

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Gender and Diversity Studies

Name coordinator:	Sophie Withaecx s.withaecx@maastrichtuniversity.nl
Full period of this minor:	1-3
ECTS credits in total of this minor:	24/30*
<i>* Registration only allowed for modules 1+2 (24 ECTS) or for all 3 modules (30 ECTS)</i>	
Language of instruction:	English
Teaching methods:	PBL tutorials, lectures
Assessment methods:	Oral presentations, Written assignments, Research papers

Keywords

Ageing; Art and activism; Black feminism; Class; Colonialism and coloniality; Critical race studies; Decoloniality; Difference and diversity; Disability; Ethnicity; Feminist theory; Gender studies; Identity politics; Inequality; Intersectionality;; Minoritarian knowledge; Orientalism; Performativity; Postcolonial studies; Queer studies; Race and racism;; Sexuality; Sexual nationalism; Social justice; Transgender studies; Whiteness studies.

Description of the minor

How do gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, religion, social class, and other categories of difference impact life in the twenty-first century? How have these differences been shaped and reshaped historically in the intertwined contexts of colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and modern science? How do individual and collective differences become social inequalities under the impact of structures of power, privilege, and oppression? And how do academics, artists, and activists respond to and resist historical and contemporary forms of sexism, racism, homo- and transphobia, speciesism, and other systems of domination?

This minor serves as an introduction to gender and diversity studies, an interdisciplinary field that critically examines how gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, religion, class, disability and other “crucial differences” are constituted and operate both at the level of individual personal experiences and as social systems of power and inequality. Taking an intersectional approach to the study of multiple differences and inequalities, the minor provides students with the conceptual and methodological tools necessary for analysing how categories of differentiation interact on the different levels of social, political, economic, and cultural life. Designed to

include both historical and contemporary contexts, the minor is of interest for students who want to know more about the history and dynamics of social and cultural differences and the origins of important (in)equalities in the contemporary world.

The minor is a contribution from the Centre for Gender and Diversity (CGD) to the BA programmes at Maastricht University, meant to complement and enrich them with critical perspectives rooted in gender studies and feminist theory, queer and trans studies, post- and decolonial studies, and more. The programme consists of a sequence of three clearly aligned, interdisciplinary courses which together provide insight into (1) the making of crucial differences and inequalities from the Enlightenment onwards up until the early 20th century; (2) the complex dynamics and interactions of these multiple differences/inequalities in various topical cases in the present; and (3) intersections of age and disability by applying intersectionality theory to an analysis of cultural artefacts

All three courses build on historical or contemporary case studies, from the historical “Jewish question” as the litmus test of enlightened universalism to the “Muslim question” and the rise of Islamophobia and new forms of (homo)nationalism today; from Orientalist representations of the harem in the Western colonial imagination to the role of “white innocence” in pro-refugee activism in twenty-first century Europe, and more. The courses are suited for students from the humanities and social sciences, as well as students from other disciplinary or interdisciplinary backgrounds with an interest in gender and diversity studies. The minor is fully taught in English and it welcomes students from other faculties as well as exchange students.

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Course A: The Making of Crucial Differences

Course code: MCD3000

Course period: 1

ECTS credits of this course: 12

Full course description

The Making of Crucial Differences offers a historical perspective on the ways in which the social categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality have made a difference, from the Enlightenment up to the mid-twentieth century, with a prelude that deals with early modernity. The course introduces students to seminal approaches within gender studies, postcolonial studies, and queer theory as critical lenses for analysing different historical case studies. The course inquires into the ways in which dominant Western discourses of identity have formed divisions between self and other, black and white, the Orient and the West, male and female, hetero- and homosexual, upper and lower class. In other words, it explores how these differences served to construct and maintain cultural hierarchies and social inequalities. The historical perspective of this introductory course implies a sustained focus on the co-construction of gender, sexuality, race, and class as categories that shaped – and were shaped by – the entangled histories of capitalism, colonialism, slavery, and modern science.

The course combines an intersectional theoretical perspective with Michel Foucault's discursive approach to the analysis of power and knowledge, and asks how gender, sexuality, race, and class were conceptualized within and against the dominant discourses of Western modernity. The purported aim of the modern age was to liberate human beings from fear and oppression, installing them as masters of nature. The Enlightenment fought for liberty, democracy, and equality, yet at the same time it reinstalled dynamic patterns of inclusion and exclusion that continue to structure and divide society today. One could argue that the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment never quite managed to live up to its own standards. The course thus highlights the paradoxes of major modern progress narratives, while at the same time affirming the capacity of minoritarian knowledge production to negotiate, resist, and survive systemic racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and classism.

