

Virtual COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

Women's and Gender Studies and Gender & Health



Friday, April 30, 2021
10:00 AM ET



Program

The Class of 2021

Women's and Gender Studies Majors

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Ruby C. Tapia
Chair, Department of Women's and Gender
Studies; Associate Professor, English
Language & Literature and Women's and
Gender Studies

Alyson Chatterjee
Hana Chung
Le'Elle Davis
Mallory Dwortz
Ava Katherine Easterwood
Brianna Giese
Paige Guyott
Stella Hackett
Rita Mei Hathaway
Samantha Havela
Munna Hazime
Sarahi Hernandez
Raegan A Himebauch
Kiernan E Huls
Cheyanne Killin

Lucy Loch
Tessa Magsoudi
Juan Marquez
Madison Petersen
Amy Ransom
Quinn A Riley
Madeleine Ripple
Olivia Robinson
Sanjana Sathrasala
Sydney Smith
Catherine Stonesifer
Osa A Svensson
Angelica Tome
Jada Wimberly
Marisa Wright

Remarks and Awards

Sara McClelland
Director of Undergraduate Studies;
Associate Professor, Women's and Gender
Studies and Psychology

Recognition of Honors Theses

Sara McClelland

Gender & Health Majors

Recognition of the Class of 2021

Sara McClelland and Donna Ainsworth,
Administrative Specialist and
Undergraduate Coordinator

Sameerah Adams
Sidney Aloisi
Katherine Baron
Jordyn Boggan
Sara Carretero
Jolyna Chiangong
Janeeva Clark
Dipita Das
Nirja Dave
Eleanor C Drake
Olivia Drlik
Kelsey Emerson
Viviana Flores
Valerie Garcia
Elaine Garjo
Margaret Greer
Evangeline Marie Grobbel
Dalia Harris
Sarina Johnson
Andrea Johnson

Olivia Keden
Alysha Loraff
Mariel Odette Manzor
Isabel Martinez
Shreya Mullapudi
Isabel Murray
Estrella Olivares
Pooja Patel
Zoe Patinkin
Gillian Rubenstein
Jillian Solomon
Margaux Sorenson
Hannah Stangis
Qwantayvious Stiggers
Reagan Taylor
Izziah Ramzi Thabath
Riley Thompson
Lillian Tushman
Claire Washnock-Schmid
Joanna F Wasvary

Closing Remarks

Ruby C. Tapia

Feminist Practice Award

Every year, the Department of Women's and Gender Studies presents the Feminist Practice Award to majors or minors in the department whose work in community service or social action best exemplifies the application of feminist thought to practice.

2021 Award Recipient: Lunar Doula Collective

The winner of the 2021 Feminist Practice Award is the Lunar Doula Collective (LDC), Michigan's first pregnancy loss and abortion doula organization. Founded by undergraduate students Brianna Giese (they/them) and Anna Stabnick (she/her), the Lunar Doula Collective provides emotional, psychological, and logistical support to people who are experiencing reproductive loss through miscarriage, stillbirth, or abortion. Within the short period of one year, members of the collective conducted an impressive amount of research, compiled a comprehensive reproductive loss support literature review, and interviewed dozens of community leaders and stakeholders. Based on their findings, they partnered with a local hospital to develop a volunteer program, recruited and trained 55 volunteer lunar doulas, and started a complementary campus club with over 40 active students. A model for inclusivity, LDC embraces and enacts reproductive health equity for all humans regardless of sexual, racial, and gender identities, and demonstrates an exemplary application of feminist principles to health care practices.

Dorothy McGuigan Prizes

Each year the Women's and Gender Studies Department awards prizes for the best undergraduate and graduate essays on women written at the University of Michigan. The prizes honor the memory of Dorothy Gies McGuigan, a distinguished alumna of the University of Michigan who taught in the School of Business Administration and the Residential College. Essays are evaluated by an interdisciplinary committee for their contribution to our understanding of some aspect of women's lives or roles, as well as for their originality and clarity of presentation.

Undergraduate Prize

Osa Svensson

Shirley Hauser: Invisibility of Trans Life and Obsessions With Trans Death

In the powerful essay, Women's and Gender Studies senior Osa Svensson carefully considers the life, death, and afterdeath of Shirley Hauser, a white trans woman who lived in North York, Ontario from 1957 to 1978. The essay is beautifully crafted, both aesthetically and intellectually. Svensson's sophisticated analysis draws upon a wide range of interdisciplinary sources to build a compelling argument about a life and an archive. With a strong and courageous authorial voice, Svensson does not shy away from posing difficult, yet urgent, questions. How do we understand the twinning of invisibility and hyper-visibility for trans women, especially in death? How do we write without, and against, formal archives?

Dorothy McGuigan Prizes, cont'd.

