As the recent COVID-19 global pandemic has made starkly apparent, it is imperative that we attend more closely to how deeply entangled our lives are — both within communities and around the world — and the importance of caring for our human and non-human worlds. The question of care and its value are at the center of an ongoing interdisciplinary project we have developed in Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies over this past year, developing an international research network, Revaluing Care in the Global Economy (RCGE). Members of this network take up a long-standing feminist challenge: finding strategies to ascribe value to care and sustainability rather than simply to productivity and efficiency.

The RCGE network brings together diverse perspectives, hosting scholars from a range of disciplines and scholars from and studying regions around the globe — e.g., a Russian legal scholar working for the ILO in Fiji, an Indian sociologist teaching in Singapore, a Japanese-Brazilian sociologist directing a research network in Paris, and a Nigerian economist teaching in London. This range is indispensable for studying care and its value — two concepts that are often naturalized and whose specificities are set in relief by comparing different contexts.

continued on page 4
On the face of it, it seems like a paradox that the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying stay-at-home orders have required many people to work harder than ever, but, by most metrics, the economy appears to be collapsing. It’s a paradox that doesn’t surprise most feminists, however, and it presents an opportunity for a global reconsideration of our values and priorities.

Since the 1970s, feminist economists have pointed out that the formal economic metrics that governments use around the world — Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since the 1930s and, internationally, the System of National Accounts (SNA) since the 1950s — systematically exclude labor performed overwhelmingly by women. This problem has only grown worse in the half century since Ester Boserup pointed out in Women’s Role in Economic Development (George Allen & Unwin, 1970) that growth-oriented economic practices would distort social and cultural traditions and exacerbate gender inequalities. As Marilyn Waring famously pointed out in her book, If Women Counted (Harper & Row, 1988), the problem with GDP and the SNA is that they fail to measure the things that really matter to most of us. Waging war gins the economic metrics; so do plastic surgery and the ecological predations of fast fashion. Meanwhile, raising a child, planting a tree, or composing a song appear nowhere in the GDP and SNA unless someone is getting paid to do these things. Yet these metrics remain the principal gauges of economic wellbeing.

It has by now become commonplace to observe that the frontline in the war on COVID-19 runs through hospitals, nursing homes, and private residences; buses, garbage trucks; and delivery vehicles; and warehouses, factories, and grocery stores. The foot soldiers fighting these skirmishes often are poorly paid and inadequately protected — lacking basic equipment, social protections, and hazard pay. These working conditions result in part from the histories of these caring labors and the fact that many of them are performed both as wage labor (or non-wage gig labor) and as unwaged labor, often by the same people on the same day.

But the hardship these frontline workers are battling now did not start with the spread of this coronavirus — it simply sets in relief what feminist scholars have long called the “crisis of care.” This crisis has familiar social symptoms: middle-class families who can’t afford childcare, a “sandwich generation” of people (mostly women) caring for both dependent children and aging parents, the hyperexploitation of workers (mostly women, largely immigrants) who perform carework for poverty wages while struggling to care for their own families. It also has familiar ecological symptoms as political leaders have labored to justify the apparent economic costs of combating climate change, preserving habitats, and protecting water sources.

Growth- and efficiency-centered policies have proven devastating not only for families and forests but also for the communities of care. A coronavirus, much like a climate crisis, impacts people differentially but ultimately do not respect national borders or status differences or family allegiances. Finally, addressing this crisis of care — both in its immediate manifestations as we struggle to subdue this pandemic and in its more enduring challenges — demands a wholesale reconsideration of how we measure economic wellbeing, devising new metrics that instead prioritize care and carework.

According to a study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, nearly two-thirds of frontline workers are women, and this workforce consists disproportionately of immigrants and people of color. Nearly a quarter of these workers live in low-income households, and many lack health insurance. However “essential” we may deem these jobs, they remain poorly paid and inadequately protected — lacking basic equipment, social protections, and hazard pay. These working conditions result in part from the histories of these caring labors and the fact that many of them are performed both as wage labor (or non-wage gig labor) and as unwaged labor, often by the same people on the same day.

First, the current crisis has achieved something that decades of feminist writing could not: it has made visible the enormous amount of labor dedicated to sustaining societies. Even as women have continued to perform most of the housework and childcare, the unmitting burden of these demands is a topic of widespread discussion. Second, the nature of this pandemic has offered a stark reminder of the costs of policing too chauvinistically the boundaries around our communities of care. A coronavirus, much like a climate crisis, impacts people differentially but ultimately do not respect national borders or status differences or family allegiances. Finally, addressing this crisis of care — both in its immediate manifestations as we struggle to subdue this pandemic and in its more enduring challenges — demands a wholesale reconsideration of how we measure economic wellbeing, devising strategies to measure sustainability and caretaking rather than simply productivity and efficiency.

“… Ester Boserup pointed out in Women’s Role in Economic Development (George Allen & Unwin, 1970) that growth-oriented economic practices would distort social and cultural traditions and exacerbate gender inequalities.”
The network stresses the imbrication of ecological, social, and cultural care and the importance of valuing all of them. The measurement of these various forms of care entails a recognition of time, effort, and expertise (whether intellectual, emotional, or physical) at a variety of scales from the individual, household and community to the national, regional, and global scales. While some methodologies and research areas place greater emphasis on one of these areas over the others, the scholars in this network keep all of these factors in a unified framework as we devise our research plans.

