

The Northeastern University Program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; the Forum on Feminist Thought; and the Feminist Theory 2.0 Collaborative Research Cluster Present

PLEASURE AND DANGER: SEXUAL FREEDOM AND FEMINISM NOW

A daylong symposium at Northeastern University

March 20, 2015 | 8:30 am – 5:00 pm
Northeastern University
Cabral Center, John D. O'Bryant African American Institute
40 Leon Street, Boston, MA

Reception to follow at the John D. O'Bryant African American Institute

Co-sponsored by the Northeastern University Humanities Center at the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, the School of Law, and the Departments of Communication Studies, English, History, Philosophy & Religion, Political Science, and Sociology & Anthropology

At the heart of the feminist project is a persistent concern with thinking through the “powers of desire” (Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson 1983) and expanding the potential for sexual and gender freedom and self-determination at the same time that we combat sadly persistent forms of sexual danger and violence. Exemplified in the US context by Carole Vance’s landmark collection, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, feminist debates over sex, gender, and society have been incendiary. First published in 1984, as proceedings of the infamous “Scholar and the Feminist” conference at Barnard, which initiated the equally infamous “sex wars,” this volume reproduced intense dialogue while also contributing to a much broader investigation of the politics (and pleasures, and dangers) of sexuality within feminist theory and culture. Articles that threw down gauntlets were subsequently canonized and celebrated. Much has changed since that explosive conference and book. Even the subtitle – “exploring female sexuality” – would now be more deeply interrogated (biologically female? presumptively heterosexual?) and certainly pluralized. But however reframed, the paradoxical joining that is “pleasure and danger” remains poignantly relevant.

This symposium engages transdisciplinary and transnational scholars and activists to address questions and debates provoked by the “pleasure and danger” couplet. Talks engage with the historical, the representational, the structural, and/or the intersectional. There are local and global questions to be asked and strategic arguments to be resolved. And the very terms are themselves constantly debated: whose pleasure are we speaking of and for? who is the “we” doing that speaking? who or what is imagined to be “in danger?”

Schedule of Events

Friday, March 20

8:30-9:00 am

Arrival and check-in

Coffee and light breakfast will be provided.

9:00 am – 9:15 am

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Suzanna Walters, Professor of Sociology and Program Director of WGSS, Northeastern University; Editor-in-Chief, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society

9:15 am – 11:00 am

The Political Economy of Sex and Gender

Moderator: *Denise Horn, Northeastern University*

Gender Violence and Reproductive Justice: Making the connections

Juli Grigsby, Northeastern University and Harvard University

Gender violence is commonly understood as sexual assault, rape, and intimate partner violence, but how do we think about *state initiated* policies and procedures that single out women or transbodies? Does the criminalization of abortion produce a form of gendered violence? What might we make of a police department's refusal to acknowledge the serial aspect of a killer targeting Black women? In this conversation I discuss that ways in which Black activist women develop a myriad of responses to state gendered violence. In particular, I discuss how more nuanced conversations about gendered violence can contribute to a broadening of reproductive justice discourses by evaluating the impact of policy and socio-economic conditions.

Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work

Kimberly Hoang, Boston College

Drawing on ethnographic research in exclusive Saigon hostess bars catering to high-end clientele, I examine Vietnam's diverse sex industry as it ascends the global and regional stage. By engaging both the sex workers and their clients, I show how Vietnamese high finance and benevolent giving are interconnected with the intimate spheres of the informal economy. For the domestic super-elite who channel foreign

capital into real estate and manufacturing projects, conspicuous consumption is a means for projecting an image of Asian ascendancy to potential investors. And for ethnic Vietnamese living abroad and Westerners who bring remittances into the local economy, personal relationships with local sex workers bolsters their ideas of Asia's rise and Western decline, while simultaneously recuperating their lost masculinity.

Sex Wars, Redux—or, what are we fighting against?

Margot Weiss, Wesleyan University

Here I address the need to rethink the "sex wars" logic when it comes to BDSM and sexual politics in general. Opening with the controversy around a "prison-themed" BDSM party at SF Pride (protested by many queer groups, while others deemed it "the sex wars all over again"), I will talk about the political problem of defending BDSM against the forces of feminism (censorship, etc.), when the real issue today has to do with the incorporation of sexual practices into commodity capitalism. The sex wars logic (which is still quite active today) acts as a sort of endless defense of our bodies and pleasures and desires against the wrong foe -- not (so much) other feminists, but the market, and the vicious extraction of profit from our potential pleasures.

We Cannot Live Without Our Lives: On Trans Women of Color, Overkilling & The Economy of Outrage

Reina Gossett, Barnard College

Here I discuss the growing movement for prison abolition and, in particular, focus on the ways in which refusing the logic of race and sex that underpin the criminalization and mass incarceration of specific communities can enable new alliances and political formations.

