We’re delighted to welcome you to the inaugural NGender conference. This event is generously supported by the School of Education and Social Work, the Department of Anthropology, the Department of Sociology, the Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies, and the Centre for the Study of Sexual Dissidence.

You can follow NGender on Twitter @SussexNGender and keep up with conversation on Twitter with the hashtag #ngender

May 13, 2014   9.00am-5.30pm
Fulton Building – 104, 113, 114
Lunch and Reception - Ground Floor
What is NGender?

NGender is a gender and sexuality research related seminar series, organised at the University of Sussex. Over the past five years, its aim has been to host interdisciplinary papers by postgraduate and early careers scholars with gender or sexuality as a theme or focus of the research.

An important driving philosophy behind the seminar series is to build a sense of community between faculty and students working on these topics, especially those not affiliated with traditional gender studies courses. Over the years the series has brought together people from Sussex and beyond, across departments and disciplines, to share ideas and discover new trends and developments.

This year NGender is hosting its first annual conference. This inaugural conference brings together gender researchers from across the University of Sussex. As well as offering the opportunity for new interdisciplinary links between researchers, this conference aims to promote the diverse, exciting, and original work being carried out in areas relating to sexuality and gender across departments and schools.

www.ngender.wordpress.com
ngender@sussex.ac.uk
@sussexNGender

🌟 NGender Blog Competition

All NGender Conference participants are invited to contribute their paper to the NGender blog (ngender.wordpress.com). If you would like to do so, please email ngender@sussex.ac.uk by May 23, and your contribution will be published on the NGender blog. Additionally, the NGender organising panel will select the best contribution, where the winner will receive recognition on the blog as well as a small gift.

Coming up next...

We are very excited to announce that NGender and the School of Global Studies will be co-hosting a symposium, ‘Dislocating Masculinity Revisited’, on July 4th & 5th 2014. This is to mark the 20th anniversary of the publication of Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies, edited by Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne. We will be joined by Andrea Cornwall and one of the foundational thinkers on men and masculinities, Raewyn Connell. Our aim in this symposium it to convene an interdisciplinary conversation about the contributions that ethnography can make to research on men and masculinities in diverse fields and cultural and social contexts.

The deadline for paper submissions is May 16th 2014. For more information and call for papers, please visit www.sussexglobal.org/dislocating-masculinity. We look forward to seeing you there!
## NGender Conference 2014 – Schedule

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### Panel 1: Theorising Gender

- Jacob Berkson: Realism, anti-realism, essentialism and constructivism about gender: parsing the space, a philosopher’s perspective
- Jill Armstrong: Successful career women. A role model for their daughters?

### Panel 2: Workshop - Sexual Attitude Reassessment (SAR)

### Panel 3: Women’s Rights

- Mary Frances Lukera: The Matrimonial Property Act and the Reality in Kenya
- Béatrice Châteauvert-Gagon: When Women Snap! Female avengers, vigilantes and superheroines and the logics of protection
- Gillian Love: Abortion and social class: A narrative study
- Haydar Karaman: Honour Killing in Turkish Legal Framework

### Panel 4: Gender and Pop Culture

- Rachel Wood: Sex Toys and Smut: Sexual consumer repertoires of women who read and write erotic fiction
- Nicola Streeten Plowman: Why the need for the comic in comics
- Gaspard G.C.E. Pelurson: Video Games Dandies as Political Signifiers
- Tianyang Zhou: An examination of the interaction between cyberqueer techno-practice and offline gay man experience in contemporary China.

### Panel 5: Gender and Education

- Padmini Iyer: Young people’s experiences of gender, sexuality and schooling in New Delhi, India
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### Panel 6: Gender and Religion

- David Geiringer: The evolution of Catholic sexual knowledge; The Catholic Marriage Advisory Council in 1960s Britain
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- Mahrokhsadat Hosseini: Iranian Women’s Poetry from the Post-revolutionary Islamic Literature to Feminism Consciousness and Expression

### Panel 7: Single Mothers

- Jessica Gagnon: Mother as ‘monster’: the social vilification of single mothers as told by their daughters
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- Emma Salter: The media and political discourse around lone parents: informing public perceptions
Panel 1: Theorising Gender
Chair: Dr. Ben Fincham

