

URBS 277 / GSWS 277 (Spring 2021)
Gender, Sex, and Urban Life
Tuesdays and Thursdays: 12:00 PM-1:20 PM (EST)

Instructor: Davy Knittle (he/him or they/them)
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Co-Convener: Mira Shetty (she/her)
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Class Zoom link for synchronous sessions: <https://bit.ly/38exPHY> (passcode: cities)

Office hours: Mondays 12:00 – 2:00 PM and by appointment

Note: If you plan to attend my Monday office hours, please still email me for an appointment!

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Is urban space gendered? Do we change how it is gendered as we move through it? Does it change us? This course explores gender and sexuality, and particularly the racialization of gender and sexuality, in the contemporary global city through the study of urban spaces. We will consider feminist, queer, and transgender theories of the city, as we investigate how practices of using and making space are gendered and sexualized. After an introduction to nine keywords for the study of gender, sex, and urban life, each week of the course will be organized around a type of space, including home, street, and birthing center, carceral facility, restaurant, and park. Assignments will include an auto-ethnography, a photo essay, and a final podcast assignment that asks you to propose an additional type of space in which to study the intersections of sex, gender, and the urban environment. In each space, we will conduct an interdisciplinary exploration, drawing from sociology, anthropology, environmental humanities, geography, city planning history, Black feminism, and queer and trans of color critique, as well as from fiction, photography, and film.

COURSE QUESTIONS:

- How do feminist, queer, and trans groups and individuals interact with global urban spaces?
- How do literary, cultural, and critical representations of feminist, queer, and trans urban life variously articulate the relationship between these communities and the city?
- How have feminist, queer, and trans theory represented the ways that gender and race mutually inform one another? How has urbanist scholarship represented the relationship between gender and race?
- How do writers, scholars, and activists in the global South and the global North, in small cities, and in large ones, analyze how ideas, scripts, and performances of gender and sexuality shape urban spaces?
- What is the relationship between the future of cities and the future of the planet, and how can examining cities from the perspective of gender and sexuality studies help us understand that relationship?
- How have “feminist,” “queer,” and “trans” functioned as administrative categories in cities? As terms of identification? For whom? What other language do they obscure or erase?
- How do queer and gender non-conforming people and communities change the city? How have cities changed, and how have those changes affected queer and gender non-conforming people and communities?

READINGS:

*All readings are available on Canvas, with the exception of the three literary works required for this course. *His Own Where* and *Parable of the Sower* are available as e-books via VanPelt Library (and on electronic reserve for our course). *Lagoon* and *The Yellow House* should be available as e-books through VanPelt by the time we get to them in the syllabus. Each book but *Parable of the Sower* is also available via the Penn Bookstore. If you choose to purchase your books, I offer the recommendation that you purchase them either from one of the many independent bookstores in Philadelphia (like [Uncle Bobbie's](#), [Harriet's Bookshop](#), or [Big Blue Marble Bookstore](#)) or from another independent bookstore that you care about. If you are not able to access the texts via VanPelt and purchasing texts for this course is unavailable to you, please let me know and I can help!

June Jordan, *His Own Where*, Feminist Press, 2010. ISBN: 1558616586

Sarah M. Broom, *The Yellow House*, Grove Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-0802149039

and either:

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Headline Press, 2019. ISBN: 1472263669

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Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon*, Gallery / Saga Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-1481440882

Note about books: in an in-person semester, I would be concerned with our all having the same edition of these books. In a remote semester, my primary concerns are that you have access to the books and that you get a chance to read them. I anticipate that we will not all have the same pagination in our books, and I will design activities and discussions accordingly. If other editions of these books are more accessible to you, that's okay!

TEACHING METHODS AND WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Most weeks, our course will meet synchronously on Tuesdays and asynchronously on Thursdays. There are several Thursdays on which we will meet synchronously to accommodate the schedule of a guest speaker—please note these as they appear on the syllabus. (Our synchronous Thursday meetings are **January 28th**, **February 25th**, **March 4th**, **April 1st**, **April 22nd** and **April 29th** for some folks.)

In a regular week for this course, you will follow this schedule:

Tuesday – attend synchronous session from 12:00-1:20 PM (EST). I will begin the Zoom session at 11:45 am and end the session at 1:30 pm if you'd like to ask questions or chat before or after class. An asynchronous discussion prompt will be posted by 5:00 PM and due Thursday at 1:20 PM (EST).

