

AMST117: Social Norms/Social Power: Reading “Difference” in American Culture

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Course Description

This FYS seminar is an interdisciplinary exploration of the privileges and penalties associated with “the normal” in the United States. We’ll be centrally concerned with the ways bodily difference and social identity interarticulate with “normalness,” locating individuals within hierarchical power structures. What is “normativity,” if not a statistical norm? How are regimes of normativity produced, reproduced, and challenged? Our goal in understanding these intersections is to think creatively about ways to challenge these forms of privilege and power.

Our focus is on Queer Studies, which we will approach through an intersectional lens, paying careful attention to the ways race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, class, disability, gender, and sexuality intersect in social terrains of power. We will unpack and explore key concepts in American Studies, including settler colonialism, compulsory ablebodiedness, heteronormativity, biopolitics, neoliberalism, and ideology, drawing on a range of genres and disciplines, including memoir, ethnography, film, and theory in disability studies, queer theory, critical race studies, Marxist feminism, Native American studies, and trans studies. Along the way, we will encounter problematics ranging from disability and the “normal body” to the American Dream, the “wedding-industrial complex,” sexual “deviance” and desire, racialized state violence, the privatization of public space, and the politics of queer/LGBT activism.

As an FYS course, this course is writing-intensive and is structured to give you ample practice in core writing, reading, and presentation skills needed at Wesleyan. This course is part of the Queer Studies and the Disability Studies Course Cluster, and it is cross-listed in FGSS.

Course Texts

1. Eli Clare (2017), *Brilliant Imperfection*. Duke University Press. 9780822362876
2. Chrys Ingraham (2008/2016), *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. Routledge. 9780415715171
3. Leslie Feinberg (1993), *Stone Butch Blues*. ← order or print <http://www.lesliefeinberg.net/> (free .pdf or print on demand)
4. Patrisse Kahn-Cullors (2018), *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*. St. Martin's Press. 9781250171085
5. Samuel Delany (2001), *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York University Press. 9780814719206

All books are available at RJ Julia Bookstore and are also on reserve at the library. All essays are available on the course Moodle & also as a course pack via your portfolio.

Course Assignments

- * Attendance and Participation ----- 15%
- * Discussion Leader ----- 15%
- * Four Short Papers ----- 30%

- * Paper Portfolio & Reflection ----- 5%
- * Event Review ---- 10%
- * Final Paper/Project ----- 25%

Attendance and Participation

This is an intensive, reading-heavy seminar designed for an active learner. You will get out of it what you put in to it – your active participation and enthusiasm is crucial to its success. Come to class on time and prepared, and contribute to our discussion in a relevant, present, and respectful way. We will be reading challenging theoretical essays, personal memoirs, and other work that advocate opposing viewpoints. Thus, participation in this course means coming to class ready to ask questions, to think about what is at stake in these debates, and to begin to forge your own analysis. Your participation should be grounded in the reading; pointing us to relevant sections of an article or to a particular quote is most productive. Remember, participation does not just mean talking, it means contributing to our collective learning – asking questions and expanding others’ insights is often as useful as (maybe even more useful than) making declarations.

Discussion leading

Once during the semester you will lead ~15 minutes of our class discussion, based on the readings for that class session: come to class having printed out a passage from the reading that you think is especially interesting, important, provocative, challenging, or that will otherwise prompt meaningful discussion about the issues at hand (it is smart to prepare a second, backup passage in case the first one falls flat). Print out your passage—a passage can be anywhere from 1 sentence to 1 paragraph. Along with the passage, you’ll also need to 1) connect the passage(s) to one of our other readings and/or other material from the course and 2) prepare 2 or 3 discussion questions for the class. You will likely need a few sentences to explicate your questions: make sure you give enough information for your question to be generative (aim for questions you think link to other important ideas or topics, get at the heart of some theoretical issue, or open up a new way of thinking). You don’t need to know the answer to the discussion questions you’ve prepared—your goal is to generate discussion among your peers. This part of the class is peer- and self-reviewed.