In the inaugural network meeting in April 2019, network members agreed on three areas for future research: metrics, governance, and social practices. The research on metrics centers on challenges of measuring care and the effects of measurement upon care itself. The research on governance explores the ways that laws and policies both reflect and foster normative values of care. The research on social practices investigates the ways that people structure social life around various forms of care, through practices such as social movements, migratory practices, and alternative household and community formations. The network also shares an emphasis on knowledge production from the global south out of a recognition that more sustainable solutions might be found in communities that have substantially different approaches to the provision of care.

Two postdoctoral fellows, Ingrid Meintjes and Riikka Prattes, joined us last Fall to participate in a seminar, Rethinking Economies of Care, co-taught by Jocelyn Olcott and Ara Wilson. They also helped lead a Bass Connections team of graduate and undergraduate researchers on the same topic and helped to broaden the international research network, which now includes nearly 100 scholars and a dozen collaborating research networks.

We held a successful conference in December 2019 at the University of Amsterdam, generously funded by Duke’s Office of Global Affairs and the Franklin Humanities Institute, that featured a keynote speech by feminist economist Nancy Folbre, a MacArthur grantee who has written extensively about the economics of care. Unfortunately, included among the many events postponed this Spring were a conference planned for this April at Duke, highlighting the work of two network partners: the Australia-based Community Economies Research Network and the University of Exeter’s Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health.

The meeting, planned by Professor Olcott, Drs. Meintjes and Prattes, and Psychology graduate student Samia Akhter-Khan intended to bring together researchers across disciplines (anthropologists, historians, economists, sociologists, legal scholars and more) and from around the globe (including Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Brazil, Croatia, Germany, India, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, and the UK) to develop a shared framework for understanding the two principal terms of care and value and for developing methodological and pedagogical trainings around the three research areas of metrics, governance, and social practices. The organizers are now working on transforming this conference into different online formats that allow network members to continue to share their research and cater to the continued integration of Duke students.
Amelia Windemuth

Thesis Title: Fetuses for Likes: An Analysis of the Contemporary Uses of Fetal Imagery by American Anti-Choice Extremists Online

Abstract:
This thesis engages critically with the historical and contemporary uses of fetal imagery to explore how it has been leveraged by American anti-choice extremists on social media to promote notions of fetal personhood. I develop an analysis of fetal imagery in a medical context to understand what social forces shaped the depiction of the fetus and how these forces contributed to the framing of fetal imagery in popular culture and the abortion debate. This informs my analysis of the use of fetal imagery by anti-choice extremists as well as everyday social media users on platforms including Twitter and Instagram. Ultimately, I argue that social media has enhanced anti-choice rhetoric around fetal personhood by exposing fetal imagery to larger audiences and eliciting these audiences to propagate their own fetal content online.

Jay Zussman

Thesis Title: Queering Oocytes: State, Laboratory, and Body

Abstract:
Recent advances in stem cell technology enable new possibilities for biological reproduction among same-sex couples and transgender people who have undergone medical or surgical transition. Despite this promise of revolutionary queer futurity, biomedical science has been harnessed to marginalize the reproductive capacity of the poor, colonized, and people of color for eugenic and capitalist aims. This study draws upon firsthand experiences working in a reproductive biology laboratory to explore how the formation of scientific knowledge (re)produces normative temporalities of the reproductive body. Embracing politics of multiplicity elucidates concrete changes in scientific and medical practice that forge more equitable somatechnic reproductive presents and futures.

“Ultimately, I argue that social media has enhanced anti-choice rhetoric around fetal personhood...”

“Such study draws upon firsthand experiences working in a reproductive biology laboratory to explore how the formation of scientific knowledge (re)produces normative temporalities of the reproductive body.”

Congratulations to the Gender, Sexuality & Feminist Studies Class of 2020

GENDER, SEXUALITY & FEMINIST STUDIES FIRST MAJORS
- Hadeel Abdelhy (2nd Major in International Comparative Studies)
- Saumya Sao (2nd Major in Global Health)
- Tara Smith
- Amelia Windemuth (2nd Major Global Health)

GENDER, SEXUALITY & FEMINIST STUDIES SECOND MAJORS
- Melanie Camejo Coffigny (1st major in Neuroscience)
- Kyra Elise Citron (1st major in Psychology)
- Jennifer Mabel Uzcategui (1st Major Biology)
- Jay Wolf Zussman (1st Major Biophysics)

GENDER, SEXUALITY & FEMINIST STUDIES MINORS
- Syed Ameen Ahmad (Major in Neuroscience)
- Gillian Margaret Card (Major in Psychology)
- Mackenzie Alexis Coles (Major in Public Policy)
- Naomi Adiah Lilly (Major in African & African American Studies)
- Isabella Florentyna Miller (Major in Psychology and Global Health)
- Mehreen Shafqat (Major in Biology)

GRADUATE STUDENTS COMPLETING THE CERTIFICATE IN FEMINIST STUDIES
- Kelly L. Alexander (PhD, Cultural Anthropology)
- Joella W. Bitter (PhD, Cultural Anthropology)
- Elizabeth Anne Crisenbery (PhD, Music)
- Annu Daiyi (PhD, Literature)
- Alyssa M. Granacki (PhD, Romance Studies)
- Shannan Lee Hayes (PhD, Literature)
- Julie Morris (PhD, Theology)
- Nora Irene Nunn (PhD, English)
- Sasha Ann Panaram (PhD, English)
- Cole Alexander Rizki (PhD, Literature)
- Jessica Quick Stark (PhD, English)
- Farren Elizabeth Yero (PhD, History)
Kyra Citron

As a double major in GSF and psychology, I was able to combine theoretical knowledge with an application in psychological research. GSF was the foundation for my analytical framework. From the professors that supported me and peers that became friends, I am thankful for the relationships that GSF has provided me.