Wednesday and Thursday – do assigned readings and respond to asynchronous discussion prompt and/or do asynchronous assignment by 1:20 PM (EST) on Thursday. *Note: if there is a synchronous meeting of our class on Thursdays, that meeting will take the place of an asynchronous assignment.*

Friday-Monday – do readings for following Tuesday and work on longer-term assignments

The teaching methods in this course will include in-class discussions, writing exercises, group work, individual and collaborative analysis of critical, literary, and cultural texts, field observations and

auto-ethnography, process writing, and other activities. A careful reading of the texts assigned for each session is necessary to an informed discussion in class. Because this is a course about gender, sexuality, and urban life, you may also find it helpful to reflect on your field observations, your daily experience of where you are currently, or on other experiences you have had in other cities.

READING AND ASSIGNMENT CALENDAR

Week 1 – Keywords: City Planning

January 21st, 2021 (asynchronous session)

City Planning: Priscilla Tucker, “Poor Peoples’ Plan” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. 27. No. 5. Jan., 1969. 265-269.

Also, please read the syllabus in detail, look around our course Canvas site, and complete the first asynchronous exercise.

Additionally, please fill out [this course questionnaire](#).

Week 2 – Keywords: Gender and Environment

January 26th, 2021 (synchronous session)

Gender: Toby Beauchamp, “Introduction: Suspicious Visibility” *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices*. Duke University Press, 2019, 1-23.

January 28th, 2021 (synchronous session)

Environment: Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities” *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 79, No. 3, Fall 2009 - 409-428.

Visit from Lila Bhide (Penn Food and Wellness Collaborative Coordinator)

Week 3 – Keywords: Family and Sex

February 2nd, 2021 (synchronous session)

Family: Natalie Oswin, “Making the Model Family at Home” in *Global City Futures: Desire and Development in Singapore*. University of Georgia Press, 2019. 83-104.

Kellie Carter Jackson, “‘She Was a Member of the Family’: Ethel Phillips, Domestic Labor, and Employer Perceptions.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 45. Is. 3/4. 2017. 160-173.

February 4th, 2021 (asynchronous session)

Sex: Kath Weston, “Get Thee to a Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration.” *GLQ*, Volume 2. No. 3. 1995. 253-277.

Week 4 – Keywords: Coalition and Fear

February 9th, 2021 (synchronous session)

Coalition: Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ*. Volume 3. 1997. 437-465.

February 11th, 2021 (asynchronous session)—Keywords Assignment Due at 12:00 PM (EST)

Fear: Gill Valentine, “The Geography of Women’s Fear,” *Area*. Volume 21. No. 4. 1989. 385-390.

Keywords Assignment due on Canvas at 12:00 PM (EST)

Week 5 – Keywords: Disaster and Queer

February 16th, 2021 (synchronous session)

Disaster: Eric Klinenberg, “The Urban Inferno” and “The City of Extremes” in *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. University of Chicago Press. Second Edition, 2015. 1-36.

Film: [Do the Right Thing](#). Dir. Spike Lee. 1989.

Note: make sure to complete film sheet on Canvas

February 18th, 2021 (asynchronous session)

Queer: Jen Jack Giesecking, “Navigating a Queer New York” in *A Queer New York: Geographies of Lesbians, Dykes, and Queers*. New York University Press, 2020. 1-46.

Week 6: The Waste-Disposal Site (Note: two synchronous sessions this week)

February 23rd, 2021 (synchronous session)

Laura Pulido. “Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. 2016. 277 vol. 27, no 3, 1-16.

LaToya Ruby Frazier, “[What is the Human Cost of Toxic Water and Environmental Racism?](#)” *TED Radio Hour*. August 7th, 2020

LaToya Ruby Frazier, [Flint is Family](#), *Elle Magazine*. August 8th, 2016.

February 25th, 2021 (synchronous session)

Dorceta Taylor, “Introduction” and “Toxic Exposure: Landmark Cases in the South and the Rise of Environmental Justice Activism” in *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility*. 2014, 1-32.

Visit from Jen Jack Giesecking (Assistant Professor of Geography, University of Kentucky)

Infrastructural Auto-ethnography due on Canvas at 12:00 PM (EST)

Week 7: The Street – Part I (Note: two synchronous sessions this week)

March 2nd, 2021 (synchronous session)

Davy Knittle, “The Disability Politics of Blight: Grappling with Urban Cure in Brenda Coultas’s “The Bowery Project.”” *Amodern*. No. 10, Fall 2020.