In your presentation, do not summarize - assume we have all done the reading. Instead, focus on giving the class a way to start thinking about/answering the following set of questions:

What forms of social normativity are at work in these reading? What is “the normal” here? How are these norms produced, reproduced, enforced, and/or challenged? How do these social norms reflect the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, disability, or other axes of difference and identity? How do these readings help us think about power and privilege - do they connect to/critique/etc. other readings we have done?

Strive to illuminate these key issues with **specifics and examples**.

Learning goals: practice leading class discussion, formulating good discussion questions, isolating key passages from long texts for further analysis, and connecting passages to larger ideas and concepts.

** on days that you are not presenting, you may wish to continue this practice and bring to class 1 or 2 passages that you wish to discuss—this is excellent practice (and will guarantee that you always have something to contribute to class discussion).

Short Papers + Paper Portfolio

You will turn in four ~3 page double-spaced critical reflection papers throughout the semester. The purpose of these papers is to give you a chance to write out a more sustained analysis of a specific issue. They have two parts: 1) definition of a concept or a key term from the reading, and 2) application (e.g., how does that term work? how does the memoir provide examples of that concept or idea?). Plan to spend ~1 page on the definition: make sure you are citing the key author(s), and provide a definition that is both in the author's own words (quoting) *and* in your own (you'll need to explain what the term means in your own words). Then take ~2 pages to give ~two (or one very complex) examples from the memoir (or longer text) that illustrates how the concept works, what it means, how it is useful, further meanings you think are important to add, etc. Those examples should be grounded in the reading; you'll want to cite and quote specific sentences, pages, passages, or moments that illustrate that key concept in motion. Avoid generalizations and pontificating; instead, focus in on the issue or theme you have pinpointed in the unit, and explore that with as much detail as possible. Make sure you back up all statements with textual citations and specific examples from the readings. Part of this assignment is to learn how to make a clear argument in a limited space, so do not waste your space with extensive introductions or conclusions – just jump right in!

Learning goals: practice isolating core concepts in dense reading, balancing quotations with explication in your own words, choosing the best examples/illustrations of challenging theoretical ideas, moving from specific example to broader analytic, and general writing skills—clarity, focus, brevity, citation, word choice, style, etc.

Papers are due throughout the semester. I will give extensive feedback on the papers; you will also meet with me in person to discuss your writing. At the end of the semester, you will turn in a portfolio of all of your short papers (the original versions, graded with my comments on them—**so keep them safe**) along with a short written reflection on what you learned about writing, your own style, things you've improved and what you still need to work on, etc.

Event review

At least once during the semester, attend a relevant event on campus and write a short, ~1-page review of the event. You pick the audience for your review: if it is your peers in the class, make sure to connect the event to topics and ideas we've been studying together; if it is a general audience, make sure your review gives some sense of why someone would want to attend the event and what they'd learn from it. Relevant events are marked in the syllabus – we are lucky that there are quite a few queer studies events this semester! Please turn in your review within 1 week of the event.

Learning goals: familiarize yourself with some of the spaces on campus where events are held, listen to/meet scholars visiting Wesleyan, practice integrating events with your classwork, think about audience for writing, and practice writing for a general audience.

Final Paper or Project

The final assignment in this class is a final paper of ~8-10 double spaced pages. The paper can be an expansion of one of your short papers (so, based entirely on course readings) or it can reflect research on a new topic that you have undertaken on your own. Broadly, the paper must be relevant for the course: it must explore social norms, privilege, and power in the United States. Beyond this, the focus of your paper is up to you. Be on the lookout throughout the semester for something you want to examine; if you are having trouble coming up with a topic, be sure to meet with me early in the term so that we can brainstorm together. You will approach this assignment in stages, or milestones:

Milestone 1: Project Proposal (1+ page): due Friday Nov 2nd (dropbox)

Milestone 2: 1-1 Meeting to discuss project and plans: Nov 5 - 13

Milestone 3: First Draft: Monday, Dec 3rd in class (printed out)

Final paper: due Dec 14th by 5pm (dropbox)

The proposal for your final paper should outline your research question or starting point in one paragraph and include an annotated bibliography of at least three sources (one paragraph per source) that you have consulted. Ask me if you have questions on appropriate sources. Your proposal should be as detailed as possible; the point is for you to do some preliminary thinking on your paper topic so that you start to understand the scholarly conversation around it. After you turn in your proposal, we will meet so that I can give you additional recommendations and assistance. You will also turn in a rough draft of the paper before the final paper is due.