Saumya Sao

During my sophomore fall semester at Duke, kind of on a whim, I took my first Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies class. A few books later, I couldn’t stop thinking about the intricacies of gender and health. Since then, I’ve dedicated my academic and personal lives to understanding how gender and sexuality impact healthcare. Taking classes in the GSF department and studying a long history of institutionalized racism and sexism around the world, I’ve learned how these structures manifest as barriers to healthcare and education. GSF taught me how to think. After working in the field of global maternal and reproductive health for a few years, I hope to matriculate into an MD/PhD program in Population Health Sciences, studying the social contexts within which health behavior is rooted. I believe that education and healthcare are fundamental human rights, and GSF has equipped me to enter the world of public health with the mindset to ensure that access to healthcare is not determined by social systems of discrimination.

Tara Smith

I knew instantly that the Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies department was where I belonged. I had grappled with issues of gender and sexuality throughout my whole academic career, and was unsatisfied with the fact that these topics were often considered afterthoughts within political and philosophical contexts. Learning from some of the best professors in the field has expanded my understanding of what it means to assume an identity – whether it be my gender, race, sexuality, or ability status – and to better understand the environments in which these concepts were formed. I can confidently say that, in addition to feeling prepared to embark on the next chapter of my life and enter the nonprofit sphere (with the eventual goal of attending law school), I feel as though I have a broader understanding of myself within the framework of the world around me. My service dog, Murphy, and I are grateful to have had this profound education.

Jennifer Uzcategui

I came to double major in Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist studies in what I like to think of as a natural accident of sorts. I started Duke as a biology major with no idea of what GSF was, but I took Gender and Everyday Life in my first year and well, the rest is history. That one class turned into two classes which turned into a minor and eventually became my second major. My GSF classes were my saving grace; they allowed me to form close relationships with my peers and my professors in a setting where everyone was devoted to growing together and using intersectional analyses to discuss difficult yet important issues. While I love participating in scientific research, this aspect is definitely missing from the field, and studying both Bio and Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies made my Duke career whole. I use the framework and knowledge I have gained in my GSF classes every single day so I know I will use it in the future as I embark on a career working towards social justice.
The Annual Queer Theory Lecture

In honor of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

by: L.J. Brandi
PhD Student, Department of History

This year’s Queer Theory Lecture in Honor of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick hosted Professor Juana María Rodríguez, whose lecture “Biopolitics, Portraiture, and the Poetics of Puta Life” comes from a chapter of her forthcoming book project entitled Puta Life: Seeing Latina, Working Sex. This work focuses on how individuals look at, and linger on, images. The chapter she presented analyzes how nineteenth century Mexican state authorities used photography as a way to document and categorize mujeres publicas (sex-workers). Each woman was required to provide a photograph when they registered their location. The Mexican state kept track of these women, documenting their movements to and from hospitals as well as when they entered and left the sex-worker profession.

Rodríguez asserts that novel photographic technology allowed the state not only to identify and track mujeres publicas, but to classify and categorize them. However, Rodríguez attempts to look beyond how the state gazed upon these women in an effort to understand how these women positioned themselves before the camera, to read their individual actions and movements against the state’s archival grain. Rodríguez acknowledges that there are limits to what can be gleaned of these women’s thoughts and feelings from an archive designed to control their self-expression. As such, she uses critical fabulation as a technique to examine her own affective attachment to these women and their images. Ultimately, she states that this is a project of presenting but also one of ‘typing.’

Spring 2020 EVENTS

JANUARY

Duke on Gender: “The Concept of Care” with Yolanda Y. Wilson (Philosophy, Howard University) “Race, Gender, Class, and Caregiving” and Jocelyn Defter (History, International Comparative Studies, GSF, Duke University) “The Desirability of Care.” This panel debates the concept of care, highlighting states of commodification, non-commodification, and indispensability of consistent performance.

“A Feminist Politics of Ambivalence Reading Emma Goldman” with Clare Hemmings, Gender Studies, London School of Economics and Political Science.

“The Notorious Madame Restell: Childhood and the Criminalization of Abortion in Nineteenth-Century America” with Nicholas Syrett, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, University of Kansas.

FEBRUARY


“Witnessing #MeToo: The Cost of Doubt and the Promise of Collective Testimony in the Kavanaugh Hearing” with Leigh Gummere, a Distinguished Visiting Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at Wesleyan College.


May 2019  –  Undergraduates

Leah Abrams  
(Graduate Student, Public Policy and History)
Awarded student admission to the SSISW Conference to study the changing role of women in the public sector and media leadership. Abrams used this experience to further fuel research and make connections with leaders in the policy and media fields.

Kinza Khan  
(Graduate Student, Political Science)
 Studied how HIV positive youth in Zimbabwe usually craft and share self-representation online through social media selfies and how that self-representation evolved through the period of their participation in the Youth Researcher Academy from May to August 2019.

Oct 2019  –  Undergraduates

Jacqueline Allain  
(Graduate Student, History, and Certificate in Feminist Studies)
Presented a paper at the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians. The paper was presented titled “The Militancy and Reproductive Labor in Post-emancipation Martinique.” The paper that Allain organized was titled Social Reproduction in Slavery and Emancipation in the Circum-Caribbean.

