

AMST117: Social Norms/Social Power: Queer Readings of “Difference” in America

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This American Studies FYS 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 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" to the American Dream, the "wedding-industrial complex," sexual "deviance" and desire, racialized state violence, the privatization of the public space, and the politics of queer/LGBT activism.

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

Course Texts

*These **required** books are available at RJ Julia Bookstore and are also on reserve at the library (they are also available as e-books, via the link in the course Moodle).*

1. Eli Clare (2017), *Brilliant Imperfection*. Duke University Press. 9780822362876
2. Patrisse Kahn-Cullors (2018), *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*. St. Martin's Press. 9781250171085

*These **recommended** books we will be reading two+ chapters from – they are available as e-books on the library link, or you are welcome to purchase from the Bookstore:*

- Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings*
- C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*
- Kate Bornstein, *My New Gender Workbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Achieving World Peace Through Gender Anarchy and Sex Positivity*
- Julia Serrano, *Whipping Girl*
- Julian Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*
- adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*

All essays and articles are available on the course Moodle and also as a bound CoursePack that you can purchase using your portfolio.

Course Assignments

As a First Year Seminar, this course is structured to give you ample practice in the core writing, reading, discussion, and presentation skills you will need at Wesleyan.

- **Reading.** The reading load for the class is substantial and varied, to give you practice reading different styles and genres, and also to work on time management. I can promise you that it is manageable, but it will also be challenging. Some materials will be quick and fun, others will be dense and abstract – this range is part of it. A few times during the semester, you'll practice annotating .pdfs in Perusall with your peers, to help think about ways that taking notes might help you better process and retain information, and assist in your own reading practice. We'll be checking in regularly on reading, as this is a core part of the class.
- **Writing.** Writing assignments are regular and build upon each other. You'll write 4 short (3-page) essays, due every 2-3 weeks, and will receive feedback on these from me and from your peers in a peer review workshop. (You can skip one, and use that deadline to turn in your rewrite--see below.) The goal is to get a good sense of your own strengths and weakness as a writer, and figure out what you want to work on re. your writing over the course of the semester. While short and sweet (focused!) writing is essential, so is editing, revision, and longer writing projects. Toward this end, you'll practice rewriting by selecting one of those short papers to revise and turn in. You will also select one of the papers to expand—it will serve as the initial kernel for a longer (~8-page) final paper that will integrate additional research, giving you some practice in working on a longer project over several weeks, and a taste of library research. Writing is an essential aspect of our course, so we will devote time to 1-1 meetings to talk about writing, a peer review writing workshop during the semester, and I will make other writing resources available to you as the semester proceeds.
- **Discussion/Class Participation.** Finally, taking an active role in class discussions is another critical skill to develop at Wesleyan (especially in seminar classes). There are a few ways you will practice this skill in our class: first, and most essentially, you'll want to be an active participant during class, prepared and ready to ask questions and make productive comments, having marked passages that you want us to discuss together, and on board to do your part to contribute to the classroom as a space of collective and collaborative learning. There are some structured "research" elements to our class that will also give you practice bringing in material to expand class discussion. Second, you'll have the opportunity to serve as discussion leader at least once during the semester, leading your peers through a ~15-minute discussion of our readings. These are ways that you can practice being an active learner and also working on your own comfort with presenting and speaking in class, both formally and informally.

I will give you additional information about each of these parts of the class as we go along.

Grading mode

This course is offered Credit/Unsatisfactory to help you step away from evaluative modes of "learning" and instead support you in prioritizing skill-building, taking risks, trying new things—actual learning. Cr/U does not mean that this is an easy course. It *does* mean that you will not get letter grades on any of your work – instead, you'll get feedback on what you did well and what could be improved, and you will be asked to periodically review your own progress toward your goals. I know that, in our neoliberal education system, grades and credentialing are hard mindsets to take a break from, but I hope you make the most of this relatively risk-free opportunity to focus on your own learning priorities and skills.

A Note on Our Seminar: Let's pledge to be patient and kind with each other in these challenging times. One of the best things about a Wesleyan seminar is being able to think together, learn from and challenge each other, as the classroom becomes a space of disagreement and debate, as well as agreement, laughter, and shared insights. This kind of space doesn't just happen; it is something we need to build together, proactively. So if there are things that are not working for you –format, class dynamics, work or reading load – and/or if you have ideas for making our class better, please bring them to me!

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 serious, in which case we should have a more detailed conversation that will likely include your Class Dean. Missing more than 5 classes is grounds for No Credit.

