We’re SWAGS—we’re hip, we’re cool, we’re now—we’re 21st century!
There’s a swagger in our step and we’re talking about sex. Come join the conversation!

“We add swagger to WAGS by adding sexuality to our name. And we recognize the interests of our new colleagues, Sahar Sadjadi, Krupa Shandilya, Khary Polk, and Aneeka Henderson all of whom address gender and sexuality in their research and teaching.” - Amrita Basu

“This change reflects a broader expansion and importance of scholarship on sexuality in the academy and our students’ interests.” - Sahar Sadjadi

“Bringing sexuality to gender is both a natural and national recognition that bodies are not abstractions. They come fully loaded with needs that are an inseparable mixture of cultural and biological urges.” - Michele Barale

“At the same time, however, it brings forth some heated and controversial theoretical debates over bodies, nature, is sex an urge, etc.” - Sahar Sadjadi

“Sexuality is a vital optic through which to view contemporary and historical debates around gender, race, class, and nation. Bringing “sexuality” to the fore in this way only highlights the intersectional work scholars of gender studies have traditionally done to enrich our understanding of the human experience.” - Khary Polk
Comings and Goings

Filmmaker and scholar Catherine Masud joined us this spring as a visiting professor to teach two South Asian cinema courses. Her films include Muktir Gaan and The Clay Bird.

Paola Zamperini is now chair of the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures in the Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences at Northwestern University.

Margaret Hunt is now a member of the History Department at Uppsala University in Sweden.

Krupa Shandilya has been on sabbatical in New York City this academic year. She is doing research at Columbia University’s Butler Library, as well as the NYU Library.

In February of this year, Khary Polk published his essay “Malcolm X, Sexual Hearsay, and Masculine Dissemblance” in Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly. Over spring break, he was invited to the University of Hawai‘i, Manoa History Department to give a talk from his new book project, Subaltern Soldiers: Race, Sexuality, and American Militarism, 1898-1948. In March, he brought Dr. Shelly Eversley, Baruch College, City University of New York to campus, where she gave an engaging lecture on blaxploitation film and the erotics of racism in the cult classic Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song. Khary just returned from London, where he presented at Goldsmiths College, University of London inaugural conference, “Beyond the Sheets: Sexualities in the Age of Digital Reproduction.”

On April 2nd President Martin visited Professor Basu’s Ideas and Methods class where the students discussed two chapters from her book, Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being a Lesbian. The chapters discussed were entitled “Extraordinary Homosexuals and the Fear of Being Ordinary,” and “Feminist Politics: What’s Home Got to Do With It?”

New Course Offerings (2014)

SPRING 2014

SWAG 229 | Gender and Nation in South Asian Cinema

This course will examine the interplay of gender and national identity in post-colonial South Asian cinema. We will begin by tracing the development of the film industry in the region with reference to the historical and political context. We will look at the different streams of South Asian cinema, from mainstream “Bollywood” movies to regional/national cinema to parallel and diasporic film. Within this framework, we will examine the shifting feminine and masculine representations of nationhood, and the way they intersect with religious identity. Specific topics include a critical analysis of the portrayal of women in the films of Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, the mother-goddess construct of Indian nationalism in mainstream cinema, thematic treatments of the relationship between machismo and Hindu/Muslim revivalism, and gender and Muslim identity in the cinema of Bangladesh and Pakistan. *Taught by Visiting Professor Masud*

SWAG 429 | Women Filmmakers of South Asia

This course will provide an overview of the major South Asian women filmmakers in the region and the diaspora: their cinematic language and vision, the feminist dimension of their work, and their place within the spectrum of global cinematic trends. Specific topics to be addressed include the challenges women face in the industry, a comparative view of their representations of gender, same sex desire, religious extremism, social conservatism and women’s experience. We will examine the work of Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair, Nandita Das, Aparna Sen, Sabiha Sumar, and Gurinder Chadha among others. We have invited some of the filmmakers to lecture after the screenings of their respective films. There will be required film screenings in addition to the regular course meetings.

*Taught by Visiting Professor Masud*


**SWAG 212H | Equality and Violence**

This Inside/Out course will meet at the Hampshire County Jail, and students will read scholars, legal experts, feminists, and political and religious leaders on how the genders are and are not equal and how these findings relate to issues of sexual assault, domestic violence, and similar topics. Inside and outside students will pursue and refine themes from their research through interviews with one another and in individual essays. They will produce a presentation, probably in the form of debates and/or discussions for an audience of incarcerated prisoners and interested Amherst students. Students will also produce a program containing essays that enlarge on their debates/discussions.