Learning goals: tackle a longer writing project in steps, including: conceiving a paper topic, doing library research, refining and focusing a paper to an appropriate length, formulating an argument, organizing a longer paper, editing and refining writing, and working with feedback.

Extra credit

If you would like extra credit in this class, you may write an additional short paper, do an additional event review, and/or lead an additional class discussion.

Course Policies

Policy on Absences: You may miss 2 classes without explanation or penalty: think of these as sick (or health) days, and take them when you see fit. There is no need to email me unless you are dealing with something more serious, in which case we should have a more detailed conversation that will likely include your Class Dean. If you miss more than 4 classes, I may ask you to withdraw. Missing more than 5 classes is grounds to fail the course.

Policy on extensions and late papers: I do not grant extensions. I will accept the Short Papers late with a grade penalty of 3 points (1/3 a letter grade) each day. The Final Paper is due during your scheduled exam period, on the next-to-last day of exam week – so – if you have valid reasons for needing more time on that, you will need to request an Incomplete for the course.

Policy on computers/cell phones in the classroom: If you take notes on your laptop or have another documented reason for having it in the class, please turn off the wireless. Do not text,

shop online, look at pictures of cats, snapchat, etc. during our class. Your cell phone should be off or on silent and put away. Any use of your computer for non-class purposes will result in suspension of this privilege. Keep in mind that laptops can interfere with your ability to learn and focus on material, and can distract others. Let's aim to be present with each other and our ideas.

Office Hours: I have office hours Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays; schedule an appointment using my online calendar: <http://calendly.com/margot-weiss>. Please come and talk to me about course material, dynamics, or any concerns or ideas you might have. My office is located in the Center for the Americas, 255 High Street, on the second floor (room 201). If you need to phone, my office number is 685-5754. If you cannot make any of my available times, email me and we will work out an alternative time to meet.

Students with Disabilities

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible. If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact Accessibility Services in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021/022, or can be reached by email (accessibility@wesleyan.edu) or phone (860-685-5581).

Honor Code

All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code. If you need help with proper citations or you have questions on how to avoid plagiarism, let me know or contact the **Writing Workshop**: <https://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/writingworkshop/index.html>

Course Schedule

(all readings are due/to be discussed on the day they are listed)

Course Introduction: Norms, Privilege, Power, Subject

Mon, Sept. 3: Course introduction

Wed, Sept. 5: Intersectionality and Identity

- Patricia Hill Collins, "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, & Gender as Categories of Analysis" in *Privilege: A Reader*
- Alan Berube, "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays" in *Privilege: A Reader*
- Kalaniopua Young, "From a Native Trans Daughter" in *Captive Genders*

(rec): Amber Hollibaugh, "Queers Without Money" *Village Voice* (online)

(rec): Dorothy Allison, "A Question of Class" *History is a Weapon* (online)

Mon, Sept. 10: Norms and Power

- Julian Carter, "Introduction" to *The Heart of Whiteness*
- Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," afterword to *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*

(rec): Elizabeth Stephens, "Normal" *TSQ*

(rec): Mary Poovey, "Sex in America," in *Critical Inquiry* (only on moodle)

1. Embodiment and Crip Theory: Compulsory Able-Bodiedness, Disability, Impairment, Cure

Wed, Sept. 12: Introduction to Disability Studies

- Simi Linton, "What Is Disability Studies?" *PLMA*
- Lennard Davis, "Introduction" (to p. 15) and "Constructing Normalcy" (skim) in *Enforcing Normalcy*
- Robert McRuer, "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence" *Disability Studies Reader*

(rec): Carol Breckenridge and Candace Vogler, "The Critical Limits of Embodiment: Disability's Criticism" *Public Culture*