Blake Beaver  
(Graduate Student, Literature, and Certificate in Feminist Studies)
Presented a paper entitled “The Catfight: Aggressive Therapy and Feminist Survival in Dynasty” at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies annual conference. The paper situated the convergence of television studies, feminist theory, and theories of psychodynamic effect. The paper analyzed the catfight in ABC’s 1981 series Dynasty to elaborate the potential for a feminine emotional survival through forms of aggressive therapy.

Zachary Levine  
(Graduate Student, Cultural Anthropology, and Certificate in Feminist Studies)
Gave a talk in Campinas, Sào Paulo Brazil about his dissertation that concerns incarceration, spirit-mediumship, and ayahuasca in Porto Velho, capital of the Brazilian-Amazonian state of Rondônia. Levine’s research explores how the concept and practice of mediumship (mediunsidad) from religious healing publics—including ayahuasca ritualism—is enlisted in the project of “re-mediating” men in Rondônia’s state prisons.

Sasha Panaram  
(Graduate Student, English, and Certificate in Feminist Studies)
Attended the American Studies Association conference in Honolulu, Hawaii. She presented on the possibilities of salvaging the land in black diasporic communities. She attended panels at the conference that explored diasporic footwork, and this aided her progress as her project takes up questions about mobility and momentum during and after the Middle Passage.

Tania Rispoli  
(Graduate Student, Romance Studies, and Certificate in Feminist Studies)
 Participated in the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) conference in Chicago, specifically to one panel called “The Ethics and Language(s) of Care in Contemporary Literature and Cinema.” Rispoli presented a paper on “Invisibility and Affectivity in the ‘Labor of Love,’” that was temporarily accepted. The paper stems from a class taught with Jocelyn Eliott and Ara Wilson. The paper is a part of Rispoli’s dissertation project.

Cole Rizki  
(Graduate Student, Literature, and Certificate in Feminist Studies)
Presented a paper drawn from a dissertation chapter that Yero is preparing for publication with the Journal of Women’s History. It concerns a set of rumors and satirical verses anonymously written about smallpox inoculation and the investigation into them by colonial authorities in Mexico City.

Oct 2019 – Undergraduates

Lucy Dong  
(Graduate Student, International Comparative Studies, and History)
Worked on an independent study with Dr. Nicole E. Barnes to write a paper on representations of female barefoot doctors during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The project spoke to spaces of tension between gender as a social construct and linguistic gender, as well as between gender-inclusive language in official and marginalized linguistic practices, music, film, and literature.

Patrick Hong  
(Graduate Student, Religious Studies)
Completed Religious Studies honors thesis on how religious organizations, specifically in American Buddhism, have adjusted their doctrine and responded to the 2015 Supreme Court legalization of same-sex marriage. They interviewed Buddhist leaders and also members of the sangha to learn more about how they fit same-sex marriage within their religious and ethical paradigm. Visited Karmê Chöling. Shambhala Meditation Center in Barre, Vermont, where Hong looked into that specific sangha.

Anna Kasradze  
(Graduate Student, Global Cultural Studies Literature)
Presented a paper at the 2020 Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA). The paper concretizes Simone de Beauvoir’s identification-based reader response theory by analyzing her own experiences of literary identification in her memoirs (e.g., Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter renews Beauvoir’s passionate identification with George Eliot through Maggie Tulliver). Kasradze reconstituted Beauvoir’s insights within subsequent feminist contributions to reader response theory.

Saumya Sao  
(Graduate Student, Certificate in Feminist Studies)
Male involvement in antenatal care (ANC) has been recommended by the World Health Organization to improve pregnancy and birth outcomes, but challenges to male engagement exist. Sao’s study explored male perceptions and experiences of their roles in ANC in order to identify opportunities to improve male engagement and gender-transformative improvements to reproductive healthcare.

Carolina Waring  
(Graduate Student, Global Cultural Studies Literature)
Presented the paper “Let’s Eat Robin: Affect, Subjectivity and Becoming-Monster in Dijana Barnes’ ‘Nighthood’” while on the “Affect and American Literature” panel at the Northeast MLA conference in Boston. Waring adapted the paper from the second chapter of their senior thesis that asked the question: How can we theorize the lesbian self within a framework like affect theory, which sets out to re-conceptualize subject formation itself?
“Through ethnographic observation, this dissertation explores sharing food as a way of caring for people that reflects moral beliefs about value and worthiness, both of food as well as of people.”

**Kelly Alexander**

**Cultural Anthropology, PhD, Duke University and Certificate in Feminist Studies**

**DISSERTATION TITLE:**

Edible Cultures: The Politics and Ethics of Recuperating Food Waste

**DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:**

On a planet with shrinking natural resources and a rising population, who will have enough to eat? This research studies the people and policies involved in an emergent citywide system of food waste recuperation in the E.U.’s capital of Brussels. It incorporates those who recirculate food—such as volunteers at the city’s largest food bank; workers at a culinary skills-training program; and activists in a soup kitchen with “zero food waste” weekly pop-up restaurant. It also includes those who benefit from their efforts—such as the E.U.’s growing immigrant and refugee population, some of whom strive to become citizens while others pass through on their way to larger dreams of European belonging.