Intended learning outcomes

Upon completion of this course students are able:

- to demonstrate an understanding of seminal approaches within historical gender studies, postcolonial studies, and queer theory;

- to examine how historical configurations of gender, social class, race, and sexuality have operated as systems of power and inequality in a variety of contexts from early modernity up to the mid-twentieth century;
- to evaluate current narratives, discursive figures, and practices in light of their lengthy historical genealogy;
- to take part in seminal academic and societal debates within historical gender and diversity studies through oral and written modes of communication.

Prerequisites

None

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Course B: Crucial Differences in the 21st Century

Course code: MCD3001

Course period: 2

ECTS credits of this course: 12

Full course description

Crucial Differences in the 21st Century examines the complex interactions between gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, and species difference in the contemporary world. Through a critical inquiry into various topical cases as well as major theoretical texts within contemporary gender and diversity studies, the course traces the multiple ways in which identity and difference, inclusion and exclusion, equality and inequality are produced and reproduced in ongoing flows of negotiation and transformation. The course is rooted in intersectional approaches as developed primarily by Black and of colour feminists, and combines critical race theory, queer and trans studies, decolonial theory, and other critical frameworks that link together academic scholarship and grassroots activism. It thus aims to help students develop the twenty-first century skills and competencies necessary for understanding, navigating, and resisting current forms of sexism, racism, homo- and transphobia, speciesism, and other systems of domination.

The emergence of various social movements during the 1960s and 1970s – including the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, the free speech movement, and LGBT+ activism – serves as a historical and conceptual starting point of the course. Special attention is directed to how intersectional feminisms and queer activism have challenged the identity politics of mainstream social justice movements, and to the implications of these interventions for academic knowledge production. Subsequently, the course looks into the entangled workings of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and other “crucial differences” through a variety of current case studies. From anti-gender and anti-trans attacks in the context of the ongoing rise of the far right worldwide to decolonial resistance to the stigmatization of intersexuality, from the rise of Dutch homonationalism to queer environmental activism in the ecosexual movement, the course critically examines the manifold dynamics of difference, power, and inequality in the twenty-first century. Simultaneously, the course traces a future landscape of possibility for minoritarian subjects – including women, queer and trans people, persons of colour and Indigenous people, as well as a range of nonhuman “others” – by mapping critical strategies of resistance, resilience, and social justice

Intended learning outcomes

Upon completion of this course students are able:

- to demonstrate an understanding of current theoretical approaches within gender studies, decolonial studies, and queer studies;
- to examine how contemporary configurations of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, and other categories of difference operate as systems of power and inequality in a variety of contexts in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries;
- to analyse the dynamics through which multiple forms of identity and difference, inclusion and exclusion, equality and inequality are produced and reproduced by applying intersectionality as a critical theory and method;
- to identify and take part in topical academic and societal debates within contemporary gender and diversity studies;
- to construct and carry out an effective research design for an undergraduate research paper within the field of gender and diversity studies.

Prerequisites

Course MCD3000 The Making of Crucial Differences

Course C: Crucial Intersections of Disability and Age

Course code: MCD3005

Course period: 3

ECTS credits of this course: 6

Full course description

The course “Crucial Intersections of Disability and Age,” will offer an introduction to critical disability studies and age(ing) studies. The course will be organized around theories and concepts such as compulsory able-bodiedness/mindness and compulsory youthfulness, chrononormativity and queer and crip futurity, repairing metaphors, transhumanism versus posthumanism, and indigenous perspectives. These will be discussed while analyzing cultural artifacts such as graphic novels, films, TV series, novels, poetry, short stories, blogs, and websites.

Intended learning outcomes

- Deepen your knowledge of intersectionality theory, acquired during the P1 and P2 course, by focusing on the intersection of disability and age.
- Understand key texts from critical disability and age(ing) studies.
- Apply the insights from critical disability and age(ing)studies to selected cultural artifacts discussed in the tutorials as well as in a portfolio kept over a period of 4 weeks.
- Position yourself in related critical academic and societal debates.

Prerequisites

Courses MCD3000 The Making of Crucial Differences and MCD3001 Crucial Differences in the 21st Century