11:05am – 12:30 pm

Representing Desire

Moderator: *Laura Green, Northeastern University*

Queer Hierarchies: Gay Men of Color and Representations of Racial Desire

Chong-Suk Han, Middlebury College

As Peter Jackson has noted, racialized gay desires are not a form of cultural diversity, but “a tightly structured hierarchy in which white men are indisputably at the top of the sexual desirability stakes.” In this talk, I examine ways that the desirability of gay white men are constructed as “universally” desirable while the desirability of gay men of color

are constructed as something that is different, exotic, or something to be indulged and consumed as a “foreign” experience outside of “normative” sexual encounters.

Digital Desire: Black queer women's web series

Moya Bailey, Northeastern University

For queer people of color, web series produced digitally and made accessible on YouTube have allowed their communities to see themselves in ways that mainstream media outlets deny. Here I will discuss a few of these shows, examining their significance and continued challenges in changing the ways people imagine Black queer community.

New Media and Feminist Activism

Wagatwe Wanjuki, writer and anti-sexual assault activist

The digital era has played an integral part in bringing widespread attention to the reality of gendered violence - especially on college campuses. How do we use the ability to create and use new media about the realities of sexual violence without replicating the invisibility of the most marginalized that exists in traditional, mainstream media?

12:30-1:00

Get Lunch and reconvene

Lunch will be provided.

1:00pm-2:00 pm

Lunch and student activist panel

Moderator: *Sarah Jackson, Northeastern University*

Featuring an undergraduate student-activist panel with:

Sonia Banaszczyk (SSH & AMD '15, *Sociology & Communication Studies*)

Kate Frisher (SSH '15, *International Affairs*)

Daniela Gonzalez-Jatar (SSH '15, *Sociology & Anthropology*)

Sydney Mokel (SSH '19, *International Affairs*)

2:00pm-3:30pm

Yes means yes? Conceptualizing consent

Moderator: *Libby Adler, Northeastern University*

Why 'yes means yes' is better than 'no means no'

Michael Kimmel and Cliff Leek, Stony Brook University

Nationwide, campuses are shifting the standards of consent from "no means no" to "yes means yes." What does this imply? Is this the wettest blanket ever thrown over collegiate sex or is does it permit more egalitarian couplings? In feminist circles, we have long theorized the relationship between pleasure and danger. But what of pleasure and safety? Can "safe sex" be other than an oxymoron?

AfroLez®femcentric lens on consent and community accountability

Aishah Shahidah Simmons, Temple University

How does one conceptualize consent when their introduction to their own sexuality didn't include consent? How does one own their sexuality when there's so much shame and blame projected onto cisgender women who do? In my own anti-sexual violence work, I frequently hear and read how the terms "slut," "whore," and/or "freak" are used, even by the those who say they oppose gender-based violence, to shame and blame non-monogamous and polyandrous women, teenage "fast" girls, sex workers, and queer people. Recognizing that most gender-based violence happens intra-communally, what are the ways in which we can hold perpetrators against gender-based violence accountable without getting involved with the very state that brutalizes communities of color?

A Legal Realist Take on Affirmative Consent

Janet Halley, Harvard University

Demands for "affirmative consent" continue a feminist project of revising old rules requiring force and utmost resistance as essential elements of rape. I will put this reform project into historical perspective and then ask how various strands of feminism would assess not only its message-sending normativity, but its likely real-world impact as cases using it are litigated and adjudicated.

3:30pm-5:00pm

Pleasure and Danger: past, present, future

Moderator: *Suzanna Walters, Northeastern University*

All Panelists to join in final discussion

- Have the sex wars moved to new terrain such as trafficking and slut-shaming?
- How does the digital era transform our sexual lives?
- What does “live streaming” sexual assault do to/for feminist organizing?
- What possibilities are there for feminist and queer imagery in an era of prolific porn, commodified otherness, and everyday inclusion?
- How do race, ethnicity, religion, and national cultures enable and constrain sexual freedoms?
- How do carceral and governance feminisms frame and perhaps contain earlier liberatory impulses?
- How do we analyze the mutually constituting relations of sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, ability, age, and so on?
- Whose pleasure are we speaking of and for?
- Who is the “we” doing that speaking?
- Who is imagined to be “in danger?”
- How does “gender” signify differently in that couplet from “sexuality?”