<https://amodern.net/article/blight/>

Brenda Coultas, “The Bowery Project” in *A Handmade Museum* (Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 2003), 13-51

March 4th, 2021 (synchronous session)

“Racism and Deadly Traffic on Cobbs Creek Parkway” *The Why*. WHYY. September 8th, 2020. <https://whyy.org/episodes/how-racism-fueled/>

Film: [Moonlight](#). Dir. Barry Jenkins. 2016.

Note: make sure to complete film sheet on Canvas

**Visit from Elaine Simon (Director, Urban Studies Program, University of Pennsylvania)
Week 8: The Street – Part II**

March 9th, 2021 (synchronous session)

Sarah M. Broom, *The Yellow House*. Grove Press, 2019, 3-98.

March 11th, 2021 (no class)

Week 9: The Home

March 16th, 2021 (synchronous session)

Sarah M. Broom, *The Yellow House*. Grove Press, 2019, 101-284.

March 18th, 2021 (asynchronous session)

Sarah M. Broom, *The Yellow House*. Grove Press, 2019, 287-376.

Photo Essay Due on Canvas at 12:00 PM (EST)

Week 10: The Restaurant

March 23rd, 2021 (synchronous session)

Matthew Shaer, "[When the Virus Came for the American Dream.](#)" *New York Times Magazine*, November 2nd, 2020

March 25th, 2021 (asynchronous session)

Gabrielle Hamilton, "[My Restaurant Was My Life for 20 Years. Does the World Need it Anymore?.](#)" *New York Times Magazine*, April 23rd, 2020

"[The Restaurant from the Future.](#)" *Planet Money*, May 13th, 2020

Week 11: The School

March 30th, 2021 (no class)

April 1st, 2021 (synchronous session)

Savannah Shange, "A Long History of Seeing: Historicizing the Progressive Dystopia," in *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco*. Duke University Press, 2019, 22-43.

Stacey Waite "Becoming the Loon: Queer Masculinities, Queer Pedagogies" in *Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowing*. 2017, 27-55.

Week 12: The Carceral Facility

April 6th, 2021 (synchronous session)

Essie Justice Group, *Because She's Powerful: The Political Isolation and Resistance of Women with Incarcerated Loved Ones*. 2018.

April 8th, 2021 (asynchronous session)

"[Abolishing Prisons with Mariame Kaba.](#)" *Why is This Happening?*, April 10th, 2019

Final Project Proposal due on Canvas at 12:00 PM (EST)

Week 13: The Park

April 13th, 2020 (synchronous session)

June Jordan, *His Own Where*. Feminist Press, 2010, v-92

April 15th, 2020 (asynchronous session)

Carolyn Finney, "It's Not Easy Being Green," from *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (2014), 92-115.

Annotated Bibliography for Final Project due on Canvas at 12:00 PM (EST)

Week 14: The Birthing Center

Note: Start reading your selected book for your book club meeting next week!

Both sessions are synchronous this week!

April 20th, 2020 (synchronous session)

Linda Villarosa. "[Why America's Black Mothers and Babies Are in a Life-or-Death Crisis.](#)" *The New York Times Magazine*. April 11th, 2018.

Trina Greene Brown, "Ain't I a Mama? A Black Revolutionary Mother in the Women's Rights Movement," *The Chicana Motherwork Anthology*. University of Arizona Press, 2019, 117-128.

April 22nd, 2020 – (final full-class synchronous session)

Final Project Q&A

Outline for Final Project Due at 12:00 PM

Week 15: The Future City

April 27th, 2021 (synchronous session for readers of *Lagoon*)

Book Club Meeting – *Lagoon*

April 29th, 2021 (synchronous session for readers of *Parable of the Sower*)

Book Club Meeting – *Parable of the Sower*

Final Assignment: Podcast Case Study due on Canvas on May 4th at 11:59 PM (EST)

ASSIGNMENTS

Class Participation (20%)

Your class participation grade reflects your course attendance, your completion of in-class writing assignments and activities, and your presence and attention in synchronous and asynchronous class sessions. I am less concerned with how often you speak and more concerned with how attentive you are to our class discussions and the ideas of your classmates. Your class participation grade also reflects your readiness to discuss texts on the day for which they are assigned.

Keywords Assignment – Due February 11th, 2021 at 12:00 PM (10%)

This assignment adapts the premise of Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976) to terms of particular importance to our course. In this assignment, you will choose a keyword of interest to you and situate its contemporary cultural meaning within its etymology, historical context, and within the critical context of our course. More information about keywords is available here: <http://keywords.pitt.edu/whatis.html>.

