

Trans-Versing Gender Boundaries: An Examination of Flintridge Sacred Heart's Women's and  
Gender Studies Curriculum

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Honors Women's and Gender Studies 2022-2023

**Abstract:**

The rise of trans-exclusionary-radical-feminism (TERFs) presents a threat to trans-inclusive gender studies classrooms, by the infiltration of hateful ideology into traditionally feminist spaces. A content analysis and pupil survey of Flintridge Sacred Heart's Women's and Gender Studies curriculum examines possible shortcomings of the course and suggests curriculum improvements. This study determines that by applying a lens shift to the existing WGS curriculum, the course can provide a broader introduction to the field of Gender Studies. The addition of transgender phenomena in classroom materials and discussions will complicate course concepts such as feminism and sexism. The classroom survey indicates a want for more intersectional and trans-inclusive approaches to the course, and demonstrates the potential danger for individual students to become tokenistic representatives of their identity within the classroom. Historical progressions of trans-exclusionary-radical-feminism and gender studies pedagogy are discussed.

**Introduction and Background**

Feminism is about equality. On that, many scholars will agree. However the more a scholar tries to refine, edit, clarify, and condense the meaning of feminism, the more they face obstacles by attempting to define gender, and specifically what it means to be "a woman." While fruitful academic discourse can stem out of fervent disagreement, arguments about gender often devolve into hostile and vitriolic hate speech against transgender identities in attempts to declassify already marginalized communities from participating in conversations *intended* to be about social justice and overcoming oppression.

With the emergence of popular figures like J.K. Rowling using feminism to justify horrendous and offensive claims about trans people, examining the ways in which feminism has failed in its goal of intersectionality seems more pertinent than ever, in order to work towards a broader definition of feminism for the future. While this phenomenon is particularly visible through anti-trans conversations within feminist spaces, the barring of certain marginalized groups from larger social justice movements goes back years: a particularly apt example being the exclusion of lower-class and women of color in the now-historic Seneca Falls convention. Before examining the existing literature on the topic, the researcher would like to provide a disclaimer courtesy of the author of a key source of this paper (*Identity Matters: Teaching Transgender in the Women's Studies Classroom*). As Kate Drabinski argues, "Identity is intersectional, and yet linguistically, we cannot talk about single aspects without excluding others, at least for the moment that a word takes up a single spot in space and time." In academic and social conversations that encounter the intersection of human identities (race, class, gender [and gender identity], religion, sexuality, ability, age, etc.) it is impossible to constantly be aware of the complex layering of individual experiences that place each person in their own unique socio-cultural/political context. For the sake of time and of clarity scholars inevitably distill or attempt to sidestep necessary parts of the conversation, and by nature their writings are incomplete. Yet the more that is written, and the more people who step up and try their hand at explaining, or commenting on complex issues such as feminism, the closer the field gets to definitions that serve the largest number of people. The limit as time approaches infinity is the correct definition of feminism; it may never be reached, but it is always being reached towards.

This study focuses on two main questions: What is the role of feminism in a world of increasing gender diversity? What is a scarcity mindset, and how does it affect individuals'

relationships with power in conversations about intersectionality? This research, although providing some historical context, situates itself in the context of answering the question in terms of the modern world. What does it mean *today* to be a feminist in an increasingly gender-expansive world, and perhaps more importantly what *should* it mean? The second question is broader than strictly referring to feminism. It relies upon the assumption that the Oppression Olympics occurs *because* of a scarcity mindset around power, which causes phenomena like the exclusion of trans-identities and experiences from a more widely accepted definition of feminism. This research gathers background of a both factual and opinion-based nature in order to interrogate *why* feminism so often fails in its intersectionality, and what can be changed to make it succeed.

### **Literature Review**

Through an examination of trans-exclusionary-radical-feminism and the Oppression Olympics, the first phase of research can be divided into three loose categories with an acknowledgement of overlap: history of the intersection of trans-activism and feminism, guidance for how feminism can become more trans-inclusive, and definitions and explorations of intersectionality and the Oppression Olympics. In a comparison of sources, agreement is found based on the principle that feminism currently has a long way to go in order to accurately and comprehensively include space for trans-identities and experiences. Additionally, multiple scholars protest against identity-based frameworks in discussions surrounding intersectionality, grounded in a belief that solely-identity focused conversations tend not to account for differences in experience, resulting in tokenism and unnecessary identity-politics arguments that detract from the central purpose of studying intersectionality. Interestingly, despite a preoccupation with defining what it means to be a woman on recent political and international platforms, the

scholarship reviewed did not attempt to provide a definition of the term “woman”, in fact this article takes umbrage with the idea of doing so as paves the way for an unnecessary attempt to control who is allowed to participate in feminism.

Examining the history of trans-exclusionary-radical-feminism reveals a narrative of feminism attempting to distance itself from the Gay Liberation Movement in hopes to make it more politically palatable to those already reluctant to accept second-wave feminism. In the article “The rise of anti-trans, “radical” feminism, explained,” Katelyn Burns addresses the aforementioned. Burns explains the recent movement of trans-exclusionary groups siding with other conservative organizations under the guise of feminism, in order to advance their transphobic goals. Burns cites a case that went to the Supreme Court in October of 2019, where anti-trans interest groups were trying to claim that employers are allowed to fire their employees for identifying as transgender. TERF groups are not the first to use science to attempt to justify bigotry and hatred, remarks Burns, citing historical arguments for eugenics and the inferiority of races to justify slavery. She claims that the rise of TERF academia (articles written in a seemingly progressive space - gender studies) give legitimacy to a movement of oppression and bigotry. According to TERFs trans-men are victims of the patriarchy who have been “tricked” into thinking they are straight men instead of lesbians, and that *all* trans-women pose sexual threats to cis-women. Burns’s work also illustrates the ways in which many so-called feminist groups who identify as trans-exclusionary or ‘gender-critical’ have ultra-conservative ties, and that these feminist organizations are willing to partner with groups that deny reproductive freedom for the goal of eliminating trans-identities. By pointing out the flawed logic of TERF arguments, Burns writes a compelling and informative article on the current climate around trans

rights as a part of a broader conversation about conservative ideologies encroaching on civil rights.