Jacob Berkson: Realism, anti-realism, essentialism and constructivism about gender: parsing the space, a philosopher’s perspective

Bio: Jacob’s DPhil thesis, to be submitted in January, concerns the nature of truth. He argues that truth is a substantial evaluative property of sentences. The motivation for the thesis is an attempt to think about how it is that we stand to the world, and, consequently, what the world is like. The thesis forms part of Jacob’s wider philosophical interest in debates between so-called "realists" and "anti-realists". Email: bau79@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: It is often assumed that realism about gender implies an uncritical acceptance of a binary notion of gender, and as concomitant with treating biological thinking about sex as both independent of cultural practices and as providing the only account of what is "really real" in the area. Binary notions of gender need rejecting, whilst biological thinking is both culturally situated and, at best, authoritative with respect to a limited domain. It can seem as if realism about gender is untenable. It is also often assumed that realism and essentialism are equivalent notions, and that essentialism is incompatible with constructivism. Thus, an anti-realist constructivist view of gender seems inescapable.

However, realism is the view that what is real is independent of our methods of representation, and anti-realism just the denial of that claim. Constructivism about a property is the claim that there are only things with that property because of specific cultural practices. However, cultural practices can be such that they create properties which are altogether independent of our methods of representation. So, there are properties about which both realism and constructivism are true. An example is the property of being a table. Essentialism about gender is the view that it would have been impossible for you to have had a different gender. But, that claim is independent of where gender comes from.

I argue that the confusion stems from an uncritical acceptance of the thesis that for something to be real it has to be knowable from any given perspective; a commitment to verificationism. This uncritical acceptance is expressed in the question, "what gives me my gender?" Verificationism is false. Recognising that allows for a constructivist realist, non-binary, view of gender. Essentialism is a matter of preference.

Jill Armstrong: Successful career women. A role model for their daughters?

Bio: Jill is in the third year of a part-time D.Phil. Interviews with 30 mother and daughter pairs are almost complete. She is also Managing Director of Lucid People; a market research consultancy specialising in communications research with mothers. Email: jill@lucidpeople.com

Abstract: This paper draws on narrative qualitative interviews exploring how the adult daughters of successful working women have been influenced by their mothers in their attitudes towards work and combining work and family.

Interview inclusion criteria for ‘successful working mothers’ was the Social Occupational Classification of their career roles– classed as managers, directors, senior officials and professionals & therefore representative of approximately 20% of working mothers. (SOC2010, Wolf 2013). The graduate daughters ranged from being close to making their own career decisions to recently having had their own children.

For the mothers, career success correlated with working full-time so their daughters have grown up with mothers for whom work is important and has taken them out of the home for substantial chunks of time.
The paper will explore the extent to which these career women can be seen to be putting their work before their children, from the perspective of both mother and daughter. Turning then to examine whether and how the daughters want to emulate the career success of their mothers, with all that entails in anticipation of or experience of motherhood themselves.

The theoretical framework in which my work is situated draws on the confluence of combining of work and motherhood with inter-generational transmission of attitudes and values and with self-conscious emotional management of the relationships within families and with wider society. My research is primarily inspired by the ideas expressed by Hochschild (gender strategy and emotional management), Thomson (examining everyday social practices of motherhood inter-generationally and within the cultural context) and Gatrell (the anticipation of motherhood guides women’s career choices).
**Panel 2: Workshop - Sexual Attitude Reassessment (SAR)**

Hosted by: David Evans

**Bio:** David Evans is a final year PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology. His background is in psychology and sexual health, where he has worked in the field for six years. His research interests are in sexual health and sexual health education. Email: david.evans@sussex.ac.uk

**Abstract:** Understanding one’s own perceptions about sexuality is important for everyone working in a sexual health or sexuality based field. Sexual Attitude Reassessment (SAR) seminars are a way for professionals to consider, evaluate and reflect on their own views of sex and sexuality as a way of gaining awareness and becoming prepared for work in a highly sensitive and often difficult area.