The same policy drives these efforts, but distinct ethical frameworks guide them. Reflecting the city’s Catholic history, traditional hospitality is embodied in acts of sharing food—which adherents believe builds communities, brings individuals closer to God, and reinforces the belief that God will provide. Volunteers at the food bank strongly express this ethic. Elsewhere, acts of “giving back” become ways to recruit new citizens, expressing neoliberal politics that locate an ethic of caring within capitalism. For example, a job-training program is a restaurant that runs on donated food and offers internships to welfare recipients so that they might join the local labor force one day. Finally, an N.G.O. runs a social inclusion program aimed at recuperating not only abandoned food but also abandoned urban spaces. In this case, a mobile soup kitchen aims to revitalize urban blight through feeding the city’s hungriest residents—giving sustenance by means of scrappy collaborations between volunteers, citizens, and immigrants.

Through ethnographic observation, this dissertation explores sharing food as a way of caring for people that reflects moral beliefs about value and worthiness, both of food as well as of people. It asks: How do obligations of care square with social obligations that match cast-off food with cast-out humans?

“This dissertation offers fascist performativity as a theoretical lens to better understand how Italian composers interacted with fascism through sustained, performative acts while leaving space to account for the slipperiness of fascist identities.”

**Elizabeth Crisenbery**

**Music, PhD, Duke University and Certificate in Feminist Studies**

**DISSERTATION TITLE:**

Performing Fascism: Opera, Politics, and Masculinities in Fascist Italy, 1935-1941

**DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:**

Roger Griffin notes that “there can be no term in the political lexicon which has generated more conflicting theories about its basic definition than ‘fascism’. The difficulty articulating a singular definition of fascism is indicative of its complexities and ideological changes over time. This dissertation offers fascist performativity as a theoretical lens to better understand how Italian composers interacted with fascism through sustained, performative acts while leaving space to account for the slipperiness of fascist identities.

Although opera thrived in fascist Italy (1922-1943), extant scholarship on this period of music history remains scant, promoting a misleading narrative of operatic decline in the twentieth century. This dissertation examines the positions of four Italian opera composers within fascist culture by focusing on the premieres of four operas during the Italian fascist period: Pietro Mascagni’s Nerone (1935), Gian Francesco Malipiero’s Giulio Cesare (1936), Ottorino Respighi’s Lucrezia (1937), and Ennio Perinno’s Gli Oriati (1941). These musical settings of romanità (Roman-ness) were part of Mussolini’s efforts to glorify ancient Rome, a central tenant of fascist ideology.

In fascist Italy, a political society that extolled masculinity and musical composition, experiences of difference were often hidden beneath a guise of hypermasculine rhetoric. Opera composers associated with the fascist regime were almost exclusively men and did not interact with the regime, musical analysis, and reception of their operas. While not all the composers included in this dissertation were outspoken fascists, or even confirmed members of the National Fascist Party, they nevertheless performed fascism to obtain favor with Mussolini and the fascist regime.
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:
This dissertation calls for a philosophical alliance between transcontinental feminist theory and contemporary origins of life research. I argue that a phallocentric scientific and theoretical framework is incapable of addressing the emergence of life out of matter on Earth. A phallocentric theory of the origin of life posits a vertical hierarchy between life and matter and understands them as fundamentally opposite to each other. In creating a division between matter and life, phallocentric approaches to the origins of life create a dilemma of needing to pinpoint exactly when life emerges, in other words answering exactly when “inanimate” matter is animated or penetrated with a logos of life.

Building on the feminist science studies tradition of examining the relation between metaphor and science, “The Conditions of Emergence” studies how certain strands of origins of life research are beginning to question whether scientific work rooted in metaphors of light, energetic stasis, and autonomous self-birth can attend to the question of how cellular life first emerged from matter somewhere between 3.8 and 4.2 billion years ago. In lieu of these metaphors, origin of life theories concentrating on deep-sea vents re-embed life’s cellular beginnings within a geochemically volatile ancient Earth through metaphors of darkness (rather than light) and gestational birth in inorganic wombs (rather than within narratives where a cellular body brings itself into being). I argue that a dark proto-intrauterine space that is bioenergetically never at rest and rooted within the geochemical forces of the Earth makes, perhaps for the first time, the question of how life emerged a conceptual possibility within both philosophy and womanhood, concepts that were at the center of various intellectual debates in fourteenth-century Europe. I historicize the question of women’s relationship to philosophical knowledge by bringing manuscript evidence—in the form of textual modifications and commentaries from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—to bear on my literary analysis. I contend that Boccaccio, in his vernacular masterpiece the Decameron and other works, presents not just one model of a woman philosopher but several, a plurality that challenges our inherited notion of what constitutes philosophy, to whom it belongs, and how we encounter it in our lives.

Annu Dahiya
Literature, PhD, Duke University and Certificate in Feminist Studies

DISSERTATION TITLE:
The Conditions of Emergence: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of the Origins of Life

“[The project] challenges our inherited notion of what constitutes philosophy, to whom it belongs, and how we encounter it in our lives.”
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

An Aesthetic Disposition offers a feminist theory of the politics of contemporary art that moves away from the project of identity-based representation and focuses instead on the prefigurative world-making practices of care, sensible pleasure, and utopian revitalization. I bring these ideas together under an extended theory of "social reproduction" and argue that under the conditions of late capitalism, art’s revitalizing features are both political and needed. I build this argument through close attention to the work of three US-based artists: Simone Leigh, Roni Horn, and Mika Rottenberg. As such, my thinking about art and politics spans a range of contemporary media and content, from a work of black feminist health-care centered social practice art (Leigh), to a set of “androgyne” minimalist glass sculptures (Horn), to a series of Rube Goldberg-like video works depicting women in absurd scenes of global production (Rottenberg). Having each exhibited new works over the past five years at major museums, I choose these artists for their shared historical context, their varied approaches, and their accepted institutional status as working within the terrain of feminist art. My project seeks at the same time to read these artists’ works against the grain of popular identity-focused feminist framings. Taken as a whole, my research demonstrates the relevance of turning to works of art as objects that can themselves theorize advanced problems in feminist and critical theory.