5:00pm-7:00pm

Reception

Cabral Center, Rooms 116-118

About the Panelists and Moderators

Libby Adler is a professor of Law at Northeastern University. Adler teaches Constitutional Law, Sexuality, Gender and the Law, and Family Law. She received the Northeastern University Excellence in Teaching Award for 2007-2008. In 2006, she was a visiting professor at Harvard Law School, where she taught Women and the Law, and in 2000, she was a visiting professor at the University of Frankfurt, where she taught on contemporary legal fallout from the Nazi labor program. In the 1990s, she practiced as a policy attorney for the Massachusetts child support enforcement agency, drafting legislation and regulations. Professor Adler has written extensively on sexuality, gender, family and children, including foster care, and draws heavily from queer and critical theory. She is a co-editor of the casebook *Mary Joe Frug's Women and the Law* (4th ed.). She also has written about contemporary legal issues arising out of Nazism and is currently completing a book for Duke entitled *Gay Priori*.

Moya Bailey, the Dean's Postdoctoral Fellow and Visiting Scholar at Northeastern University, is the country's first joint postdoctoral fellow in women's, gender, and sexuality studies and the digital humanities. Professor Bailey received her Ph.D. in women's, gender, and sexuality studies from Emory University after obtaining her bachelor's in comparative studies at Spelman College. Bailey remains active in digital social media curating the #TransformDH Initiative and is currently working on a manuscript on digital media and black queer health initiatives.

Reina Gossett is an activist, writer, and artist and the 2014-2016 Activist-In-Residence at Barnard College's Center for Research on Women. Prior to joining the Sylvia Rivera Law Project as the membership director, Reina worked at Queers for Economic Justice where she directed the Welfare Organizing Project and produced [A Fabulous Attitude](#), which documents low-income LGBT New Yorkers surviving inequality and thriving despite enormous obstacles. Reina is a 2009 Stonewall Community Foundation Honoree as well as a filmmaker collaborating with Sasha Wortzel to write, direct and produce STAR PEOPLE ARE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE, a film detailing the lives of Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P Johnson and Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries.

Laura Green is a Professor in and Chair of the Department of English at Northeastern University, where she has taught since 2001. She is the author of *Literary Identification: From Charlotte Brontë to Tsitsi Dangarembga* (2012) and *Educating Women: Cultural Conflict and Victorian Literature* (2001), and articles and book chapters including "George Eliot: Gender and Sexuality," in the *Blackwell Companion to George Eliot*. She specializes in Victorian literature and culture, history and theory of the novel, particularly the Anglophone realist novel, and women's, gender and sexuality studies.

Juli Grigsby is a social cultural anthropologist and received her doctorate from the University of Texas at Austin. She received her master's degree from the University of Texas at Austin in Anthropology and her bachelor's degree from the University of

California at Los Angeles (UCLA) in Chicana/o Studies and Anthropology. She is currently a 2014 - 2015 Visiting Scholar in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Northeastern University and Lecturer at Harvard University in Studies of Women, gender, and Sexuality. Her current book project, *Grim Sleeper: Gender, Violence, and Reproductive Justice in Los Angeles*, explores black women's experiences of structural violence.

Janet Halley is the Royall Professor of Law at Harvard Law School. She is the author of *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism* (Princeton 2006), and *Don't: A Reader's Guide to the Military's Anti-Gay Policy* (Duke 1999). She coedited *Left Legalism/Left Critique* with Wendy Brown (Duke 2002) and *After Sex? New Writing Since Queer Theory* with Andrew Parker (Duke 2011), and solo-edited *Critical Directions in Comparative Family Law*, 58 *American Journal of Comparative Law*. She is working with Prabha Kotiswaran, Rachel Rebouché, and Hila Shamir on two books about *Governance Feminism* (forthcoming, Minnesota 2015 and 2016).

Chong-suk Han is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Middlebury College and the author of *Geisha of a Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America*, forthcoming from New York University Press. Prior to becoming an academic, he was an award-winning journalist and served for three years as the Editor of *The International Examiner*, the oldest pan-Asian Pacific American newspaper in the United States.

Kimberly Hoang is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and International Studies at Boston College. She received her Ph.D. in 2011 from the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley and in 2012 she won the American Sociological Association Best Dissertation Award. She is the author of *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work* (2015) published by the University of California Press. She is also the lead editor of *Human Trafficking Reconsidered: Rethinking the Problem, Envisioning New Solutions* (2014), a collection commissioned by Open Society. Her articles have appeared in *Social Problems*, *Gender & Society*, *Contexts*, *The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, and *Sexualities* as well as in news articles for the BBC.

Denise M. Horn is an Assistant Professor of International Affairs and Political Science at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. She is the author of *Democratic Governance and Social Entrepreneurship: Civic Participation and the Future of Democracy* (Routledge 2013) and *Women, Civil Society and the Geopolitics of Democratization* (Routledge 2010). Horn is an International Relations scholar, whose work explores the relationship of civil society development to democratic growth, focusing on women's transnational activism and trends in global development strategies, such as social entrepreneurship. She is the director of Northeastern University's Global Corps Practicum, which conducts workshops in social entrepreneurship in Thailand, Indonesia and India. Dr. Horn was a 2014 Fulbright Senior Scholar, where she conducted seminars in Democratization and Human Rights at Universitas Andalas, in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia.