The SAR is a process-orientated seminar that takes place in a non-judgmental and supportive setting in which issues surrounding and affecting sex and sexuality are viewed, discussed and then reflected upon. There is no cognitive information transferred and the session is not intended to provide a resolution for personal issues, but rather the key outcome of the session is a better understanding of how different aspects of sex and sexuality affect you as a person, both professionally and personally.

Key themes in the session can include, but are not limited to, sexual orientation, sexual myths, BDSM and fetishes. Each theme will involve a display of the activity and both small and large group discussions about the material viewed. Through the exposure to contentious and sometimes difficult material, individuals will gain a better insight into their own views as well as a sexological worldview on the selected themes.

Individuals are asked to participate fully with the understanding that no personal information needs to be shared, and comfort with the topics may not always be guaranteed. The session is not necessarily intended to change the ideals of the participant, however it is meant to challenge those views to elicit a better understanding of the overall field.
Panel 3: Women’s Rights  
Chair: Prof. Maya Unnithan

Mary Frances Lukera: The Matrimonial Property Act and the Reality in Kenya  
Bio: Mary Frances is PhD Candidate in Law Studies at Sussex Law School. She is researching on sexual and reproductive health rights of sex workers in Kenya and has wealth of experience on human rights. She consulted with UN and worked at FIDA Kenya. Email: m.lukera@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: Kenya overwhelmingly passed its Constitution on 27th August 2010 which provides for progressive provisions that seek among others to protect the rights of women including the right to ownership of property before, during and upon dissolution of marriage. The Constitution explicitly states under Art 2(5) and 6 that the general rules of international law and any treaties that Kenya ratifies shall form part of the Kenyan law hence indication of commitment to oblige with its international obligations. In January 2014 the President of Kenya signed into law a Matrimonial Property Act, 2013 which defines the rights of spouses in regard to property. Before its passage the Bill was subjected to various amendments in Parliament hence pushing Kenya miles back. The provisions of this law are retrogressive and seek to perpetuate discrimination against women and neither do they comply with the Kenya’s regional and international commitments as well as its own Constitution. The law provides that women cannot claim ownership to property unless they can prove that they made a contribution to marital property which unfortunately very few women can prove such contribution. Therefore the reality in Kenya is quite different from what the law depicts and women are likely to experience violation to their right to property in the hands of this law. This paper will analyse the provisions of this Act and point out the opportunities that maybe available as well as the challenges that this law creates not only for women but also for families in Kenya.

Béatrice Châteauvert-Gagon: When Women Snap! Female avengers, vigilantes and superheroines and the logics of protection  
Bio: Beatrice Chateauvert-Gagnon is completing the first year of her PhD in International Relations at Sussex, under the supervision of Cynthia Weber and Louiza Odysseos. Her work is situated mostly in Feminist Security Studies but her research interests also include queer and feminist theories. Email: b.chateauvert-gagnon@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: Feminist scholars in Feminist Security Studies (FSS) have developed substantial literature on the gendering of international security and war. Many of them have concentrated of the power relations underlying security narratives and war stories. They argue that the majority of these war and security narratives rely on the logic of masculinist protection to justify the use of force or the maintenance of the statu quo. This logic places (mostly) women in the position of “Beautiful Souls” in need of protection, while men are conceived as potential or actual “Just Warriors” protecting them (Huston 1982; Stiehm 1982; Elshtain 1995; V. S. Peterson 1992; Young 2003). But women are (and always have been) occupying positions of protectors, in the armed forces and beyond, and FSS has also developed considerable literature on female soldiers. Yet this initial and necessary feminist critique can also be quite limiting and could gain from being complicated further. This paper investigates whether, and in what ways, logics of protection and female protectors are often more complex than this literature suggests.

To do so, this paper will look at female avengers, vigilantes and superheroines. These three types of protectors are defined and usually portrayed in popular imagery as enforcing the law or taking justice into their own hands in the face of the failure of state’s institutions of protection and justice. Their aim is thus to make the state live up to its failed promises by protecting and promoting the rights of the unprotected or the unprotectables. By acting out, by “snapping” where/when they believe the state’s institutions (or other dominant logics) of protection
failed, they point out to the failures, the lacks and/or the exclusions of such logics. How do these female avengers/vigilantes/superheroines problematize and disrupt multiples logics of protection and the power relations they rely upon?