Shannan Hayes

DISSERTATION TITLE:
An Aesthetic Disposition: Art, Social Reproduction, and Feminist Critique

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

One is not born but becomes a woman—Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex

Simone de Beauvoir’s now famous quote began an exploration in feminist studies around the socialization of gender. For de Beauvoir, being socialized as a woman means belief in an inherent problem that requires the mitigation of self-improvement. What happens if we replace “woman” with “Christian” in the above quote?

One is not born but becomes a Christian.

On the one hand, this signals the conversion process central within Protestant Christianity. On the other hand, it signals how this conversion process has become entangled with the patriarchal system of improvement. That is, the conversion process within Christianity began to take on the characteristics of the latter.

The confusion between patriarchy and Christian soteriology (what I term patriarchal soteriology) led to the baptism of the patriarchal arrangement (i.e., heterosexual, male-dominated, white, binary-based, and hierarchically ordered according to class, language, etc.). The expectation to approximate to the patriarch (either by emulation or submission) became an issue of salvific import. For women, patriarchal soteriology communicated to women that they were inherently further from salvation and that the solution lay in approximating themselves to masculine desires. For non-white women, this was compounded with the conflation of whiteness with salvation. Thus, the performance of redeemed femininity (a saved woman) is articulated by means of ideas of self-improvement calibrated to masculinist longings for control and power.

This produces a theological politic that reinforces the gender binary and positions women in reference to and in need of saving by men. Furthermore, it means the patriarchal system reproduces itself under the guise and name of Christianity.

We must then ask: is salvation good for women?

Julie Morris

DISSERTATION TITLE:
Salvation from Self-Improvement: A Feminist Theology

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

For women, patriarchal soteriology communicated to women that they were inherently further from salvation and that the solution lay in approximating themselves to masculine desires.
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

Genocide studies typically emphasize economics, law, history, political science, and sociology as the disciplines most relevant to understanding the phenomenon of premeditated mass slaughter, and the scholarship has been dominated by men, both as subjects and authors. Engendering Genocide intervenes in a field traditionally dominated by the social sciences, illustrating how U.S. literary and cultural texts provide a space for their creators and their audiences to imagine the transnational, gendered, and often quotidian nature of genocide. Weaving together literary criticism, feminist theory, and a transnational American Studies methodology, the project analyzes representations of the crime in the twentieth-century United States. Unbound to the empirical protocol of social sciences, my objects of study—which include novels, memoirs, manifestos, photographs, and film—allow for the imagination of political possibilities unafforded to other disciplines. I demonstrate that by giving this crime a name and telling its story, the figures in my project relied on both word and image to make visible a specific kind of violence they saw repeating in different iterations throughout human history, and in turn, to enable nations to interfere in the domestic affairs of other sovereign powers. By chronicling their efforts, Engendering Genocide considers the ethical and aesthetic challenges and consequences involved in these acts of representation. Based on this analysis, I ultimately conclude that the horror of the crime cannot be fully represented—and that’s precisely one of the factors that makes genocide so dangerous: it can hide, so to speak, in plain sight.

Nora Nunn
English, PhD, Duke University and Certificate in Feminist Studies

DISSERTATION TITLE:
Engendering Genocide: Representations of Violence in the Long Twentieth Century

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

This dissertation explores renderings of the Middle Passage in creative and critical works by African American and Caribbean women writers. Departing from the premise that the term “Middle Passage” is insufficient where it concerns describing the massive scale of forced migration that occurred during this trans-Atlantic catastrophe, I look to black women writers in order to build a different vocabulary to depict that which has no beginning, middle, or end; that which is not confined to a narrow strait but whose nomenclature suggests otherwise. Bringing together Caribbeanist philosophical treatises on crossing, like that of M. Jacqui Alexander and Kamau Brathwaite, and the dynamic work in black geography studies and black feminist literary criticism by Katherine McKitrick and Barbara Christian, I argue that black women writers retell Middle Passage stories anew in order to isolate specific forms of movement such as holding, landing, and crawling that outlive the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In so doing, they intervene in what has previously been a male dominated field of criticism on the Middle Passage. Across four chapters, this dissertation addresses the challenges of writing about the catastrophe of the Middle Passage for which there is no set of identifiable ruins before turning specifically to three works of literature – M. NourbeSe Philip’s Zong! (2008), Paule Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow (1983), and Toni Morrison’s Beloved (1987). Heeding to the momentum necessary for this particular trans-Atlantic event ultimately allows us to reckon with what I call “Middle Passages” or “Middle Passings” – the multiple crossings that ensue in the wake of this unparalleled event.

Sasha Panaram
English, PhD, Duke University and Certificate in Feminist Studies

DISSERTATION TITLE:
The Space in Between: Middle Passage Movement and Black Women’s Literature

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

“Based on this analysis, I ultimately conclude that the horror of the crime cannot be fully represented—and that’s precisely one of the factors that makes genocide so dangerous: it can hide, so to speak, in plain sight.”