Mon, Sept. 17: *Brilliant Imperfection*

- Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (through section 6)

In-class: Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back // Sins Invalid -- *Skin, Tooth and Bone*

Wed, Sept. 19: *Brilliant Imperfection*

- Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection* (finish)

Short Paper 1 due: Friday, Sept. 21

2. Marriage and the American Dream: Ideology, Heteronormativity, Homonormativity

Mon, Sept. 24: Ideology and Heteronormativity

- Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in *Lenin and Philosophy*
- Michael Warner, “Introduction” to *Fear of a Queer Planet*

(rec): Chrys Ingraham, “The Heterosexual Imaginary” in *Queer Theory/Sociology*

(rec): Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public” *Critical Inquiry* (only on moodle)

In-class: “heteronormativity” from “Sex in Public”

Wed, Sept. 26: The Wedding-Industrial Complex

- Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings* (Ch 1-2)

(rec): Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex” *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader* (only on moodle)

In-class: Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex” charmed circle

EVENT: Liz Montegary, talk on her recently published book *Familiar Perversions: The Racial, Sexual, and Economic Politics of LGBT Families* | Weds Sept 26 @4:30 Judd 116

Mon, Oct 1: Heterosexual Imaginary

- Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings* (Ch 3-Epilogue)

In-class: wedding magazines, websites

Wed, Oct 3: Samesex Marriage

- Michael Warner, “Normal and Normaller: Beyond Gay Marriage” in *GLQ*
- Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism” in *Materializing Democracy* (p. 179)

In-class: “Is Gay Marriage Racist?” from *That’s Revolting*

Short Paper 2 due: Friday, Oct 5

3. Trans Studies and Body Politics: Trans, Cisgender, Sexology

EVENT: Becca Blackwell, “They, Themselves and Schmerm” -- one-person show by New York City-based trans actor | Friday Oct. 5 at 7:30 & 9:30, World Music Hall

Mon, Oct 8: Sex/Gender, Sexology, Trans Theory

- Julia Serrano, “Trans Woman Manifesto” in *Whipping Girl*
- David Valentine and Riki Anne Wichins, “1% on the Burn Chart” *Social Text*
- C. Riley Snorton, “Preface,” “Introduction” and “Anatomically Speaking” from *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*

(rec): Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah and Lisa Jean Moore, excerpt of “Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?” in *WSQ* (on moodle only)

(rec): David Valentine, “I know what I am: Gender, Sexuality, & Identity” *Imagining Transgender*

EVENT: Mel Chen (details TBA) @ CHUM | Monday October 8th

Wed, Oct 10: Stone Butch Blues

- Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (~through ch. 13)

In-class: My Gender Workbook

Mon, Oct 15: *Stone Butch Blues*

- Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*

Wed, Oct 17: LIBRARY WORKSHOP

Short Paper 3 due: Friday, Oct 19

>>> FALL BREAK <<<

4. Queer Indigeneity: Settler Colonialism, Indigeneity, Sovereignty, Self-determination

Wed, Oct 24: What is Settler Colonialism?

- Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. "Introduction" to *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*
- J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (Kanaka Maoli) interviews Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism" *Speaking of Indigenous Politics*
- Christina Heatherton, "Policing the Crisis of Indigenous Lives: An Interview with the Red Nation" in *Policing the Planet*

(rec): David Wilkens (Lumbee) and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesik Stark (Turtle Mountain Apache), "Indigenous Peoples are Nations, Not Minorities" in *American Indian Politics* (on moodle only)

(rec): Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" *Journal of Genocide Research* (on moodle only)

Mon, Oct 29: Queer Indigenous Studies

- Scott Lauria Morgensen, "Unsettling Queer Politics: What Can Non-Natives Learn from Two-Spirit Organizing?" In *Queer Indigenous Studies*
- J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (Kanaka Maoli), "Indigenous Hawaiian Sexuality and the Politics of Nationalist Decolonization" in *Critically Sovereign*
- James Thomas Stevens (Akwesasne Mohawk), "Poetry & Sexuality: Running Twin Rails" *GLQ*