This paper will explore this question by looking at three specific cases: Diana the Huntress of Bus Drivers in Juarez, Mexico; Qahera, a Muslim superheroine of an online comic strip; and Chelsea Manning (formerly Bradley Manning), the American whistle-blower.

**Gillian Love: Abortion and social class: A narrative study**

**Bio:** Gillian Love is a first-year doctoral student in Gender Studies, based in Sociology. After completing an MA in Gender Studies, she was awarded ESRC funding to continue to a PhD. Her research interests include abortion, reproductive justice, and social class. Email: g.love@sussex.ac.uk

**Abstract:** In 2003, a research team in France conducted a large study of women’s decision making after unintended pregnancies. They noted: Despite the sizeable amount of literature on abortion, understanding the nature and interaction of the different factors influencing the decision to continue or terminate a pregnancy remains limited. (Sihvo et al. 2003, 601)

This remains true, and there is a particular dearth of research exploring the effects of social class on abortion decision making. The literature that does exist reveals an interesting tension between the reality of women’s reproductive decisions, and classed expectations of these decisions. Middle-class women are more likely to have abortions than working-class women (Walkerdine et al. 2001; Smith 1993; Sihvo et al. 2003); however, medical practitioners are more likely to question middle-class patients seeking abortions and more readily accept abortion requests from working-class patients (Beynon-Jones 2012). Surrounding these decisions are punitive discourses coding working-class women and women of colour as excessively fertile and irresponsible (Tyler 2009), and middle-class women as selfish careerists with no time for family life (Sheldon 2001).

In this paper, I will argue that insufficient attention has been paid to the ways in which abortion narratives created in the midst of these tensions offer ‘a window into the contradictory and shifting nature of hegemonic discourses’ of femininity and class (Chase 2011, p.422). Research has shown that it is productive to study women’s experiences of reproductive health as a part of their entire life story (Porter and Gustalfson 2012); I will outline a proposed ESRC-funded research project to explore the life stories of 10 women from different social backgrounds and generations who have had abortions. The study aims to occupy this gap in the literature by demonstrating the narrative strategies women create to locate themselves within or against classed and gendered discourses.

**Haydar Karaman: Honour Killing in Turkish Legal Framework**

**Bio:** Haydar was born in Turkey and is a PhD candidate in Law at the University of Sussex. His major areas of interest include conscientious objection, legal discourse and minority rights. His research is funded by the Republic of Turkey. Haydar holds an A.B. in IR from Kirikkale University and a LLM from the University of Sussex. Email: h.karaman@sussex.ac.uk

**Abstract:** The honour killings in Turkey have dramatically increased in last years. Turkish government figures released and they pointed that murders of women by a family member, husband or partner increased 1,400 percent in seven years, from 66 in 2002, to 953 in 2009 and the figures continue to rise.
The practice of honour killings is deeply rooted in pre-Islamic tribal customs and has remained part of traditional culture in many rural Turkish communities. Despite the radical social, religious, and legal modernization, the patriarchal perception dominates the society and law. According to the patriarchal culture in Turkey, a man’s “honour” is relevant with the chastity or virtue of the female members of his family. If a man’s ‘honour’ is lost because of sexual misconduct on his female family members, the only way to restore the familial honour by killing the guilty woman.

Although Turkish law grants women legal equality and passed stricter laws enacting harsher punishments for men found guilty of honour-related crimes as a life sentence, these laws are frequently ineffective due to the traditional patriarchal practices of judges. Thereby sentences are usually dramatically reduced by reason of grievous provocation.