“...I argue that black women writers retell Middle Passage stories anew in order to isolate specific forms of movement such as holding, landing, and crawling that outlive the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.”
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

My dissertation combines ethnographic, literary, archival, and visual culture methods to study contemporary transgender politics and cultural production as these have taken shape in response to Argentine dictatorship (1976-83). Each chapter considers how trans activists strategically deploy existing visual and material culture, activist strategies, and legal interventions developed by antigenocide activists such as the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo to forward trans rights claims. Taken together, the dissertation’s chapters evoke an interdisciplinary method that twins the study of cultural practices with histories of state violence, focusing on gender and sexuality as central to such analyses. In doing so, my work traces unexpected affinities between Argentine transgender and antigenocide politics, cultural production, and activism—relationships otherwise obscured by US Trans Studies scholarship that largely links trans activism with other gender, sexuality, and identity-based activism alone. By tracing the ways Argentine trans activists reanimate the past to meet the demands of the present, my dissertation offers a historical interpretation of transgender political subjectivity that extends and revises Trans Studies’ geopolitical imagination, bringing Latin American archives, national histories, and political strategies to bear on existing Trans Studies scholarship.

Cole Rizki
Literature, PhD, Duke University and Certificate in Feminist Studies

DISSERTATION TITLE:
State Violence and Transgender Cultural Politics in Post-Dictatorship Argentina

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

This project argues that experimental poets, beginning with Gertrude Stein but proliferating later in the century with such poets as Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, Joe Brainard, and Barbara Guest, were drawn to comics for the way they perform, while undoing, the most conventional appeals to authorship, authenticity, personhood, and the unified text. Examining twentieth-century poetry in juxtaposition with comics as an often-overlooked interlocutor, I show how comics—from their inception—have always held an influential place in US poetic avant-garde. Drawing on critical work in visual cultural studies and popular culture as well as queer theory and literary studies, this project revises the term “avant-garde” and its loaded connotations of privilege, elitism, and obscurity, to include a myriad of popular frameworks that expand literary histories of the US American avant-garde and its recognized artists. Rather than attempt to reverse hierarchical classifications, I chronicle production continuities (e.g. publication models, modes of distribution, editorial influences, and common audiences) between avant-garde culture and mass media in order to emphasize overlapping contexts between these seemingly disparate fields. My consideration of long-publishing comics in poetry—from the Nancy comics to Krazy Kat and Dick Tracy—not only highlights the ways these poetic works challenged conventions in their use of comics media, but also how multi-authored texts provide agitating, lyrical depictions in response to reductive classifications of race, gender, and sexuality in the twentieth century.

Jessica Stark
English, PhD, Duke University and Certificate in Feminist Studies

DISSERTATION TITLE:
Picturing Poetics: Seriality, Comics, and the Cartoon in US Experimental Poetry

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

“My dissertation offers a historical interpretation of transgender political subjectivity that brings Latin American archives, national histories, and political strategies to bear on existing Trans Studies scholarship.”

“My consideration of long-publishing comics in poetry—from the Nancy comics to Krazy Kat and Dick Tracy—not only highlights the ways these poetic works challenged conventions in their use of comics media, but also how multi-authored texts provide agitating, lyrical depictions in response to reductive classifications of race, gender, and sexuality in the twentieth century.”
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

My dissertation examines the colonial history of medical rights through a study of the world’s first vaccine. The Spanish introduced the smallpox vaccine to their empire in 1804, along with royal orders that vaccination be voluntary and consent a natural right ceded to parents. Yet, the vaccine first arrived in the bodies of two enslaved girls. Doctors would continue to rely on enslaved, indigenous, and other dispossessed bodies to conserve the vaccine for those otherwise accorded this “universal” right. Foregrounding these patients and their own knowledge about health, the body, and disease, my dissertation follows the vaccine through the Spanish Caribbean and Mexico to ask why imperial—and later, national—authorities protected voluntary vaccination, what this choice meant for parents and patients, and what their stories can tell us about the value of consent in an era of both race and rights-making.

I argue that medical consent, as it was envisioned and employed in vaccination policies, worked to uphold colonial structures of power, explaining how immunization became embedded in struggles over the abolition of slavery, parental rights, and hierarchies challenged by the unrest of revolution. Racial and sexual politics informed decisions about which bodies were best suited to incubate and test the vaccine, whose knowledge was deemed a threat to public health, and ultimately, who should be recognized as a parent, worthy of rights and capable of informed consent. By tracing the vaccine through the postcolonial era, my project addresses the enduring effects of colonialism across political discourses of liberalism and access to resources and care, demonstrating the limits of consent and prompting more ethical understandings of bodily autonomy.

By tracing the vaccine through the postcolonial era, my project addresses the enduring effects of colonialism across political discourses of liberalism and access to resources and care, demonstrating the limits of consent and prompting more ethical understandings of bodily autonomy.

Reflection on Dr. Nicholas Syrett’s Lecture

by Luoshu Zhang
PhD Candidate, Department of English, Duke University

On January 30, 2020, Nicholas Syrett, a historian and chair of the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at the University of Kansas, gave a work-in-progress lecture, “The Notorious Madame Restell: Childhood and the Criminalization of Abortion in Nineteenth-Century America,” sponsored by the Program in Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies and the History Department. The focus was the changing discourse of the value of children and definitions of childhood that led to the criminalization of abortion by 1881 in the US. While scholars have pointed out a number of factors behind the criminalization of abortion, such as rejection of white middle-class women’s sexual agency, condemnation of increased unaccountable sex that led to illegitimate pregnancy, and a decline in birthrate by white middle-class women, Syrett considers how a moral panic about abortion and baby farms became linked to “the sacralization of children and childhood.”