In a similar article that explains the historical intersection of trans and feminist politics, as well as their mutual connections to the Gay Liberation Movement, scholars Saeidzadeh and Strid chronicle the history of TERFeminism as well as making an argument for activism not based on identity. The authors contend that although the movements were/are distinct they share the same goals, however many feminist organizations began to question trans-authenticity and its role in the movement by questioning ‘what’ constitutes a woman. In the article, Saeidzadeh and Strid posit that antagonistic debates stem from the problematic dependence on identity-based politics. In doing so, the authors argue for status-based politics where trans means a social status rather than just an identity that requires recognition from others. Indeed, they suggest highlighting individuals' specific needs in society. Because both groups experience societal oppression based upon their status as women and/or trans women, the article asserts that instead of getting bogged down by questions of who is allowed to be a woman, and who is allowed to be a feminist, that both feminists and trans activists alike embrace the similar goals of their distinct social movements. According to Saeidzadeh and Strid, this will lead to equal distribution of wealth and equal political representation of trans people in feminist politics.

As a natural progression from outlining the history of trans-exclusive movements within feminism, many scholars shift to provide guidance on how feminism can become more inclusive of gender as a lens through which to view “women’s issues.” In a transcription of an interview with Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, a noted lesbian, transgender, feminist scholar, she explains her assertion of the harm that TERF feminism has done to the movement. She makes an argument for feminism that fights against oppression in all forms, and uses a Biblical basis to confirm her

theories. As a feminist and religious scholar, she gives many biblical examples of trans-accepting and LGBTQ+ affirming bible passages. Mollenkott takes umbrage with the idea that to be transgender requires medical intervention, and she invites listeners to reshape their ideas of gender to break the binary and accept a more fluid notion of gender identity and diversity. Moreover, the interview chronicles Mollenkott's opinions on the intersection of feminism and womanism, explaining the harm that early first and second wave white feminism has had on women and LGBTQ+ people of color. She recommends that instead of comparing who has supposedly been harmed the most from systems of oppression, people should seek to listen to each other and begin a dialogue. Mollenkott argues that the more restrictive a definition of gender, the more losses are racked up, and that despite what some people wish to believe, everyone benefits from more inclusive concepts of gender identity.

Krista Scott-Dixon goes further in her analysis and attempts to define and explain what the future of trans-feminism looks like. She explains that many trans-individuals have the unique experience of viewing feminism through a separate lens by interacting with the world in differently gendered bodies. Scott-Dixon specifically highlights sexual assault as an example of the intersection of trans issues and feminist ones. (It is worth noting here that trans people are more likely to be sexually assaulted, although this was not mentioned in the article.) Similarly, Scott-Dixon examines the experience of trans-men and the journey of grappling with masculinity. Through this examination, Scott-Dixon asserts that trans and feminist issues are so interwoven they cannot be separated, and underscores that both topics depend on gender and the intersection of societal oppression. The author cites similar scholars surmising that it is "neither accurate nor useful" to view transgender social justice movements as separate from or antagonistic to feminism (Scott-Dixon). The article concludes by imagining a definition of

transgender feminism by folding a focus on trans issues into the larger fight for gender equality. While understanding that trans-specific issues need special social and political protections, feminism cannot exist without honoring and including the real effect that the trans-modifier has on society's view of one's gender.

In a related way, Kate Drabinski, a professor from Tulane University elaborates upon trans-inclusive feminism and suggests a new model for reshaping gender studies curricula to match. In "Identity Matters: Teaching Transgender in the Women's Studies Classroom," Drabinski outlines the main pitfalls of teaching 'transgender' in a Women's and Gender Studies (or Gender and Sexuality Studies) curriculum, and gives specific examples based on her teaching experience of how to reshape discourse on transgender issues within the context of feminist conversations. Her main point indicts the preference for what she calls a "special-guest" model of teaching transgender issues. Often it is a single day of classes, one article, or one guest speaker, and transgender issues are only occasionally brought up throughout the rest of the course. A key way of combating this reductionist model, claims Drabinski, is to frame transgender discourse in terms of transgender phenomenon and not based on the individual experiences of token trans people. At the same time, this scholar argues that to completely dismiss identity as historically and socially relevant categories is yet another form of transphobia evident in gender studies courses. Drabinski identifies the gender studies classroom as a crucial place where conceptions of gender are reshaped, and in her article ushers forth a lesson plan for creating a gender-inclusive gender studies program that moves beyond focusing on trans issues as only a facet of women's issues, but viewing transgender as a lens through which to observe the larger social and historical conceptions of gender as a whole.

In response to the second research question referring to the Oppression Olympics, the



first step was to attack the academic discourse surrounding the definition of the Oppression Olympics. Scholar Amen Gashaw defines the term Oppression Olympics and argues against it using practical and ideological evidence of the harm it causes society. The author defines the Oppression Olympics as the competition for the title of ‘most oppressed.’ Gashaw claims that this attitude stems from the idea that society is only capable of a finite amount of progress at one time, and therefore oppressed groups must compete to receive the ‘honor’ of social/political progress. To debunk this assumption Gashaw gives historical background for groups with different interests working together to achieve all of their goals, like the temperance, women’s suffrage, and abolitionist movements of the 1800s. The journalist also describes how in the 1900s the labor movement was unable to make progress because of division down racial lines. Gashaw ends the article by explaining that only by releasing ourselves from this mindset of competition around oppression and trauma, will true justice be achievable.