Nevertheless, the honour killings remain an accepted part of traditional practice in direct opposition to secular laws. Thus, after the revision in Turkey’s penal code has imposed life sentences for perpetrators, families have taken alternative paths of maintaining the traditional practice including “forcing their daughters to commit suicide” or killing them “and disguising the deaths as suicides” in order to cleanse their honour. Thereby restoring the family honour without risking the possibility of sending a male relative to jail.
Panel 4: Gender and Pop Culture
Chair: Dr. Niall Richardson

Rachel Wood: Sex Toys and Smut: Sexual consumer repertoires of women who read and write erotic fiction
Bio: Rachel is currently writing up her PhD in Gender Studies at the University of Sussex based in the department of Media Film and Music. Her PhD research focuses on women’s experiences of UK sex shops and the products they sell. Email: r.wood@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: Following their paperback publication in 2012, the bestselling Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy of erotic novels by E. L. James have received an unprecedented level of media hype and attention (Deller at al., 2013). Sex shop retailers hoping to profit from the success of Fifty Shades have promoted and launched sex toys and bondage products directly and indirectly inspired by the objects used in the novels’ many sex scenes, and increased sales of such products have been reported by major retailers and small boutiques alike (Martin, 2013). This has strengthened and made more visible the connection between two particularly feminised fields of sexual consumption: erotic fiction and sex toys.

This paper explores the way in which women who both read and write erotic fiction construct their sexual subjectivities by drawing upon a range of related sexual repertoires (Wilson-Kovacs, 2007, 181). Using data from one to one semi structured interviews with UK women, I argue that the construction of erotic capital relies upon women’s ability to access and appropriately manipulate a range of material, domestic and consumer objects that are understood in a relational and everyday context (Juffer, 1998; Wilson-Kovacs, 2007). Women’s consumption of erotic narratives and fantasies in paperback and e-book fiction can be productively analysed through and alongside their purchase and use of a range of paraphernalia including luxury bed sheets, candles, lingerie, sex toys and bondage items. Drawing upon these repertoires women perform sexual personas and construct intimacy with sexual partners.

However, these practices must also be understood in relation to a range of other factors including women’s professional identities, everyday routines, and their romantic and social relationships. Erotic fiction and sexual products are not only or even primarily used to construct intimacy with sexual partners, but serve as a topic of discussion and debate between women both online and off (Deller and Smith, 2013). Moreover, for those women who construct themselves as professional erotic romance writers, the purchase and use of sex toys and other sexual products is framed as a form of ‘research’ that can be understood as sex work. This contextualist reading extends the analysis beyond ‘the bedroom’ and reveals the diverse negotiated relationships that women have to the relational landscape of sexual consumption.

Nicola Streeten Plowman: Why the need for the comic in comics
Bio: Nicola Streeten is an anthropologist-turned-illustrator and comics scholar. Her graphic memoir, Billy, Me & You, (2011, Myriad Editions) received a British Medical Association Award in 2012. Her PhD research is the cultural history of British feminist comics 1970-present. Email: n.j.plowman@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: “...laughter in the face of serious categories is indispensable for feminism. Without a doubt, feminism continues to require its own forms of serious play.” (Butler, 1990:viii)

In this paper I will show how humour has been used in British feminist comics to contribute to the public message and the public conception of feminism. I will argue that this aspect of the feminist message has been and continues to be key in challenging stereotypes of feminism. Carl Homberg noted from his ethnographic notes that the women’s movement and the leaders of the National Organisation for Women (NOW) were dismissed by both men and women. This was not on the grounds of the content of their policies, but because they were assumed
Lesbians. Lesbians are just not fun people, always serious and grim, as stereotypically homosexual, they certainly could never be satisfied with anything because they are deviants. (Homberg, 1998:65)

The logic of this assumption was that if women voice concern they are not acting like women and must therefore be deviant, that is, lesbians. This paper will explore why and how such attitudes developed and how and why the comic form has addressed them. The inclusion of a low art and temporal form such as found in comics in no way compromises the seriousness of feminism, but questions why seriousness is equated with humourless.