(rec): Maria Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System" in *Hypatia* (on moodle only)

(rec): Alexandria Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree Nation). "Two-spirit people, body sovereignty, and gender self-determination." *Red Rising Magazine* (online)

(rec): Oceti Sakowin Two Spirits, LGBTQ+, and Supporters, "This Land Was Made for Decolonized Love." *Indian Country Today* (online)

(rec): Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, Cheyenne, and Arapaho). "Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sexualities" (online video)

5. #BlackLivesMatter & State Racism: Racial Formation, Whiteness, Biopower, Necropolitics

Wed, Oct 31: Racialization, Whiteness, and Social Institutions

- Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Racial Formation" in *Racial Formation in the United States*

- George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness" in *American Quarterly*
- Michelle Alexander, "Introduction" to *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

(rec): Karen Brodtkin, excerpt from *How Jews Became White Folk* (on moodle only)

(rec): Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility" in *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* (on moodle only)

(rec): Zeus Leonardo, "The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the Discourse of 'White Privilege,'" *Educational Philosophy and Theory*

due Milestone 1: Project Proposal: Friday Nov 2nd (dropbox)

EVENT: FGSS Annual Symposium on HIV/AIDS, Black lives and health, queer historiographies, and writing practices with Linda Villarosa and Khary Polk | Friday, Nov. 2 @ noon

EVENT: AMERICAN STUDIES @ 50 Symposium with Jean O'Brien, Matt Jacobsen, Jasbir Puar, and others TBA

Mon, Nov 5: #BlackLivesMatter

- Patrisse Kahn-Cullors, *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (part 1)

Wed, Nov 7: *When They Call You a Terrorist*

- Patrisse Kahn-Cullors, *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*.

Mon, Nov 12: Biopower/Necropolitics

- Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended" in *Society Must Be Defended*
- Nancy Ordover, "Introduction" to *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism*
- Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman and Silvia Posocco, "Introduction" to *Queer Necropolitics*

(rec): Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, "Monster-Terrorist-Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots" *Social Text* (on moodle only)

(rec): Margot Weiss, "'Rumsfeld!': Consensual BDSM and 'Sadomasochistic' Torture at Abu Ghraib" in *Out in Public* (on moodle only)

Wed, Nov 14: TBD

Short Paper 4 due: Friday, Nov 16

6. Intersectional Queer Politics: Neoliberalism, Sex Politics, Solidarity

Mon, Nov 19: Neoliberalism and Sex Politics

- Margot Weiss, "Queer Politics in Neoliberal Times" *The Routledge History of Queer America*
- Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (Preface and start Part 1)

>>>THANKSGIVING<<<<

Mon, Nov 26: Times Square Red, Times Square Blue

- Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (finish)

(rec): Martin Manalansan, “Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City” in *Social Text*

EVENT: Christina Crosby (topic TBA) @ CHUM | Monday November 26

Wed, Nov 28: Intersectional Queer Politics, redux

- Abby Ferber, “Dismantling Privilege and Becoming an Activist” in *Privilege*
- Margot Weiss, “‘Reinvigorating the Queer Political Imagination’: A Roundtable with Ryan Conrad, Yasmin Nair, and Karma Chávez of Against Equality” *American Quarterly*
- Sara Ahmed, “A Killjoy Manifesto” and “A Killjoy Survival Kit” in *Living a Feminist Life*
- Combahee River Collective Statement and “Introduction” to *How We Get Free*
- Aimee Carrillo Rowe, “A Queer Indigenous Manifesto,” *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*

(rec): Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation” in *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (on moodle only)

(rec): Cathy Cohen. “Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” in *Black Queer Studies* (on moodle only)

Mon, Dec 3: conclusions

Wrap-up and final paper presentations

Milestone 3: First Draft: Monday, Dec 3rd in class (printed out)

EVENT: Alison Kafer (topic TBA) @CHUM | Monday December 3rd

Wed, Dec 5: last class

Wrap-up and final paper presentations

Final paper: due Dec 14th by 5pm (dropbox)