In a critical and formative academic text entitled, “Dialogical Epistemology—An Intersectional Resistance to the ‘Oppression Olympics,” referenced by many in the field of Gender Studies, author Yual-Davis writes in her article about an academic feminist, sociological, and epistemological framing for intersectional and political dialogue. She challenges the idea that objectivity and truth can come from any one group, asserting that by its nature, the truth of only one group is incomplete although it may be correct. She argues that specifically marginalized groups are a good way to begin to study epistemology, but that does not mean that only members of an identity should study it (ex. Only women study feminism, only LGBTQ+ people study Critical Sexuality and Gender theory). Yual-Davis, citing the work of other notable experts in her field, explains that it is untrue to claim that any group is ‘more marginalized’ than another; she more specifically rejects any kind of hierarchical view of oppression. The focus of

her academic paper is to convince readers that entering into discussion being aware of differences in identity but being able to ‘transcend’ those differences is a way to combat the reversion to an “Oppression Olympics,” mindset.

As a whole, this research aims to answer the question *why* can feminism be transphobic? It also poses the inquiry as to *how* feminism can be more inclusive in the future. Moving beyond the specifics of feminism and trans-rights discourse, sources outlining the Oppression Olympics provide a broader context for the process in which historically marginalized groups go on to marginalize other oppressed groups out of fear that the amount of power they have regained is at risk of falling out of their hands. The phrase “scarcity mindset” used in this study’s primary research question refers to a mindset of privileged individuals and/or groups that understands power as a finite resource in society, and therefore when one group is granted rights or relief from historical oppression it by default takes rights/power/voice away from other groups who have regained power *or* from the dominant socially powerful group.

The second phase of this research project examines existing pedagogical discourse on teaching Gender and Transgender Studies, as well as exploring potential materials to add to Flintridge Sacred Heart’s Women’s and Gender Studies curriculum. Outlined as suggested reading for an Introduction to WGS course in Kate Drabinski’s article, Susan Stryker’s work begins by introducing transgender phenomena as a framework that makes gender studies more *interesting*. She defines transgender phenomena, “as anything that disrupts or denaturalizes normative gender, and which calls our attention to the processes through which normativity is produced and atypicality achieves visibility,” and broadens what the field of Women’s and Gender Studies attempts to study (Stryker). Moreover, she argues that more than transgender phenomena being interesting, it is vitally important to include in Women's Studies curricula. She

explains that transgender phenomena is subtly applied to cis, straight, and gay individuals as a way of criticizing their presented gender or sexuality as a function of domination, wanting to push people back into clearly defined gender roles and boxes. Stryker reiterates the sex/gender split as previously articulated by many in the field of gender studies, and explains how transgender feminism, like critical race studies and disability studies, necessarily focuses on an individual's experience of gender and gender oppression in the world. Stryker speaks from personal experience as a transwoman to explain how her identity and personhood are constantly under threat because of how gender oppression uniquely affects transgender individuals. She concludes with a call to action for feminists to reevaluate the stance that transgender is a minority identity and asserts that it is rather a lens through which to view patriarchy and other forms of oppression.

In the first chapter of her classic treatise on feminism *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that feminism needs to change by examining 'women' as an exclusive category that hinders feminism's progress. She explains that feminism has assumed identity as a prerequisite for representation and liberation and therefore has isolated individuals who do not fit into the mainstream category of women, thus splintering feminism's credibility and support base. She argues that feminism plays into the very structures of power it tries to free itself from, simply through its use of the category women. Butler emphasizes that because gender and gender expression are eternally dependent on time and place, a universal explanation or definition of gender cannot be formed or argued. Feminism's first mistake, claims Butler, is the notion that 'woman' was ever or ever could be a stable category to begin with. She goes further to argue that the next phase in feminist inquiry requires a historical examination of the category of 'woman' and how it has been used to reinforce oppressive patriarchal structures of privilege.

In the first chapter of Susan Stryker's book, *Transgender History*, she outlines important contexts for the modern and historical transgender/transfeminist movement. She begins by giving an overarching definition of the term 'transgender' and prefaces what comes next by declaring that she intends to speak about trans phenomena in the most broad of terms. She explains that for many years trans issues have been viewed as solely personal issues, and plays on the second wave feminists' catchphrase: 'the personal is political' to argue that trans issues, like all of feminism, affect all people and deserve political weight. Stryker outlines a common misconception of second wave feminists and beyond, namely that transgender individuals are either women seeking to escape sexism or men seeking to escape homosexuality, and argues that although transgender identities are affected and oppressed by patriarchy, they are not a product of it. By moving through the four waves of feminism, Stryker reaches the age of intersectional feminism and credits it with laying the groundwork for transgender activism to situate itself within feminist frameworks. Stryker argues that because gender is one of the first things we perceive and assume about others, it can be a barrier to respecting one's shared humanity, and thus trans individuals experience stark discrimination. She ends the section by illustrating how transgender activism, like modern activism, has taken many avenues be they radical, creative, liberal, or otherwise.

In Butler's chapter on viewing gender through a psychoanalytic lens, she begins by explaining that the existence of differing gender identification insists that there is no universal experience of gender. She argues that previous feminist inquiries into the psychology of gender have often reinforced the very binary notion of gender that feminism rebels against. Responding to psychoanalytic scholars like Freud, Lacan, Abraham, and Torok, she outlines various psychological theories such as paternal law and melancholia in order to explain how society's

enforcement of heterosexuality and cisgender identities creates a sense of grief within LGBTQ+ individuals. Moreover, she surmises that society's insistence on compulsive heterosexuality can cause a repression wherein the subject attempts to mask their homosexuality both to themselves and to others through an aggressive commitment to socialized gender roles. Butler claims that gender is something people "do" which fundamentally changes the argument that gender is something fixed within individuals and unable to be altered. Finally, she explores how a patriarchal view of sex maintains that desire is felt only by bodily organs which necessitates heterosexuality. Assuming that desire is felt in the literal organs involved in sex outlaws any opportunity for non-gender specific bodies to participate in sex, thus enforcing the gender binary.