Sarah J. Jackson is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Northeastern University where she studies the way national debates about race, gender, and social change evolve in the public sphere. Jackson's recent book *Black Celebrity, Racial Politics, and the Press: Framing Dissent* (Routledge, 2014) considers the role of African American celebrities in shaping political debates about race and protest in both the black and mainstream press. She serves on the associate board of editors for *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.

Michael Kimmel is Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities at Stony Brook University (SUNY), where he is also Distinguished University Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies. He is the author of many books, including *Manhood in America*, *Angry White Men*, and the best-seller *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*. An activist for gender equality for over 30 years, he was recently called "the world's pre-eminent male feminist" by *The Guardian* newspaper in London.

Cliff Leek is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at Stony Brook University (SUNY), a Program Director at the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities, and a Research Fellow at Catalyst Inc. He is writing his dissertation on the inter-organizational dynamics between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seeking to engage men and boys in gender justice work and more traditional feminist NGOs. Cliff is also a founding editor of the [Masculinities 101](#) blog.

Aishah Shahidah Simmons is an award-winning Black feminist lesbian filmmaker, writer, international lecturer, and activist who teaches in [Women's and LGBT Studies at Temple University](#). An incest and rape survivor, her acclaimed shorts *Silence...Broken* and *In My Father's House* explore the issues of race, gender, homophobia, rape, and misogyny. Simmons is the creator of the [Ford Foundation-funded](#) award-winning film *NO! The Rape Documentary*. An Associate Editor of the online publication *The Feminist Wire*, Ms. Simmons' cultural work and activism have been documented extensively in a wide range of media outlets including *The Root*, *Crisis*, *Forbes*, *Left of Black*, *In These Times*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Alternet*, *ColorLines*, *Associate Press*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Essence Magazine*, NPR, Pacifica Radio Network, and BET.

Suzanna Walters is Professor of Sociology and Director of WGSS at Northeastern University. In January 2015, she took over as Editor-in-Chief of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Her most recent book, *The Tolerance Trap: How God, Genes, and Good Intentions are Sabotaging Gay Equality* (2014, NYU Press), explores how notions of tolerance limit the possibilities for real liberation and deep social belonging. She is the author of numerous books and articles on feminism, lgbt and queer studies, and popular culture, including *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), and *Material Girls: Making Sense of Feminist Cultural Theory*.

Wagatwe Wanjuki is an activist and writer who started blogging about feminism and campus rape culture while a student at Tufts University. She has continued her work using new media to create social change as a digital strategist for several progressive causes through ColorOfChange, Free Press, and RH Reality Check. Wanjuki has written for Feministing, Mic, RH Reality Check, *ESSENCE magazine*, BuzzFeed, and the *New York Times*. She is also the founder of F— Yeah Feminists, one of the first and most popular feminist blogs on Tumblr. Her work as a prominent anti-sexual violence activist has received widespread media attention when she started the nationally trending hash tag #SurvivorPrivilege from her Twitter page [@wagatwe](https://twitter.com/wagatwe). As a prominent campus activist, Wanjuki became a founding co-organizer of the Know Your IX ED ACT NOW campaign.

Margot Weiss is Associate Professor of American Studies and Anthropology at Wesleyan University, where she coordinates the cluster in Queer Studies. Her scholarship focuses on the sexual politics of late capitalism. Her book *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality* (Duke University Press, 2011) is a queer, feminist, and materialist analysis of BDSM; the book was awarded the Ruth Benedict Book Prize by the Association of Queer Anthropology and was a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award in LGBT Studies. Her current book project, *Visions of Sexual Justice*, draws on multi-sited fieldwork with queer activists in North America to explore the possibilities and parameters of a radical political imagination at a time of economic precarity.

About the Student Panelists

Sonia Banaszczyk is a fifth-year undergraduate student at Northeastern University, pursuing a combined major in Communication and Sociology.

Daniela Gonzalez-Jatar is a senior, studying Cultural Anthropology, Sociology and International Affairs. They center their studies on the role of culture in sustaining and resisting systems of power.

Kate Frisher is a senior at Northeastern University where she studies International Affairs with minors in Political Science and Communications. She has been an active member of her school's reproductive rights club since 2011. Professionally, she has worked with various progressive nonprofits in policy and communications roles and currently works as a policy associate at Health Care For All. She is interested in the relationship between gender and international peace and security.

Sydney Mokel is a first year International Affairs student. Outside of classes, she explores the glittering facets of the human condition through Write Club, Queer Student Union, and Progressive Student Alliance. As for the future, she hopes to pursue extensive language study, specifically Spanish and Igbo, in addition to French and Mandarin Chinese.