How can historians recover trans histories without contributing to the objectification of trans peoples, especially trans women? Svensson is not afraid to think differently, and to imagine trans histories outside of traditional archives. Her essay is imaginatively conceived and tightly argued. Svensson sees and honors Shirley Hauser in this award-winning essay.

Honors Theses

Margaret Greer

Fear From Gay to Z: A Study of U.S. Gay Sex Panics in the Context of Epidemics, Moral Contagion, and Zombies

Advisor: Prof. Benjamin Paloff

Second Reader: Prof. Henry M. Cowles

In a renewed period of epidemics, it has become clear that the outcome of an epidemic is dependent on how society reacts to it, and that this response is based on social and moral expectations of the public. In literature, zombie narratives illustrate the worst-case scenario of an apocalyptic viral outbreak. While extreme and fictitious, zombies are used as an exaggerated representation of actual societal fears. This narrative, therefore, can be a helpful tool to both reflect and better understand the actual fears, events, and societal reactions of an era. In this paper, I will focus on the comparison between zombie narratives and the narratives created and acted upon during the Lavender Scare and the AIDS epidemic against individuals suspected of being gay. As demonstrated in the fears of the zombie narrative, the creation and fear of an "Other" – who is seen as a potential threat to society itself – was a key representation of gay people in both of these eras. Through the comparison of U.S. moral fears and exaggerated literary fears of the "Other," one can better understand the resulting moral panics and reactionary discrimination faced by the "Othered" gay community.

Cheyenne Killin

"I Don't Think They Can Help Me": Exposing Abuse in Patient-Provider Interactions for Women with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and Informing a Framework for Change

Advisor: Prof. Abigail Dumes

Second Reader: Prof. Jane Schubart

Chronic illness, especially for those with rare conditions, is an emotional, mental, and physical battle. It is often expected that medical providers should provide a supportive hand throughout this journey, but this is not always a reality. As has been documented in medical literature, women with the Ehlers-Danlos Syndromes (EDS), a set of rare genetic connective tissue disorders, often have complex relationships with their medical care provider(s) and the institution of Western medicine. Existing literature on Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome has neglected to recognize the individuality of these relationships and has not sufficiently represented the patient's perspective. Using patient interviews, I first sought to include lived experiences in an evaluative framework as a form of representation and, instead, found significant instances of treatment dismissal, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and malpractice. When combined

Honors Theses, cont'd.

with intersectional feminist and sociological theories, these harms outline a grave danger for women with EDS within their care and inform a novel evaluative model that can be used to create more equitable and supportive systems of care.

Tessa Magsoudi

Bathing in Blood: An Analysis of the Maternal Body, Nonreproduction, and the Abject in Art

Advisor: Prof. Megan Sweeney

Second Reader: Prof. Petra Kuppers

Performance art is a powerful political tool of communication for the exploited and marginalized. This is why earth body artists, like Ana Mendieta and María Evelia Marmolejo, have used performance art to challenge cycles of representation that perpetuate the oppression and commodification of the maternal body and earth. As part of my thesis, I created my own performance art piece that explores my individual experience with being a “natural” maternal body, specifically related to abortion, in dialogue with both artists. This thesis analyzed how patriarchal and racial capitalism constructs the maternal body as a source of sexual pleasure, domestic labor, and labor in the workforce. I further explore how each artist has used their bodies and the land as sites of resistance against oppressive reproductions of the Maternal.

Mariel Manzor

Expecting During the Unexpected: The Experiences of Pregnant Women During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Advisor: Prof. Joanne Bailey

Second Reader: Prof. Cynthia Gabriel

This thesis documents the prenatal and postpartum experiences as well as the birth stories of women during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is framed within the wider context of caring for pregnant women during challenging times as well as how the healthcare system and broader society should best support them. Using personal interviews with women from various backgrounds, I documented their first-hand experiences during their prenatal care, their labor and delivery process, and postpartum care. I focused on what women wished was available to them in terms of support, resources, and information as well as the ways they coped with having a child during the COVID-19 pandemic. My analysis used a double-hermeneutic feminist narrative analysis. Utilizing this framework ensured that these stories were purposely told within historical, structural, and ideological contexts and the agency, voice, and identities of storytellers were centralized. Looking forward, this information can be used to inform health professionals on how to better support pregnant women and to emphasize listening to first-hand experiences within the wider discussion of improving maternal health outcomes.