Beauchamp's article entitled "Clutching on: Teaching Identity and Terminology in Transgender Studies," explores pedagogical advice for dealing with identity and the language surrounding it, specifically in Transgender Studies classrooms. He begins by outlining the struggle that comes with subjects like Transgender Studies that hold real personal significance to many students, but that also require participants to move past the boundaries of personal or individual experience and identity in order to view, in this case, *transgender* as a lens to apply to many different subjects. Beauchamp unpacks what he terms the "about" model of teaching transgender studies that focuses on definitions, life stories, and factual information about trans people. He argues that, while instructors cannot fully abandon that model of teaching in order to fill the needs of students who wish to see themselves represented in the course material, transgender studies classrooms also cannot solely use this model, as it puts too much burden on trans students in the class to act as experts in the subject matter. He explains that he often begins his class by reading an article about introductions with pronouns and how it can force people who might not be comfortable yet in a room to "come out" through their pronouns. This example

is one way that Beauchamp seeks to complicate the transgender studies curriculum in order to both honor the experiences of transgender individuals and move past the limits of an individual view of transgender studies. Moreover, it highlights the overarching societal mechanisms that reinforce patriarchy and homophobia, fomenting oppression in our everyday lives.

In her second chapter of *Gender Trouble*, Butler examines the sex/gender split and questions whether accepting that gender is socially constructed is as far as the field should go, or if scholars should examine the ways that sex is culturally constructed as well. She explains that the assumed unity of the category of ‘woman’ has been used as a tool for feminism to appear un-splintered, but asserts that the category of ‘women’ holds more complications within itself than feminism often claims. Butler writes that gender is neither *because* of sex, nor is it as ‘fixed’ as sex and then goes on to query if sex is indeed as fixed as it is believed to be. She furthers her argument by exemplifying how sexed bodies do not have to correspond with gendered bodies of the same modifier. Once the sex/gender split is accepted, however, Butler begins to ask questions rather than pose explanations about the intractability of gender. She wonders about the historical and scientific construction of sex, and therefore asks that if sex is as fluid as gender is there indeed any difference. In short, Butler manages to argue a thesis grounded in the in-arguability of the sex/gender split whilst also poking her own argument apart by suggesting that neither sex nor gender are simple and fixed categories precisely because of their socio-cultural-historical constructions.

In Reis’ Op-ed piece in the New York Times “Pronoun Privilege,” she examines how attempts at gender inclusivity can have unintended and detrimental effects on students. She asserts that introducing oneself in a college classroom has evolved to mean saying: “Hi, my name is [Name] and I go by [blank/blank] pronouns.” The intention of this strategy is to avoid

the misgendering of students by their instructors or peers when having discussions or interacting in the classroom setting. However, she cites an example of a former student who later admitted that revealing their female preferred pronouns mid-transition in a male-passing body had a harmful effect when it drew the attention of many students in the class. In response to this occurrence the author tested out a different strategy in introductions. She explained to students that they should introduce themselves with their first name and personal pronouns *only* if they felt comfortable doing so. If students did not disclose their pronouns they would then be referred to using the neutral they/them. She found that about half the students in her class disclosed their pronouns and half did not. Reis concluded by arguing that the forced admission of pronouns contradicts the idea that gender is fluid and not fixed, while also putting students in uncomfortable and potentially dangerous situations to their mental and physical health.

Perusing existing literature on crafting trans-inclusive Women's and Gender Studies curricula provides a guide to the researcher for editing Flintridge Sacred Heart's curriculum. This study will add to the existing discourse on feminism, transphobia, and the Oppression Olympics by condensing various areas of study into a concrete examination of how Gender Studies curricula can be edited to better focus on Gender Studies through a gender-expansive/trans-inclusive lens.

### **Project Description**

Based on the central text of this research (Drabinski's "Identity Matters: Teaching Transgender in the Women's Studies Classroom"), this study undertook the creation of a Gender Studies curriculum for Flintridge Sacred Heart that includes a gender-expansive lens through which to view feminism and the field of Gender Studies. A content analysis of the curriculum was conducted, and a guest lesson was taught using the pedagogical suggestions from the

existing literature. Dr. Kate Drabinski was interviewed to further explore suggestions for creating a more trans-inclusive approach to teaching Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies. Interviews were conducted via email and in-person with the two current instructors for Flintridge Sacred Heart's Women's and Gender Studies course: Stephanie Gonzalez Doo and Dr. Olanna Mills. In addition Nora Murphy, Flintridge Sacred Heart's head of the research department, and co-creator of the current curriculum was also interviewed. A survey was taken by current students in both sections of WGS that explored student perceptions of the adequacy of transgender instruction in the current course, as well as examining the experiences of students who identify as transgender or LGBTQ+ and their feelings on how discussions are handled within the classroom.

### **Methods**

The methods of this research study can be broken up into four categories: a content analysis of the current curriculum, the guest lecture, interviews, and the survey.

A content analysis of Flintridge Sacred Heart's current Women's and Gender Studies curriculum revealed to the researcher not inadequacies of the existing course but rather opportunities to expand upon the solid foundation of the current curriculum to improve its breadth and depth. The course was first examined by critiquing the framework of the units. The current curriculum contains four main units with a fifth subunit that are as follows:

Unit 1: Welcome to Women's and Gender Studies [Introduction to WGS]

Unit 2: The Social Construction of Gender in Early Childhood

Subunit 1: Gender Socialization in Schools

Unit 3: Privilege and Oppression

Unit 4: The Gendered Media



Two main critiques came up in regards to the division of the course. First, a potential flaw in the current unit breakdown was identified: the potential for Unit 3 on Privilege and Oppression to be the only time where intersectionality is discussed in depth in the course. To avoid this kind of tokenistic inclusion of intersectionality, the researcher suggests that at least one lesson is added to each unit that specifically considers how transgender phenomena function in the context of the unit. For example, the introductory unit could include a lesson on the origins of the Gay Liberation Movement and Stonewall and how second wave feminism interacted with transgender rights and activism. The second unit could discuss how a transgender lens complicates the concept of raising children to perform or “do” gender. In Privilege and Oppression specific lessons could be dedicated to cisgender privilege as well as male privilege and address heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality. Finally, Gender and the Media could examine transgender representation in media as well as the extent to which the media perpetuates the heteronormative binary. The second critique addresses a potential restructuring of the units to include a fifth unit called Gender and Sexuality. The addition of this fifth unit would give the current course a broader foundation for the field of Gender Studies. According to the course description, “the purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to the field of Women’s and Gender Studies.” Adding a unit on Gender and Sexuality would present the class with the opportunity to better prepare students for more specialized classes in the field of Women’s and Gender Studies that they might pursue in college.