Urban Artifact Presentation – Due date dependent upon presentation sign-up (10%)

Early in the semester, you'll select a date on which to give a five-minute presentation of an object, image, place or other artifact from the location where you are this semester. You'll introduce your object/place/image/artifact and then explain how it relates to the themes and questions of our course. One goal of this assignment is to share with one another our physical locations as well as the site of our Zoom class. Another goal is to use the tools and strategies of urban and gender studies to read artifacts from urban, suburban, and rural places.

Short Responses and Discussion Questions (two) – Due weekly on Tuesdays at 12:00 PM from weeks 6-14 (pick two) (10%)

This assignment asks you to submit two very short (250-300 word) responses over the course of the semester to the readings for a given week, quoting from the readings to put them in conversation with one another. Along with your response, you'll also submit a discussion question that helps you link the readings together or raise an idea that the readings negotiate differently from one another.

Infrastructural Auto-ethnography – Due February 25th, 2021 at 12:00 PM (15%)

The auto-ethnography assignment asks you to conduct an analysis of the infrastructural systems (water treatment, heating, roads, transit, food distribution, telecommunications, etc.) you use on a daily basis. What systems support your daily life? Who is responsible for the maintenance and operations of those systems? For this assignment, you'll keep an infrastructure journal for one day, and then write a 1000-word essay that reflects on the systems with which you came into contact, the gender and racial norms that you observed in relation to those systems, and anything you were curious to learn about the people and infrastructures to which those systems connect.

Photo Essay – Due March 18th, 2021 at 12:00 PM (15%)

This assignment asks you to adapt Elaine Simon's practice of taking photographs on her daily walks through Philadelphia and photograph the same location once a day for one week. I encourage you to practice COVID safety and social distance appropriately while completing this assignment. You might choose to photograph the same location at different times of day across your week of documentation. Your photographs should indicate how the space shifts over a period of a week, who uses the space, and how different uses of the space compete with one another. Each time you

take a photograph, take some brief notes about who is using the space and use those notes to caption your photographs. Submit at least seven photographs with captions, accompanied by 500-750 words of reflection that engage with at least two texts from our course.

Final Assignment: Case Study – Due May 4th, 2021 (20%)
(with elements due earlier – see course calendar)

The final assignment asks you to make a podcast that proposes an additional category of space as a lens for analyzing gender and/or sex in an urban context. The final submission of your 10-12 minute podcast should be accompanied by a 750-1000 word reflection that explains why you chose the site you selected, and how the process of making the podcast shaped your ideas about the site. Your reflection should additionally explain what your chosen space reveals about gender, sex, and urban systems, and analyze a cultural, ethnographic, or historical example of your space. In the final weeks of the course, you'll submit a short proposal, an abbreviated annotated bibliography and an outline for your assignment. (So, the final process will be one of recording and editing your podcast in dialogue with your existing research, rather than one of inventing a new project.) We will have an audio recording and editing workshop in class, and I will be able to provide support for anyone new to podcasting.

FINAL GRADE EQUIVALENTS

94-100 = A

90-94 = A-

87-89 = B+

83-86 = B

80-82 = B-

77-79 = C+

73-76 = C

70-72 = C-

67-69 = D+

63-66 = D

60-62 = D-

COURSE POLICIES

COMMUNITY STATEMENT *

A classroom is a space into which each of us enters to expand our perspectives, learn new things, and challenge our assumptions. Our classroom, in particular, may engage critically with material depicting violence, racism, sexism, misogyny, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and other topics that may elicit intense emotional responses, debate, and disagreement. Throughout the course we will have frank and challenging conversations about social justice, and about personal and institutional responsibility.

While safe spaces are important, it is impossible to guarantee them in a classroom in which we are respectfully challenging ourselves and one another. What I can guarantee, as your instructor, is that I will work to facilitate conversations that are respectful of every student and that are attentive to the sociohistorical conditions that produce uneven degrees of safety in the classroom and other spaces.

I ask each of us to validate each person's insights, perspectives, and needs as we create a "brave space" in our classroom, and open ourselves to our work in class as a collaborative project for which we need the participation and support of one another in order to succeed.

*Adapted, with gratitude, from the Community Statement of ENGL 410: Death in the Digital, taught by Dr. Amanda Phillips, Georgetown University.