Quinn Riley

Fleabag Feminism: Looking at Gaze Theory Through Television’s Liberated 21st Century Female

Advisor: Prof. Ruth Tsoffar

Second Reader: Prof. Jason Fitzgerald

Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s *Fleabag* depicts the life of a young woman as she navigates sex, love, and loss in London. Through the lens of Laura Mulvey’s “Gaze Theory” and Roxane Gay’s *Bad Feminist*, this thesis sought to examine the relationship between the heroine and the audience in order to better understand the cultural pressures around being a “perfect” feminist. Fleabag’s desire of being told what to eat, what to like, what to hate, what to rage about and so forth can be understood as an analogy to a 21st century culture that emphasizes being “the best,” making the “right” choices, and being a “good” feminist, all attributes of a society that constantly watches for vulnerabilities and individual flaws. This relationship with the audience is twofold—it is used by Fleabag as a source of validation, but it is also pushed away at various points in order for Fleabag to experience the world on her own. Fleabag’s choice to part with the audience at the end of the series confirms her growth and newfound ability to love herself and her own decisions and opinions. This analysis identifies and pushes back on external validation and “ideal” feminist standards, two pitfalls of the stereotypical “liberated” female.

Gillian Rubenstein

Empowering Biological Reproductive Decision-Making for Transgender Men: Evaluating the Impact of Exogenous Testosterone on Extraovarian Structures Using a Transgender Mouse Model

Advisor: Prof. Ariella Shikanov

Second Reader: Prof. Anna Kirkland

Background: 1.4 million Americans identify as transgender and some transmasculine individuals elect to use gender-affirming hormones, such as testosterone (T). Little research exists about the impact of long-term T on reproductive organs. One tenet of the Reproductive Justice framework is the “right to have children” which involves making informed healthcare decisions about fertility.

Research Question: How does T impact extraovarian structures in a mouse model of the gender-affirming T given to transgender men?

Study Design: Female mice were treated with exogenous T or oil control for 6 weeks, mice were sacrificed, and ovaries were harvested. The morphology of the oviduct and rete ovarii were evaluated following hematoxylin and eosin staining, Periodic Acid-Schiff’s staining, and androgen receptor immunohistochemistry.

Results: The epithelial cell layer in the rete ovarii was elongated after T-treatment, while the oviduct appeared unchanged. Androgen receptor expression appeared in both structures.

Conclusions: It appears T can impact the morphology of the rete ovarii and potentially androgen receptor response in the rete ovarii and oviduct, supporting further laboratory and clinical investigation. Outcomes of this study can add to existing knowledge necessary to inform decision-making related to biological reproduction in transgender men and are in conversation with efforts to produce feminist scientific research.

Sydney Leigh Smith

Gendered Patterns in Public Displays of State-Perpetrated Sexual Violence: A Rwandan Case Study

Advisor: Prof. Rhagnhild Nordås

Second Reader: Prof. Sueann Caulfield

Scholars have established four central theories addressing the causes of state-perpetrated sexual violence during conflict – gender inequality, opportunism/greed, ethnic hatred, and combatant socialization. These theories were examined in Rwanda while identifying patterns unique to men and women in public displays of sexual violence. I created a detailed coding method to identify these gendered patterns in 100 redacted International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) witness testimonies. Analysis of witness testimonies revealed the following gendered patterns for women victims: 1) prevalence of gang rape and multiple perpetrators, 2) an audience beyond perpetrators, and 3) repeated sexual violence over a period of time. Men victims experienced: 1) mutilative forms of sexual violence, 2) an audience post-mortem (witnesses to violence after death), and 3) isolated incidents of sexual violence. I argue that gender is relevant across all conflicts and it impacts not only how sexual violence occurs, but why it occurs, including whether it is intended or subconsciously used to forward other motives. Ultimately, I emphasize the importance of inclusive coding methods in conflicts beyond Rwanda to help reveal a more comprehensive understanding of how sexual violence is carried out across genders and why the state may utilize sexual violence during conflict.

Marisa Wright

“The Pink Wave” in 2018: Democratic Women Candidates’ Motivations to Run for Congress and the Future of Women’s Political Representation

Advisor: Prof. Lisa Disch

Second Reader: Prof. Elizabeth Wingrove

In 2018, women ran for office at record numbers. This study seeks to understand the motivating factors of Democratic women running for Congress in 2018 as a method of revealing insights about the future of women’s political representation in the U.S. It investigates the role of three primary motivating factors in driving women to run for office: (1) anger at the election of Donald Trump, (2) a basis of inspiration via the role model effect, and (3) support from women-focused political groups, while also accounting for alternative motivating factors. Using primary sources, including newspapers and books, I categorized women candidates’ expressed motivations and found that the most cited motivating factor was anger at Trump’s election and administration. Because motivation related to Donald Trump is context specific and may not be replicated in near future elections, it is unlikely that there will be a similarly large surge of women running and being elected in the near future. However, results from the 2020 election indicate that the outcome of 2018 — a record number of women elected to Congress — is generative in that it will yield a somewhat steady growth in women’s political representation over the next several elections.

Congratulations, Class of 2021!

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