A guest lesson was presented to Block F students in the current WGS class by the researcher in order to gauge the implementation of materials that enable a lens shift within the WGS classroom. In the unit The Gendered Media, the guest lesson involved the viewing of Declan Nolan’s youth TEDTalk: “Transgender Representation in the Media” and concluded with

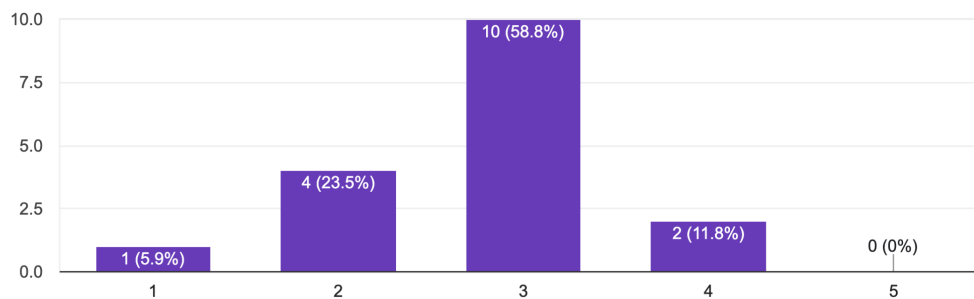
a class discussion based on ancillary questions provided by the researcher. The guest lesson proved to be a natural addition to the unit, and added to ongoing discussions in the classroom about representation.

An interview with Dr. Kate Drabinski on how to incorporate transgender experiences and identities into an introductory WGS course yielded suggestions for specific curriculum improvements as well as general feedback on the goals of instruction in the field of gender studies. When asked how to avoid teaching transgender using the special guest model (referenced in her article “Identity Matters: Teaching Transgender in the Women’s Studies Classroom”), Dr. Drabinski explained by incorporating trans issues into all aspects of the curriculum, and not just in one lesson or one unit, students can better “understand transgender as just another aspect of gendered life” (Drabinski). The researcher presented Dr. Drabinski and each FSHA instructor with the question ‘should FSHA’s course name be changed from Women’s and Gender Studies to just Gender Studies?’ All four of the instructors interviewed agreed with Drabinski’s point that “taking women out of the name all together risks doing what patriarchy often does, which is then we don’t talk about women any more” (Drabinski). Because WGS classrooms can be places of radical sharing of life experiences, there lies a difficulty of centering transgender discourse without putting the burden on trans and nonbinary students in the class to share from personal experience or become the ‘queer expert’ in the room. Drabinski suggests “to name it when we see it and also make clear that no one is expected to testify on behalf of their person” (Drabinski). This study’s first research question (What is the role of feminism in a world of increasing gender diversity?) was asked during the interview and Dr. Drabinski responded, “I would say that feminism and feminist theory, those are the tools we have to think through how gender works and structures our lives” (Drabinski). When using these tools to approach Gender

Studies, scholars disagree about whether or not to approach the field from an identity based framework. Dr. Drabinski calls it “almost a kind of colonial expectation that we could have a total understanding at all times of things,” which is what scholars do when you try to teach about all identities all the time (Drabinski).

A survey of current WGS students at FSHA questioned how students felt about the current curriculum and its inclusion of transgender discourse, as well as addressed their experience in the classroom. Students were asked to rank their agreement with a series of statements on a scale of one to five (one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree). When asked if “FSHA's Gender Studies Curriculum adequately educated [them] about what it means to be transgender,” most students replied with a response of three or below, demonstrating low to moderate approval of the curriculum’s inclusion of transgender issues.

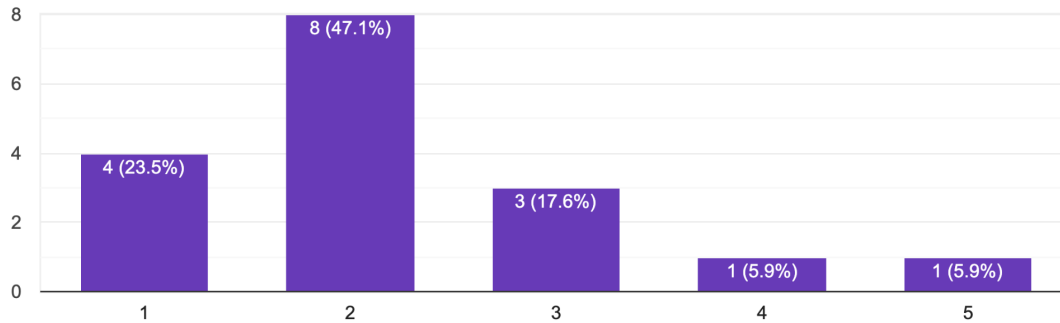
FSHA's Gender Studies Curriculum adequately educated me about what it means to be transgender.  
17 responses



Students additionally reported that transgender people, history, or experiences were brought up regularly (i.e. in 4 out of 5 lessons) more often by students than instructors or in course materials.

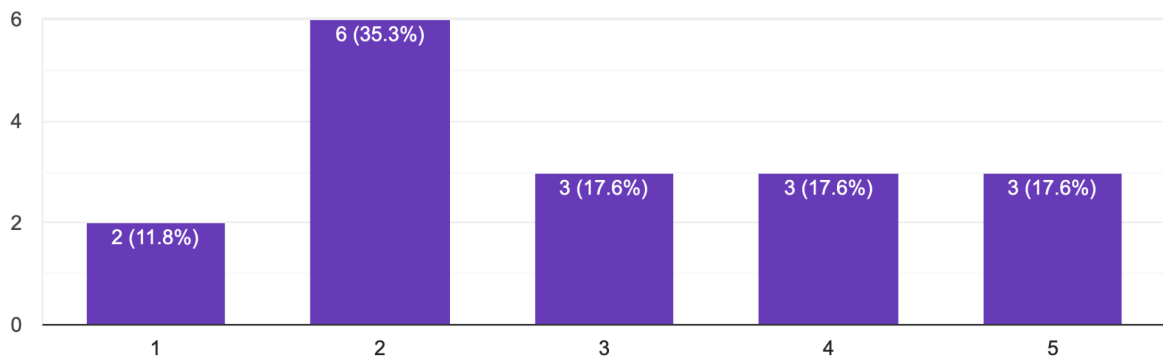
In my WGS class, transgender people, history, or experiences came up regularly (i.e. in 4 out of 5 lessons) in readings, videos, lectures, and/or other curriculum materials presented to me by my teacher.