STATEMENT ON NAMES AND PRONOUNS

In our classroom, it is important that we refer to everyone by the name and pronouns that they prefer. Pronouns can be a way to affirm someone's gender identity, but they can also be unrelated to a person's identity. They are simply a public way in which people are referred to in place of their name (e.g. "he" or "she" or "they" or "ze" or many others). In this classroom, you are invited but not required to share the pronouns you use, and I ask us all to commit to being attentive to and using each other's preferred pronouns. That being said, if you accidentally misgender someone or use an incorrect pronoun for them, please simply correct to a pronoun that they prefer. If during the course you would like me to change the pronoun or name I am using for you, please let me know.

In support of the University of Pennsylvania's commitment to providing an equitable and safe experience for students whose birth name and/or legal name does not reflect their gender identity and/or gender expression, Penn accepts requests from any student seeking to use a preferred first and/or middle name in University records. A student's preferred name can and will be used where feasible in all University systems unless the student's birth name and/or legal name use is required by law or the student's preferred name use is for intent of misrepresentation.

Any student, including transgender, gender nonconforming, gender variant, and non-cisgender students who wish to designate a preferred name should fill out the Preferred Name Change Form. Students wishing to change a birth name and/or legal name to a preferred name must meet with one of the following designated University Life trans* allies to discuss the scope and limitations of the preferred name request:

Erin Cross, Director, LGBT Center <<mailto:ecross@upenn.edu>>, 215-898-5044

Rodney Robinson, Associate Director, Office of Student Affairs
<<mailto:rodneyr@exchange.upenn.edu>>, 215-898-6533

For additional Preferred Name Information: <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/preferrednames.php>

STUDENT RESOURCES

Office of Student Disability Services: Provides services for students who self-identify as having a disability, including academic accommodations and accommodations for housing.

International Student and Scholar Services: Provides immigration expertise and services to the Penn community, runs programming and outreach partnerships within the university and with agencies like Social Security and Customs and Border Protection.

Counseling and Psychological Services: Provides confidential and free professional mental health services to Penn students, and helps students adjust to university life, manage personal challenges, situational crises and academic stress.

Penn Violence Prevention: Engages the Penn community in the prevention of sexual violence, relationship violence, and stalking (a collaborative program of the Penn Women's Center).

ADDITIONAL ACADEMIC SUPPORT

As this course requires several written assignments, please keep in mind the writing-related resources on campus. Please take advantage of these resources if you desire or need additional assistance with your writing.

The Marks Family Writing Center provides writing support to students across Penn's schools and departments. Peer and faculty writing specialists offer individual writing guidance, as well as more general writing workshops. For further information, and to schedule an appointment, see: http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/writing_center/.

The Weingarten Learning Resources Center also offers writing support to all students, and includes Penn's Student Disability Services office.

ACCESSIBILITY AND CARE STATEMENT

If you have a medical, physical, psychological or learning disability for which you wish to request accommodation, you may complete an accommodation request [here](#). All services are confidential. Students with disabilities of any kind are encouraged to approach me as soon as possible, and we can work together to shape course assignments and activities to meet your needs.

Additionally, if there are circumstances that may affect your performance in class, or if those circumstances appear over the course of the semester, whether physical, emotional or organizational, please contact me as soon as you can and we will work together to make sure you are accommodated.

In our third semester of remote university classes, it is likely the case that many of us are beginning this course with a greater sense of exhaustion, and with increased care and domestic labor obligations. If you need to take a break from our course materials to take care of yourself or anyone else, please let me know and we can figure out a plan that allows our course material to reshape itself around your care obligations. For further information on disabilities services at Penn, see <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/> and <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are responsible for following the policies (in particular those regarding academic integrity, plagiarism, and original work) contained in the Penn Student Handbook. For further info, see: <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/>.

LATE WORK

If you encounter circumstances that impede your ability to submit an assignment on time, please contact me at least 24 hours in advance of the assignment deadline. Except in the event of a last-minute emergency, no written work will be accepted late without prior permission, but any written work will be accepted late with prior permission. If you would find more time on an assignment helpful for any reason, ask me and we can figure out a plan.

ATTENDANCE

More than two absences – excused or unexcused – will be reflected in your final grade in the course. If you must miss class for any reason, please let me know ahead of time so that we can work together to make sure you have access to course material and assignments. After your first two

absences, each subsequent absence will lower your final grade for the course by one third of a letter. That being said, if circumstances arise that prevent you from attending several weeks of class (including, but not limited to care for yourself or others, mental and/or physical health needs, etc.) we can renegotiate this policy on a case by case basis.