*Taught by Professor Saxton and Visiting Artist-In-Residence Ewald*

**SWAG 329 | Bad Black Women**

History has long valorized passive, obedient, and long-suffering black women alongside aggressive and outspoken black male leaders and activists. This course provides an alternative narrative to this misrepresentation, as we will explore how “bad” is defined by one’s race, gender, class, and sexuality as well as how black women have transgressed the boundaries of what it means to be “good” in US society. We will use an interdisciplinary perspective to examine why black women have used covert and explicit maneuvers to challenge the stereotypical “respectable” or “good” black woman and the various risks and rewards they incur for their “deviance.” In addition to analyzing black women’s literature, we will study black women’s political activism, prostitution, and rising incarceration as well as black women’s nonconformity in art, poetry, music, dance, and film. Students should be aware that part of this course is “immersive” and consequently, students will be asked to participate in a master class that will provide a space for students to learn and explore how dance has been historically used to defy race, class, and gender norms.

*Taught by Assistant Professor Henderson*
Aneeka Henderson

Assistant Professor Henderson has accepted a tenure-track position with us. Please join us in officially welcoming her to the SWAGS department.

In May 2013, she presented her paper “Romantic and Political Impotence: Sapphire's Push and Nationalist Nostalgia” at the American Literature Association Annual Meeting in Boston, MA. In September of the same year, she presented “Politicizing African American Marriage” at The Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation (WISE) at the University of Hull, U.K. with Margo Jefferson (Cornell), Emily Lordi (Umass), and Courtney Thorsson (U of Oregon).

Additionally, one of Assistant Professor Henderson’s class projects was featured in the New York Times. The project, authored by Stella Temitayo Oyalabu ‘16, explores the politics of respectability in relation to race, gender, sexuality, creativity and expression.

To view the feature, visit the following URL: http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2014/01/31/education/edlife/photobooth-ss.html?smid=pl-share

Professor Michele Barale

“I just got back from the Library of Congress, Photographs and Prints Division, where I almost finished work begun at the British Museum. I have been looking at photographic portraits of women made between 1880-1910. Kodak’s invention of the Brownie camera was as revolutionary as the creation of the web, but the desire for the formal portrait never seemed to go away. Going to the photography studio in your best clothes and being posed is an important marker still: graduations and first birthdays and marriages and induction into the military. And being dead, of course. Lots of babies in coffins were photographed. But my favorite pictures are those taken of early farm families on the plains, posed outside their sod houses, with as many of their noteworthy consumer goods, including such things as the family cow, the sewing machine (foot powered, of course), a new butter churn, an organ, displayed around them. Even in these black and white photos it is obvious that sun screen is not yet invented. And the average number of children appears to be six, the oldest looking perhaps 10 and the youngest still a babe in arms. Both parents look to be in their 60s, though they are most likely 30 years younger. No sun screen.”

- Professor Michele Barale
A Message from the Creating Change Crew 2014

In late January, a group of 11 Amherst College students attended The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change in Houston, Texas. Creating Change hosted over 4,000 attendees from all over the world. This opportunity allowed for us to meet, connect, and learn from a diverse group of LGBTQIA and ally activists and leaders. We each attended a day-long institute on topics such as campus pride, black civil rights, and stop and frisk. The workshops, over 400 offered, covered a huge range of topics from trans* inclusion, campus organizing, mental health, and race and class within the queer community. We learned a great deal of information and skills that we are excited to bring back to campus. We also gathered in caucuses to discuss issues surrounding the intersection of different identities such as femme, trans*, and pansexual. We are most grateful to the Sexuality, Women’s and Gender Studies Department, the Queer Resource Center, Center for Community Engagement, Women’s & Gender Center, Student Activities, AAS, Dean of Students, and the Office of the Provost for their support and funding to make this unique opportunity possible.

Thank you,
Creating Change Crew 2014

Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

This coming fall semester, Professor Saxton and Artist-in-Residence Ewald will be conducting a course at the Hampshire County Jail on the Inside/Out model. This collaboration began in 2005 when High Sheriff Robert J. Garvey and Anthony Marx, former President of Amherst College, worked together to begin offering Amherst College classes in the House of Correction.