17 responses



In my WGS class, transgender people, history, or experiences were brought up in discussions BY STUDENTS regularly (i.e. in 4 out of 5 lessons).

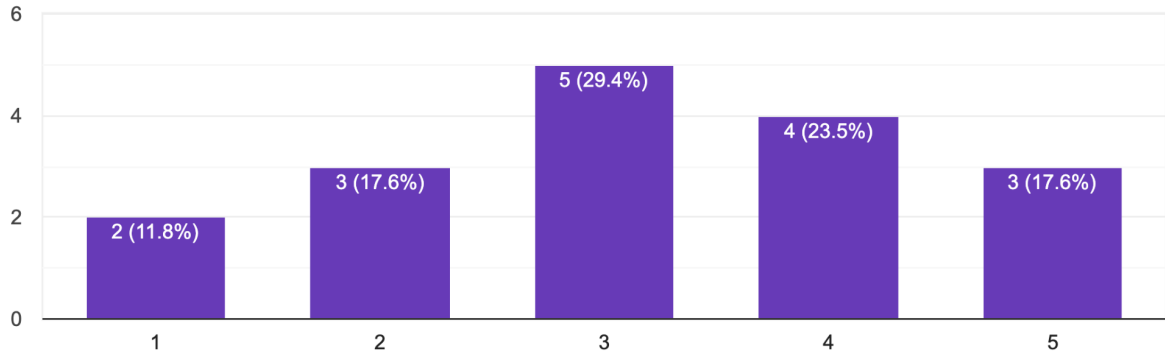
17 responses



When asked what students wanted from the curriculum, results varied. Most students agreed that they would prefer the curriculum to include more instruction regarding transgender phenomena. However, students were more likely to agree with the statement that they wanted the curriculum to be more inclusive in general (i.e. discuss the varying levels of overlapping oppression that people of color, disabled people, women, LGBTQ+ people, etc. experience).

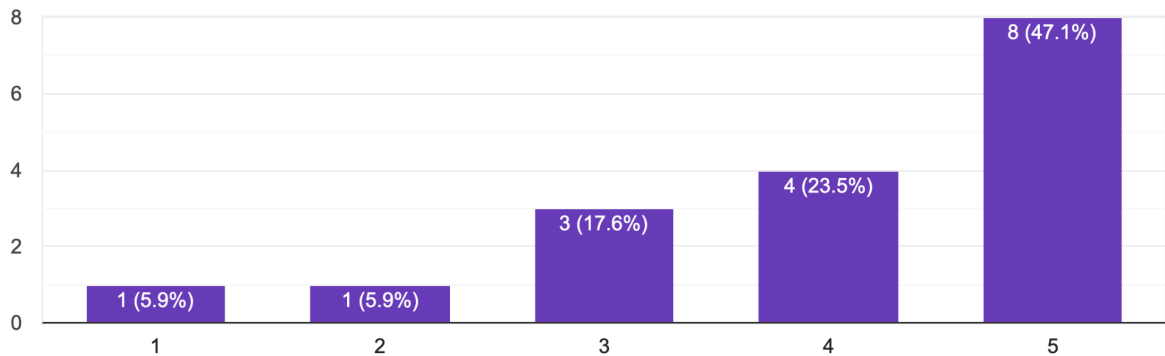
I want FSHA's Gender Studies curriculum to include more materials (readings, videos, lectures, etc.) related to transgender issues.

17 responses



I want FSHA's Gender Studies curriculum to be more intersectional (i.e. discuss the varying levels of overlapping oppression that people of color, disabled people, women, LGBTQ+ people, etc. experience).

17 responses



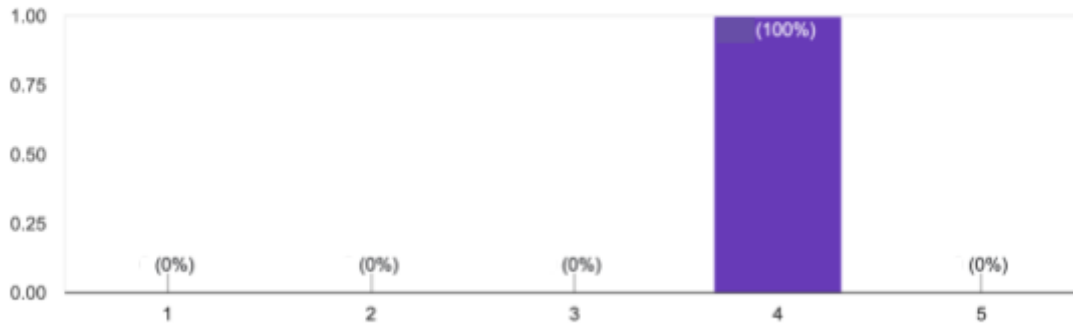
Transgender students in the class selected a four when asked to rank their agreement with the following statement: “In my WGS class, I felt pressure to speak on behalf of my transgender identity or educate fellow cisgender classmates about what it means to be transgender”.

LGBTQ+ identifying students had similar but more varied responses to a similar question.