Policy on extensions: I have found that extensions can be worse for the procrastinators and anxious among us (myself included), and a crappy draft of a paper that you can go back to is often better than a "perfect" one that is never turned in. Therefore, in a typical semester, I discourage extensions (except for emergencies or as accommodations). However, this semester there is the small matter of the Global Pandemic. So, if you are having any difficulty with deadlines, please be in touch.

Office Hours: I have set office hours Mondays and Tuesdays both on Zoom and in person; schedule an appointment using my online calendar: <http://calendly.com/margot-weiss>. If you cannot make any of my available times, email me and we will work out an alternative time to meet. You can talk to me about course material or any concerns or ideas you might have – or sign up to just say hi and chat so we can get to know each other a bit!

Disability Policies: I am including the official Wesleyan statement below, but please know that I want to work with you on access issues that might fall outside of these "official" channels. If there is anything that might make our class more accessible for you, please let me know.

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, room 021, or can be reached by email (accessibility@wesleyan.edu) or phone (860-685-2332).

Religious/Spiritual Observance Resources: If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations such as attending class, taking examinations, or submitting assignments, you can work directly with me to make reasonable arrangements. Should you require additional support or guidance, please feel free to reach out to Rabbi David Teva, Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at dleipziger@wesleyan.edu or any of the chaplains in the [Office of Religious and Spiritual Life](#).

Title IX Resources: If trauma inhibits your ability to fully participate in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Title IX Coordinator, at dcolucci@wesleyan.edu, or your class dean. Additionally, if you are comfortable, you can work directly with me to make reasonable arrangements.

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

0. Course Introduction Key terms: Norms, Normal, Privilege, Power, Subject

Mon, Sept. 6: Introduction

About this class. Getting to know each other. Unpacking the Knapsack(s). Class goals and personal goals. Writing resources.

Wed, Sept. 8: Intersectionality and Identity

Read before class:

- 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*

Research before class:

- Watch or read something by Kimberle Crenshaw on intersectionality (interview, keynote lecture, podcast, her original research article "Mapping the Margins"...) (rec): Amber Hollibaugh, "Queers Without Money" *Village Voice* (rec): Dorothy Allison, "A Question of Class" *History is a Weapon*

Mon, Sept. 13: Norms and Power

Read before class:

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

Group Annotation before class (Perusall):

- Elizabeth Stephens, "Normal" *TSQ* (rec): Mary Poovey, "Sex in America," in *Critical Inquiry* (rec): Robert McRuer, "Normal" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

1. Embodiment and Crip Theory: Normativity and Normalcy, Disability, Impairment, Compulsory Able-Bodiedness, Cure
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Wed, Sept. 15: Introduction to Disability Studies

Read before class:

- Simi Linton, "What Is Disability Studies?" *PLMA*
 - Robert McRuer, "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence" *Disability Studies Reader*
 - Sami Schalk, "Critical Disability Studies as Methodology" *Lateral* (rec): Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, "Disability" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*
- In-class: Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back; Sins Invalid

Mon, Sept. 20: *Brilliant Imperfection*

Read before class:

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

Wed, Sept. 22: *Brilliant Imperfection*

Read before class:

- Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection* (finish)

Short Paper #1 due: Friday, Sept. 24

Mon, Sept. 27: Peer Workshop

1-1 meetings with me // colleagues and check-in

<p style="text-align: center;">2. Marriage and the American Dream: Ideology, Heteronormativity, Homonormativity, Neoliberalism</p>

Wed, Sept. 29: Ideology and Heteronormativity

Group Annotation before class (Perusall):

- Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy*

Read before class:

- 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*
(rec): Tavia Nyong'o, "Subject" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*
In class: "heteronormativity" from "Sex in Public"

Mon, Oct. 4: The Wedding-Industrial Complex and the Heterosexual Imaginary

Read before class:

- Chrys Ingraham, "Lifting the Veil" and "The Wedding Industrial Complex" in *White Weddings*.
"Romancing the Clone" recommended. E-book available via library link.

Research before class:

- Any aspect of the "Wedding Industrial Complex" (bridal mags, industry stats, websites, etc.)
- (rec): Elizabeth Freeman, "Marriage" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

Wed, Oct. 6: Queer Critique of Samesex Marriage

Read before class:

- Michael Warner, "Normal and Normaller: Beyond Gay Marriage" in *GLQ*
 - "Is Gay Marriage Racist?" from *That's Revolting*
- in class: Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex" charmed circle

Mon, Oct 11: Neoliberalism + Homonormativity

Read before class:

- Margot Weiss, "Queer Politics in Neoliberal Times" *Routledge History of Queer America*
 - Martin Manalansan, "Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City" *Social Text*
 - Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism" in *Materializing Democracy* (to p. 179)
- (rec): Lisa Duggan, "Neoliberalism" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

