensure that you are checking both outlets.

This course is an offering of the Harriet Tubman Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies located in Susquehanna Hall. To learn more about the department, and our undergraduate programs in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; LGBTQ Studies; and Black Women's Studies please visit wgss.umd.edu. To schedule an advising appointment with Gwen Warman please visit Ter.ps/WgssAppt. To receive our email newsletter about undergraduate events and programs please sign up at www.ter.ps/WGSSnews. For other departmental questions contact wgss@umd.edu.