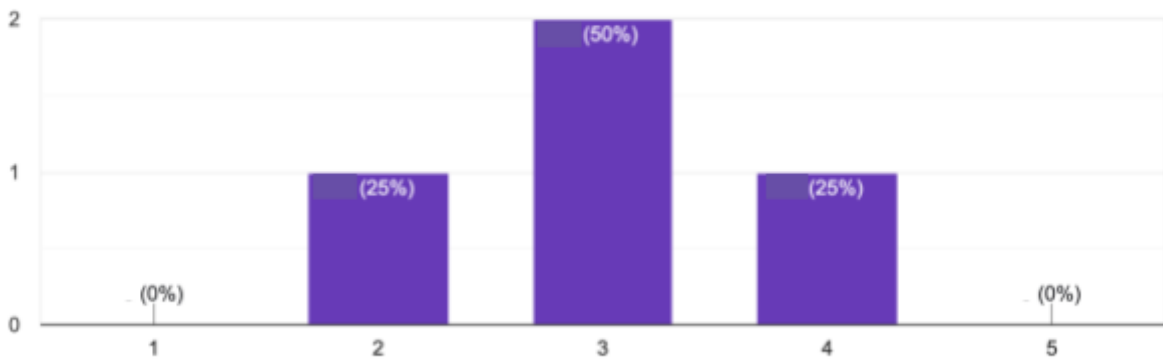
Specific numbers for the previous two questions have been excluded to protect the

confidentiality of the survey respondents.

**FOR TRANSGENDER IDENTIFYING STUDENTS ONLY:** In my WGS class, I felt pressure to speak on behalf of my transgender identity or educate fellow... classmates about what it means to be transgender.



**FOR LGBTQ+ IDENTIFYING STUDENTS ONLY:** In my WGS class, I felt pressure to speak on behalf of my queer/gay/LGBTQ+ identity or educate fellow heterosexual classmates about queer issues.



Finally, when asked if respondents had any other feedback about the curriculum, one student wrote, “I have a fun time in the class and it always feels like a safe space.”

**Results**

The goal of this study was to gather information from the existing literature, expert and

instructor interviews, field experience in teaching, and a student survey, synthesizing the gathered knowledge to create a concrete map of curriculum improvements. After doing so, the researcher has compiled a plan of suggestions for curriculum edits to expand the focus of the course to include more transgender discourse. The five-step plan is as follows:

1. Pronoun discussion and class norms setting

Inspired by Toby Beauchamp's article, "Clutching on: Teaching Identity and Terminology in Transgender Studies," the researcher proposes an early lesson to be added to the first unit: Welcome to WGS, wherein students are introduced to the complexities of navigating identity discussions in the field of Gender Studies. As suggested by Beauchamp, students would read "Pronoun Privilege" Elizabeth Reis' NY Times opinion article, and hold a discussion where they unpack her argument and decide how they as a community would like to approach introductions. Because of Flintridge Sacred Heart's small class size and student population, students will likely already know the names of their fellow classmates and are acquainted with one another, so this exercise can be adapted to be as abstract or literal as the instructor and class wishes. If taken in the abstract, students will begin the process of what it means to be critical of an argument, as well as introducing the WGS classroom as a place of both "sharing stories of our experience [as] a classic feminist organizing strategy," of "consciousness raising," and a place where discussions address what gender means as a social structure outside of individual life experiences (Drabinski). If taken literally, this exercise would enable students to set norms for how they believe their classroom space should operate. By introducing this material towards the beginning of the course (ideally the second or third lesson) students will early on, craft boundaries and parameters for discussion and classroom interactions preventing situations where LGBTQ+ identifying students feel pressured to speak from personal experience, as reported in the

classroom survey.

## 2. Unit development

As addressed in the Methods section of this article, this study recommends that, at minimum, one lesson is added to each of the five units to address course concepts and themes through a gender-expansive lens. Specific materials are listed below for such unit developments.

### Suggested Resources to be added:

#### *Unit 1:*

Tanner, Lindsay. “More teens see gender in non-binary terms, according to new study.” *Newsela*, 13 Feb 2018, <https://newsela.com/view/ck9nooic005gp0iqjl1fktbit/?levelId=ck7ecwiyc0t2f14p79ru9axnh>

#### *Unit 2:*

Long, Crispin. “‘Raising Baby Grey’ Explores the World of Gender Neutral Parenting.” *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-documentary/raising-baby-grey-explores-the-world-of-gender-neutral-parenting>

“Raising a Gender-Neutral Child | Raising Baby Grey | The New Yorker Documentary.”  
uploaded by The New Yorker, 24 June 2020, <https://youtu.be/g4o87MOY5R4>

#### *Unit 3:*

Butler, Judith. “‘The Compulsory Order of Sex/Gender/Desire.’”  
*Gender Trouble*, Routledge Classics, 1990, pp. 8-10

#### *Unit 4:*

“Transgender Representation in the Media | Declan Nolan | TEDxYouth@Wayland,” uploaded by TEDx Talks, 31 Aug, 2015, <https://youtu.be/B8GYjnBSZoA>

## 3. Unit addition



This study recommends the addition of a fifth unit entitled Gender and Sexuality to help give the WGS course a broader view of the subject. The researcher acknowledges that because the class has a finite amount of time to cover the necessary materials while still allowing for time to address the Senior Research Project, the addition of a fifth unit might be unfeasible. In that case, the researcher suggests that materials from the fifth unit be added to previous units, or general lens shifts can achieve the same goal by prompting students to consider gender identity and sexuality through ancillary questions and class discussions. A non-comprehensive list of suggestions for Unit 5 course materials is listed below.

Potential Unit 5 Materials:

“Curb Your Enthusiasm - Type + Distance = No door hold.” uploaded by Johnny Westside, 1 Oct 2017, <https://youtu.be/CyFSAzwLtPk>

Gashaw, Amen. “In the Oppression Olympics, Don’t Go for the Gold.” *Harvard Political Review*. 24 Oct, 2021.

<https://harvardpolitics.com/in-the-oppression-olympics-dont-go-for-the-gold/>

Burns, Katelyn. “The rise of anti-trans, “radical” feminism, explained.” *Vox*, 5 Sep 2019,

<https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/9/5/20840101/terfs-radical-feminists-gender-critical>

Stryker, Susan. “Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question.” *Sweet Study*,

<https://www.sweetstudy.com/files/stryker-pdf>

Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, Seal Press, Second Edition, 2017

*Introduction to Transgender Studies* by Ardel Haefele-Thomas (2019)

*The Transgender Studies Reader* by S. Stryker, S. Whittle (2013)

*Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* by Leslie Feinberg (1998)

*Female Masculinity* by Judith Halberstam (1998)

*Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* by Jay Prosser (1998)

“After Trans Studies” by Andrea Long Chu; Emmett Harsin Drager *TSQ* (2019) 6(1):103-116.

