

Gender & Sexuality

Interdisciplinary Research Center for Gender and Sexuality Studies

The intellectual transformations of women's studies into gender studies, and gay and lesbian into sexuality and queer studies, since the late 1970s have produced a new interest in the social norms, cultural forms, and political regulations that shape sexual practices and gendered identities. This new interest converges with larger societal problems around globalization and localization, nationalism and the nation-state, inequality, and new configurations of identity that concern us all. These problems are frequently connected to issues of gender and sexuality (e.g., prostitution, human trafficking, labor movements, civil rights), and can often benefit from the theoretical and methodological insights developed within gender and sexuality studies. Whereas public debate is often mired by problematic and unrecognized assumptions, scholars in this field provide a much needed contexts for our understanding of these complex problems. Gender and sexuality scholarship has opened up the investigation into identity-producing mechanisms in everyday life, such as pleasure, affection, intimacy, love, and friendship. In addition, it has extricated gender from being simply a matter of the emancipation and visibility of women by problematizing categories such as masculinity, transgender, and intersex. It has reclaimed the body as an object of social research, locating it at the convergence of the subjective and the structural, and has foregrounded the relationship between gender and such categories as race. The contribution that gender and sexuality scholarship can make thus reaches well beyond the confines of understanding the aforementioned categories, and provides innovative approaches to a wide range of social and political dynamics, including those surrounding race, class, nationalism, ethnicity, religion, age, space, and other forms of social difference.

The new Interdisciplinary Research Center for Gender and Sexuality Studies in the context of the ASIR seeks to provide a forum for synergistic research and teaching at the University of Amsterdam, tapping on the state-of-the-art research that current staff member across disciplines are already engage in, and generating new collaborations. It builds on the productive and innovative gender studies tradition of interdisciplinarity and is situated institutionally at the heart of the social sciences, primarily sociology, anthropology, political science, social geography, and science and technology studies. It will situate UvA in an international academic context, enabling new international scholarly collaborations, providing intellectual visibility to current research, attracting new students at all levels, enabling timely interventions in public debates in the Netherlands, Europe, and beyond, and producing a lively intellectual community that integrates research and teaching.

Research at the Center will be organized around three broad themes, designed to be mutually enriching and self-transforming:

- *Institutions, public debates, politicized cultures, and citizenship*: In many contemporary societies, sexuality and gender are focal points of public and political debates: sex education, the division of labor at home and in the workplace, the display of identity markers in public places, and the rights of gays, lesbians, transgender people, and sex workers. Sexual politics is at the

heart of current debates on populism and right-wing politics, fundamentalism of all kinds, terrorism and international security. Political strategies both construct and are constructed by gendered and sexual practices in private and public settings, from bedrooms, families, and streets, to the workplace, in the political arena, in the media, as well as in schools, social movements, and civil organizations. Personal, social, political, and religious certainties and uncertainties about gender and sexuality lead to new forms of discipline and resistance on local and global levels. Theoretically and methodologically innovative research conducted at the Center focuses on concrete sexual and gendered practices in relation to social contexts, political institutions, and public debates.

- *Colonial, post-colonial, and globalized worlds:* Colonialism, post-coloniality, and globalization are inherently gendered, sexualized, and ethnically coded, although these features are often naturalized. The Center takes as a given the recognition that prescriptions of masculinity and femininity are far from universal and timeless. Rather, they are inherently unstable due to the particularities of time, place, and changing structures of power. Center researchers investigate these dynamics through the lens of state structures and the structures that challenge them, as well as through in the conduct of everyday life. The Center engages seriously with post-colonial theory and its emphasis on the mutual constitution of Self and Other. We emphasize that gender and sexuality are constitutive of migrations and other forms of transnational interactions in a global context, in a way that can be symbolic or material. Research at the Center seeks to theorize such dynamics as: gendered mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion; the way in which global flows are grounded in, aggravate, or contest pre-existing gender and sexual inequalities; and continuities and ruptures across time and space in gender and sexuality.
- *Medicine and other forms of knowledge production:* Biomedical knowledge and technology have become central to our daily lives. They do not only contribute to the quality of our lives, by combating and curing diseases and more generally through our experience of health and illness, but also shape who we are, through access to or exclusion from medical care and technology, as well as the construction of individuals, families, and populations at risk. Gender and sexuality, as well as race and class, have entertained a long and troubled history with biomedical knowledge and technology. At the same time, theoretical concepts and methods developed in scholarly work on sexuality, gender, and race are pivotal to understanding the dynamics of differences produced in medicine and the life sciences. In addition, what comes to count as knowledge or as medical care is by no mean neutral, but rather is structured along gendered, ethnic, and classed differences. Feminist, Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT), and anti-racist activists and scholars have critiqued the dominance of biomedical models and reclaimed sexuality, health, and the body as fields of expertise. Research at the Center takes stock of these insights and contributes to them with innovative research on the interaction among gender, sexuality, race, and biomedical practices across cultures.

These three broad themes are on the cutting edge of theoretical thinking on gender and sexuality specifically. More generally, they enable Center researchers to address

pressing social concerns in the practice of everyday life, both in local and global contexts.

The Center will encourage dialogue among diverse methodologies, from historical to ethnographic to discursive to survey approaches, and will be open to both analytic and interpretive research. Comparison will figure prominently in research activities conducted at the Center, whether across societies, social groups, or historical periods. Both macroscopic and microscopic methodologies will be represented, and research that explores the mutual constitution between them will be especially encouraged.

The Center will provide the intellectual coherence for teaching at the BA, MA, and PhD levels. At the BA and MA levels, we seek to develop both disciplinary and interdisciplinary courses with a focus on gender and sexuality, as well as encourage the embedding of a gender and sexuality perspective in the rest of curriculum of our respective disciplines. One of the long-term aims is to work towards the accreditation of the MA in Gender, Sexuality, and Society, which is the only social science program on gender and sexuality in the Netherlands, others being based in the humanities and focused on gender only. At the PhD level, the Center will provide an attractive environment for the recruitment of highly qualified AIOs and for successful funding applications from NWO and other sources.

Initially, the activities of the Interdisciplinary Research Center for Gender and Sexuality Studies will be intellectually driven, and will include seminar series, reading groups, grant-seeking endeavours, conferences, and invited lectures, through which participants will be encouraged to work collaboratively. These intellectual aims will then give rise to an institutional structure for the Center. The Center seeks to benefit from the long history of gender and sexuality studies at the University of Amsterdam and aims to rejuvenate this focus so as to make the university an obligatory passage point in the global circulation of knowledge on these issues.