Wed, Oct 13: Neoliberal Multiculturalism + Diversity

Read before class:

- Jodi Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism" *Social Text* (focus on pp. 1, 13-20)

Group Annotation before class (Perusall):

- Sara Ahmed, "Embodying Diversity: Problems and Paradoxes for Black Feminists," *Race Ethnicity and Education*
- (rec): Jodi Melamed, "Diversity" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

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

Wed, Nov. 3: Queer Indigenous Studies: Two Spirit

Read before class

- Deborah A. Miranda (Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation, Chumash), "Extermination of the Joyas: Gendercide in Spanish California" *GLQ*
- Jenny L. Davis (Chickasaw), "'More Than Just 'Gay Indians': Intersecting Articulations of Two-Spirit Gender, Sexuality, And Indigenoussness" in *Queer Excursions*

Group Annotation before class (Perusall):

- James Thomas Stevens (Akwesasne Mohawk), "Poetry & Sexuality: Running Twin Rails" *GLQ*

(rec): Scott Lauria Morgensen, "Unsettling Queer Politics: What Can Non-Natives Learn from Two-Spirit Organizing?" In *Queer Indigenous Studies*

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

(rec): J. Kēhaulani Kauanui: "Marriage is a Colonial Imposition" (video)

(rec): Robert Warrior, "Indian" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

(rec): J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Indigenous" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

Mon, Nov. 8: Decolonizing Queer

Read/Research before class:

- Online essays/videos on decolonizing and/or queer beyond "settler sexualities": might include
 - Alexandria Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree Nation). "Two-spirit people, body sovereignty, and gender self-determination." *Red Rising Magazine*
 - Oceti Sakowin Two Spirits, LGBTQ+, and Supporters, "This Land Was Made for Decolonized Love." *Indian Country Today*
 - Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, Cheyenne, and Arapaho). "Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sexualities"
 - Hannah Manshel, "Settler Fantasies, Televised" *Public Books*

(rec): Scott Lauria Morgensen. "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities," *GLQ*

Short Paper 4 due: Tuesday, Nov 9

<p style="text-align: center;">5. #BlackLivesMatter: Racism, Racial Capitalism, Neoliberalism, Whiteness, Biopower, Necropolitics</p>
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Wed, Nov. 10: Racial Geographies, Racial Capitalism

Watch before class:

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Geographies of Racial Capitalism" with (video)
- Robin D. G. Kelley, "What is Racial Capitalism and Why Does it Matter?" (video)

Read before class:

- George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness" in *American Quarterly*
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Predatory Inclusion" in *n+1*

(rec): Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Racial Formation" *Racial Formation in the United States* (in class: race, racism, racialization)

(rec): Jodi Melamed, "Racial Capitalism" *Critical Ethnic Studies*

(rec): Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property" *Harvard Law Review*

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

(rec): Daniel Martinez HoSang and Oneka LaBennett, "Racialization" in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

Mon, Nov 15: #BlackLivesMatter

Read before class:

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

Wed, Nov 17: *When They Call You a Terrorist*

Read before class:

- Patrisse Kahn-Cullors, *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (II)
- (rec): Liat Ben-Moshe, "Introduction" to *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition*

Mon, Nov 22: Biopower

Read before class:

- Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended" in *Society Must Be Defended*
- Nancy Ordovery, "Introduction" to *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism*
- Dean Spade, "Administering Gender" in *Normal Life*

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Mon, Nov 29: Necropolitics

Read before class:

- Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman and Silvia Posocco, "Introduction" to *Queer Necropolitics*

Group Annotation before class (Perusal!):

- Sabrina Strings, "Obese Black Women as 'Social Dead Weight': Reinventing the 'Diseased Black Woman'" *Signs*

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

Short Paper 5 due: Tuesday Nov 30

<p>6. Conclusion: Intersectional Queer Politics, Sex, Solidarity, Care</p>
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Wed, Dec. 1: Carework, Disability Justice, and Radical Solidarity

Read (around) before class ONE of the following:

- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (E-book available via library link)
- adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (E-book available via library link)

(rec): Sami Schalk, "Coming to Claim Crip: Disidentification with/in Disability Studies" *DSQ*

Mon, Dec. 6: Intersectional Queer Politics, redux

Read/Research before class (read one or two, or find your own):

- 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*

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

(rec): Siobhan B. Somerville, “Queer” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

1-1 meetings this week on final paper

Wed, Dec. 8: Course Wrap-up

Reading period: Dec 11-14: I am available for office hours.

Final paper due: Dec 18 by 5pm (last moment of exam week)