

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Gender and Diversity Studies

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Full period of this minor:	1-3
ECTS credits in total of this minor:	24/30*
Language of instruction:	English
Teaching methods:	PBL tutorials, lectures
Assessment methods:	Presentation, Take home exam, Research paper

Keywords

Art and activism; Black feminism; Class; Colonialism and coloniality; Critical race studies; Decoloniality; Difference and diversity; Ethnicity; Feminist theory; Gender studies; Hegemonic masculinity; Identity politics; Inequality; Intersectionality; Life writing; Minoritarian knowledge; Orientalism; Performativity; Postcolonial studies; Qualitative interviewing; Queer studies; Race and racism; Religion; 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 modernscience? 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- andtransphobia, 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, 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 gender and other categories 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, postcolonial 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 catastrophe of the Shoah; (2) the complex dynamics and interactions of these multiple differences/inequalities in various topical cases in the present; and (3) the ways in which individual and collective differences are represented, reflected, and performed through practices of life writing and auto/biographical narratives.

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 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 inquiry into the development of important social differences marked through categories like gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, and social class from the Enlightenment until the mid-twentieth century. The course introduces students to seminal approaches within gender studies, postcolonial studies, and queer theory as critical lenses for analysing different historical case studies, philosophical texts, and literary works. Specifically, the course looks 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, middle, and lower classes; and how

these differences were used to maintain cultural hierarchies and social inequalities. Special attention is directed to the co-construction of gender, sexuality, race, and class as categories that shaped—and were shaped by—the entangled histories of colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and modern science.

The course combines an intersectional theoretical perspective with a historical and discursive approach to the analysis of power and knowledge, and asks how gender, sexuality, race, class, and other crucial differences were conceptualized and “invented” both within and against the dominant discourses of Western modernity. The purported aim of the modern age was to achieve progress through rational, critical thinking and to liberate human beings from dogma, myth, and superstition. But while the Enlightenment promised liberty, democracy, and equality, at the same time it also has created dynamic patterns of inclusion and exclusion that continue to structure and divide society today. This ambivalent legacy of the Enlightenment is at the centre of this course. We will highlight the paradoxes of major modern progress narratives, and their entanglement with structures of power and inequality, while at the same time we will affirm the capacity of minoritarian knowledge production to negotiate, resist, and survive the violent realities of systemic racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and other intersecting forms of oppression.

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, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, and other categories of difference have operated as systems of power and inequality in a variety of contexts from the Enlightenment to the mid-twentieth century;
- to reflect on the ambivalent legacy of the Enlightenment and illustrate this with concrete examples;
- to evaluate current discursive figures, narratives, tropes, and practices in light of their *longue durée* and genealogy in history;
- 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 feminism, 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 the “headscarf debates” and anti-Muslim racism in France to the medicalisation of intersex bodies, from the rise of Dutch homonationalism to queer environmental activism in the emerging 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, postcolonial 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

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Course C: Crucially Different Lives

Course code: MCD3002

Course period: 3

ECTS credits of this course: 6

Full course description

Crucially Different Lives, Narrated Auto/Biographies is designed to explore life stories/histories and auto/biographical writing in relation to the construction of differences we have studied in course A and course B. The course aims to come closer to understanding multiple differences and inequalities through shifting the level of analysis to that of the individual self. Starting from the premise that the differences studied in the previous two courses are not just discursive constructions but also experienced and lived realities, the course explores how social and cultural scripts of identity and difference, of selfhood and “otherness”, are narrated, performed, and embodied at the level of auto/biographical memory. At the same time, it asks how scripts, norms, and stereotypes of “otherness” are contested and possibly transformed through auto/biographical practices. The course thus investigates the multiple ways in which gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, and other social categories intersect and interact

with one another in the formation of subjectivity and the storying of “different” selves.

The course combines an introduction to the field of subaltern studies—exemplified by the work of postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak—with current discussions of the history of the biographical method and the ethics of life writing. It also introduces students to qualitative interviewing and “memory work” as critical methodological tools for studying the auto/biographies of different (minoritarian) subjects and how the stories of their lives are told. How can individual and collective differences be read, interpreted, and written by the authors of another’s life? How are they narrated and acted in stories and performances of the self? In addressing these questions the course directs special attention to the connections between auto/biographical production and contemporary theorising about the subject within the fields of gender and diversity studies, life writing studies, and memory studies. As the final course in the minor, *Crucially Different Lives* furthermore provides students with the opportunity to mobilise the insights gained during the previous two courses by making use of them in analysing life stories and doing narrative interviews with a person of their own choosing.

Intended learning outcomes

Upon completion of this course students are able:

- to demonstrate an understanding of key concepts and methods from subaltern studies, life writing studies, and memory studies;
- to examine the narrative construction of different “selves” in a variety of auto/biographical texts and practices;
- to perform a close reading of various life writing documents, ranging from auto/biographical narratives and memoirs to film and literary fiction;
- to conduct a qualitative interview and reflect on the practical and ethical dimensions of qualitative interviewing as a research method;
- to apply the biographical method (including interviewing) in writing an undergraduate research paper within the field of gender and diversity studies.

Prerequisites

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