“The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program increases opportunities for men and women, inside and outside of prison, to have transformative learning experiences that emphasize collaboration and dialogue, inviting participants to take leadership in addressing crime, justice, and other issues of social concern.”
- sourced from www.insideoutcenter.org

Inmate tends the garden and labyrinth at Hampshire County Jail and House of Correction. Photo by Kevin Gutting

SWAG 212H | Equality and Violence

“This course will be conducted on the Inside/Out model, and, given the sensitive nature of some of the topics, authorities from the Jail will collaborate with us about the nature of the research and format and timing of the panels, and we will consult with the College’s experts on these matters.” -Professor Saxton
Kyra Ellis-Moore ‘15, describes her semester abroad in Cape Town, South Africa.

“This fall I had the opportunity to spend an incredible semester at the University of Cape Town. I chose to study at UCT for multiple reasons, two of the most notable being that I wanted to be close(r) to my father and his family in Angola, and because I wanted the opportunity to explore gender studies in a different context through the renowned African Gender Institute (AGI), which is connected to UCT. At UCT I took classes in African dance, the Xhosa language, contemporary literature, queer theory, and gender and the politics of development.”

“Additionally, I had the opportunity to participate in an action-research project through the AGI on sexuality and articulations of sexual boundaries at UCT, and attend a conference with students from all over Southern Africa working on similar projects (as the only American participant), and attend the annual national Students for Law and Social Justice seminar as a UCT delegate. Outside of UCT I attended Rosebank Methodist Church, which became an extremely important part of my time in Cape Town, providing me with a spiritual home and a family away from home, and was able to travel pretty extensively around the country. I am happy to be back at Amherst, but am looking forward to getting back to Cape Town as soon as I can.”

- Kyra Ellis-Moore

In 2007 a new term arose in Mandarin Chinese lexicon: 剩女. Meaning “leftover women” this pejorative term refers to women who are 27 years or older and have remained unmarried. Taking into account Mainland China’s historical traditions with women and marriage, why is it that this word emerged? Why is there such social unease with the recent increase in women remaining single for longer, or forever? Beyond history and terminology I’m interested in learning about the “leftover” women themselves. Why are they unmarried, is their marital status of their own volition, and how do they deal with external and internal pressures to marry? I’m interested in giving voice to the experience of these women and shattering the stereotype that they are merely picky women, unwilling to properly settle down with male suitors.

By blending short stories that go into the heads of four modern Chinese women with an academic look at the recent phenomenon of women not marrying and the statistics and reactions surrounding it, I hope to illuminate the complexity of these women’s lives. As an ASLC and WAGS double major this topic has been the perfect blend of my two areas of concentration. I became acquainted with the term leftover women while living abroad in Beijing, China. While there I spoke with my host mother about a number of controversial topics, one of them being these leftover women. She stressed to me that not all women are ‘like that,’ and as a queer woman who does not plan on marrying I became curious as to what ‘that’ really meant.
They’re not all picky? Unwanted? Single? What was her perception of these women, versus the reality of their day-to-day lives? And thus I started talking with other, younger, Mainland Chinese people and soon became all the more curious to give voice to these women’s reality, especially since this topic has been overwhelmingly graced over by academia.

Maia Mares ’14

“Cripples, Bastards, and Broken Things”: Gender, Genre, and Disability in A Song of Ice and Fire by George R.R. Martin.

I am exploring masculinities and disabilities in George R.R. Martin’s fantasy series, A Song of Ice and Fire. I stumbled upon this topic after reading the series over the summer and noticing that all the disabled characters were men, and that most of the major male characters were disabled. I wanted to explore both how these characters’ masculinities and disabilities intersected, as well as why disability is only represented as intersecting with masculinity, never femininity. Furthermore, I examine how this specific intersection actually serves to further the type of worldbuilding necessary to this type of fantasy fiction. In other words, the specific relation between masculinity and disability Martin represents is crucial to his task of creating the fantasy world of the series. The emphasis the SWAGS department places on integrating fiction into gender studies prepared me for such an analysis. I am indebted to the courses I took that focused on and/or included literature, such as those taught by Krupa Shandilya and Aneeka Henderson.

Congrats to our Seniors!

Please join us in congratulating our seniors who wrote their comprehensive exam on Nadine Gordimer’s The Pickup. A big warm cheers to the following: Akira Kohbara (WAGS), Michelle Park (WAGS/BIOL), Abigail Hahn (WAGS/CHEM), and Leilani Webb (WAGS/PSYC). Wishing the very best to all of our seniors as they graduate this spring.

Fengsheng Zhu (WAGS/ECON) is working with Professor Basu on her senior thesis project entitled “Gendered Identity & Narrative: Transnational Experience of Chinese (International) Students at Amherst College.” The project is in the form of an oral history project highlighting the individual experiences of international Chinese students at Amherst.

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