Using the famous case of “Madame Restell,” Syrett traces the shifting narratives around abortionists and the institutions they were associated with—abortion clinics, lying-in hospitals, and sites from which abandoned infants could be adopted (“baby farms”)—as well as the impact of this discourse on public perceptions of abortion and reproduction. The rhetorical slippage between “fetus” and “child” had emerged before abortion was criminalized. Conflating abortion with child murder and kidnapping and depicting abortionists and administrators of baby farmers as diabolical figures seeking to profit from ending the lives of innocent children facilitated the rise of the figure of the child and childhood as sacred and priceless. Syrett’s new work fits within his longstanding research interests in the history and politics of age in the United States, especially as it relates to gender and sexuality.

As we have explored in Frances Hasso’s graduate seminar Governing Race, Sex and Reproduction this term, technologies and discourses of reproduction, birth control, and motherhood are inseparable from the ideologically freighted social and political contexts from which they emerge.
In 2013, Owens was named the first recipient of The Graduate School’s Distinguished Alumni Award. The next year as a part of Duke’s commemoration of 50 years of black students at Duke, The Graduate School honored her with the premiere screening of the documentary about her life and work, accompanied by a panel discussion about the role that graduate and professional schools played in the desegregation of higher education.

Owens is survived by her husband Herbert Owens, son Jeffrey Owens, daughter Lisa Owens, son-in-law Darryl Settles, grandchildren Taylor and Preston Settles, sister Giovendolyn Bradley, and brother Benjamin Stephens. As an expression of sympathy, the family has requested that memorial contributions be made to The Duke Graduate School Annual Fund noting that the gift is “in honor of Ida Stephens Owens.” Donations can be made at http://tiny.cc/IdaOwens.


In Memory of
Ida Stephens Owens

Ida Stephens Owens, one of Duke’s first African American Ph.D. graduates and an internationally recognized researcher on the genetics of human diseases, died on February 24 at the age of 80.

Born in 1939, Owens grew up in Whiteville, North Carolina. She earned her bachelor’s degree in biology from North Carolina College (now NCCU) in 1961. Owens entered Duke’s physiology Ph.D. program in fall 1962. She was among the first three African Americans to enroll in The Graduate School, which had been desegregated in 1961. In 1967, she became one of the first two African Americans—and the first black woman—to receive their Ph.D. from Duke.

After earning her Ph.D., Owens completed her postdoctoral training at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). She then established a research program there that became internationally recognized for its investigation into the genetics of human diseases. Owens was the first to determine genetic defects in children with Crigler-Najjar diseases, a rare disorder affecting the metabolism of bilirubin and often causing brain damage in infants.

In 1981, her research program became a permanent section on drug biotransformation at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and Owens was named section chief. She later served as the head of the NICHD’s Section on Genetic Disorders of Drug Metabolism in the Program on Developmental Endocrinology and Genetics. In 1992, she received the NIH Director’s Award.

Owens remained connected to Duke throughout her life. She served on the Trinity College Board of Visitors and the Women’s Studies Advisory Council and was a frequent speaker for alumni groups and students. The Duke Bouchet Society, which supports STEM graduate students from underrepresented groups, holds an annual dinner named after Owens in honor of her accomplishments.

Spring 2020 EVENTS

MARCH

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Feminist Connections Exploring the value of a degree in Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at Duke through connecting potential majors with faculty.

10th Annual Feminist Theory Workshop with Keynote Speakers: Judith Butler, Maine Elliott Professor of Comparative Literature at University of California, Berkeley; Sharon Holland, Townsend Ludington Distinguished Professor of American Studies at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Audio Simpson, Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University; Stedman Thedford, Associate Professor of Government at Dartmouth College. RESCHEDULED FOR FEB. 2021.

APRIL

Anne Ferrer Scott Lecture: “Regulating Care for the Global Economy: Protection, Rights, and the Home Workplace” with Eileen Boris, the Hull Professor and Distinguished Professor of Feminist Studies, History, Black Studies, and Global Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara.

2020 Honors Thesis Presentation This year’s honors students to present are Amelia Windmuth – “Teaure for Liikes: An Analysis of the Contemporary Uses of Fetal Imaging by American Infertility Extremists Online” and Jay Zussman “Queering Oocytes: State, Laboratory, and Body”. The student presentations are followed by a celebration.

DUE TO THE COVID-19 VIRUS, GSF SPRING EVENTS WERE CANCELED OR POSTPONED. WE LOOK FORWARD TO SCHEDULING ALL OF OUR CONTINUING AND NEW EVENTS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
Fall 2020 COURSES

GSF 89S.01  Clothing and Care
Jocelyn Olcott

GSF 199S.01  Thinking Gender
Patrice Douglass

GSF 225S.01  Women in Politics
Jane Caputi

GSF 229S.01  Space-Body-Image
Rikka Pratess

GSF 235S.01  Clinical Issues for LGBTQ
Janie Long

GSF 278.01  Sex/Gender, Nature/Nurture
Ara Wilson
Christina Williams

GSF 290S.01  Intro to Transgender Studies
TBD

GSF 351S.01  Adoption Ethics
Kathy Rudy
Juliette Duara

GSF 352S.01  Sex Work: Politics of SXL Labor
Kathi Weeks

GSF 361S.01  Money, Sex, Power
Kathi Weeks

GSF 364S.01  Race, Gender, and Sexuality
Patrice Douglass

GSF 369.01  Transnational Feminism
Frances Hasso

GSF 499S.01  Senior Capstone Seminar
Jennifer Nash

All classes are subject to change as the schedule is finalized. These are the planned courses/times.