Dean, Robert D. *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*,  
2001

Bederman, Gail. “Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the  
United States, 1880-1917,” 1995

Napikoski, Linda. “What is Compulsory Heterosexuality?” *ThoughtCo.*, 12 Sept 2019,  
<https://www.thoughtco.com/compulsory-heterosexuality-overview-3528951>

#### 4. Lens shift through ancillary questions and discussion

Knowing that no WGS course will ever be perfect, perhaps the truest goal of this process of course improvement is enhancing the visibility of transgender experiences through discussion rather than relying solely on the addition of more supplementary materials. The researcher suggests that throughout the entire course students are encouraged to ask themselves this question: How does considering the existence and experiences of transgender and gender expansive individuals complicate what is being studied? If a transgender lens is commonly brought up during discussions and through ancillary questions, the course will rapidly evolve towards being more inclusive, simply by naming how gender expansion affects how feminism is discussed. The researcher would also like to acknowledge that while this study focuses specifically on addressing Gender Studies through a transgender lens, there are many other lenses that it is necessary to study feminism through. The hope of the researcher is that by adding more transgender discourse to the curriculum it will grow in its intersectionality to include more

discussion of people of color, disabled people, native peoples, non-Western views of feminism, and more.

#### 5. Globalizing WGS: addressing law and current events

The addition of current events presentations given by students will enable the course to further “explore how gendered bodies have been represented in different, non-Western cultures” (Mills). Regular presentations given by students in the format of FSHA’s AP US Government and Politics current events assignment, will allow students to further apply what they have learned to the world they live in. Presentations can range from current laws related to gender and sexuality to how other countries are addressing topics in the field of Gender Studies, and will give the class both a more global lens, while also allowing for students to have more hands-on involvement in their learning.

### **Conclusion**

The biggest obstacle to overcome in this process was learning to, as Dr. Kate Drabinski put it, “know that it will never be perfect, and there will always be something you forgot, or something you didn’t know how to see” (Drabinski). Because the work of Women’s and Gender Studies is the work of making the world better, of dismantling patriarchy and white supremacy, of questioning homophobia and exploring identity, many scholars fear that to teach incompletely is to teach incorrectly. In reality, it is impossible to teach completely, because to do that is to assume consensus, to assume simplicity, when in reality the structures of patriarchy are complex, varied, and even those at the top of the field of Women’s and Gender Studies disagree on how to combat them. What scholars can do is provide new input, to suggest small expansions or little ways individuals can broaden their lens to make feminism work for the most people. That is what this research intended to do. To provide a small expansion, to explore how one Women’s

and Gender Studies course at one high school can evolve to serve its increasingly gender expansive student population.

The most obvious limitation to this study is its specificity. As this article has previously addressed, this study aimed to focus primarily on how FSHA's WGS course can improve in its inclusion of transgender discourse. A very true and necessary argument should be made to address how FSHA's WGS curriculum can improve in its inclusivity through other facets of intersectionality (i.e. race, class, nationality, culture, ethnicity, ability, age, etc). Additionally, the survey only provided responses from students currently enrolled in FSHA's WGS class, thus yielding a very small sample size as well as 2022-2023 course and instructor specific results. Finally, a limitation to the study lies in the fact that the researcher does not have the experience of being a teacher, and therefore some suggestions may be unrealistic from an instructor point-of-view.

This study invites future researchers to consider the impact of Gender Studies classrooms on students' perceptions of gender. In addition, the researcher recommends a yearly audit of the WGS curriculum at Flintridge Sacred Heart by instructors and relevant faculty members with student input, to consider how the course needs to evolve to fit the evolving needs of the student body, and the evolving attitudes around gender, sexism, and feminism in the wider world.

By viewing feminism through the lens of gender as not binary, Gender Studies courses can be reshaped to posit questions of the socialization of gender without excluding the experience and identity of transgender individuals and gender-non-conforming views as a whole. Perhaps that is the role of feminism in a world of increasing gender diversity: to adapt to mean fighting for the liberation of all peoples from the power structures that hold down multiple marginalized groups.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my teacher Dr. Olanna Mills for a year of excellent instruction in the field of Gender Studies. Thank you for supporting my research goals and guiding me through my first forays into the field of Gender Studies. Thank you to Ms. Nora Murphy for aiding me in my research, and giving me the idea to examine FSHA's curriculum in the first place. Thank you to Flintridge Sacred Heart in general for allowing such vigorous and inquisitive research and exploration. Thank you to Ms. Stephanie Gonzalez Doo for being willing to be interviewed. Thank you to Dr. Kate Drabinski for the same thing; your insight and advice proved invaluable to this study. Finally, thank you to all my transgender friends and family members for whom I wanted to pursue this work.

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<https://www.sweetstudy.com/files/stryker-pdf>

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## **Appendices**

Ancillary Question for Guest Lesson:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fEY5a4zaXBypeeg9vz-zh82ddBMt2W\\_P-cHbqgIqLc8/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fEY5a4zaXBypeeg9vz-zh82ddBMt2W_P-cHbqgIqLc8/edit?usp=sharing)

Interview with Dr. Kate Drabinski Transcription:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OeYmAZzJiLKt8gz4kavB6lThO7pqv3JUKufAdkLXJds/edit?usp=sharing>

Survey Results (not accessible to all for confidentiality reasons):

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdwZtl\\_pOrwydKuXmRXzH\\_ZP8ACABUQ4GS3y\\_rLPEagpSy3Sfw/viewform?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdwZtl_pOrwydKuXmRXzH_ZP8ACABUQ4GS3y_rLPEagpSy3Sfw/viewform?usp=sharing)