Gaspard G.C.E. Pelurson: Video Games Dandies as Political Signifiers

Bio: Gaspard is a first year PhD Student in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex. His research interests include gender in video games, masculinity in popular culture and "disruptive" gender performances.
Email: g.pelurson@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: Dandies have acquired international fame during the XIXth century. Regarded as the 'premier model of gay subjectivity' (Glick 2001, p.129), they are defined by 'élegance' and 'originalité' (Baudelaire 1895, p.807) and represent an alternative set of beliefs and representations which reject the society's norms. First, this paper will draw on the several definitions of dandyism and investigate the debates raised by its key theorists. This will enable me to explore the intricate relationships between dandyism, queerness and "sexual dissidence". Also, this research aims to explore the political dimension of the dandy through the use of video games as a case study. Dandies are not regarded as political signifiers by every authors, therefore, this will require an investigation of what being political means. Through in-game textual, visual analyses and the application of fashion theory, this paper will study the dandy characters' appearance and how it can disturb the norm. Further to this, this paper will expand upon the roles video games' dandies perform as protagonists and antagonists. On the one hand they tend to be relegated to secondary positions, bringing comic relief and leaving room for the lead character to express his growing masculinity. On the other hand, dandy characters are perfectly suited for embodying antagonists. Misunderstood and pushed by their personal drives, they manage to create love-hate relationships with gamers, who need to defeat them in order to complete their adventures. This paper will focus on these two roles and deal with the implications and meanings they convey. Finally, the paper will address the question of whether or not dandies are here to disrupt the established norms of Western society.

Tianyang Zhou: An examination of the interaction between cyberqueer techno-practice and offline gay man experience in contemporary China.

Bio: Tianyang is a first-year PhD candidate from the Media and Film Department of the University of Sussex.
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Abstract: As participants can leave behind their bodies, real names and physical location, the Internet becomes a place of freedom within which they can share secrets and play the identities that they may never do in physical world. In relation to LGBT people, cyberspace has been shown as a heart-warming place for those who are afraid to come out in their real lives. As cyberspace was considered to be more flexible in that it transcends the real world, it seemed to be the ultimate manifestation of queer theory. The term ‘cyberqueer’ is used to refer to the alliances between lesbian, gay, transgender and queer experiences and computer-mediated worlds, which stresses the independence of the two concepts in both daily practices and academic research.

This study examines the interaction between cyberqueer techno-practice and offline gay experience in order to explore how the ICTs change gay male culture in contemporary China regarding the issues of identification, community-making, marriage and space. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks upon which this study built include queer theory and cyber subjects.
With the development of mobile telecommunications technologies, a huge global gay market gives rise to the emergence of international gay chat and dating software, such as *Grindr* and *Jack’d*. Through using GPS technologies, these softwares can show their users the guys closest to them who are using it, which appears to be quick, convenient, and discreet. However, questions have been raised about an increase in the infection rate of HIV caused by the popularization of these gay chat and dating softwares. Cyberqueer techno-practices play a vital role in the gay men’s life in contemporary China but since much more research has focused on offline gay experiences, far too little attention has been paid to the influence of ICTs on Chinese gay man’s life in the Internet age.
Panel 5: Gender and Education

Chair: Dr. Naureen Durani

Padmini Iyer: Young people’s experiences of gender, sexuality and schooling in New Delhi, India

Bio: Padmini Iyer is a doctoral student in her second year of PhD Education at the University of Sussex. Her PhD research focuses on young people’s experiences of gender and sexuality in three secondary schools in New Delhi, India. Email: pi34@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: ‘Schools have to act as counter-socialisers to tackle gender bias and discrimination’ (Verma Commission, 2013). This quotation comes from a landmark report which recommended progressive changes to Indian law following the Delhi gang rape which took place on December 16th 2012, and which sparked furious debates on gender and sexuality in India. Few would argue with the normative aspirations of Justice Verma’s statement on the transformative power of education, but how does this relate to young people’s actual experiences of schooling in Delhi today? This paper reports initial findings from my PhD research with secondary school students (aged 15 – 17) from three schools in Delhi. The students I spoke to characterised school environments in which gender boundaries are rigidly enforced; girls and boys sit in separate rows in the classroom, teachers scold girls and boys who are found talking in the corridors, and gendered assumptions about girls’ and boys’ strengths (in the classroom and on the playing field respectively) prevail.

The students I spoke to railed against certain aspects of restrictive gender norms. Many criticised teachers’ ‘Indian mentality’ for placing these limitations upon them, while both girls and boys demanded improved safety for girls and women outside school. But tensions emerged between norms which were challenged and accepted. The brutality of the December 16th case was denounced, but positive associations between masculinity and violence were made; students argued that women must fight for their rights, but a quiet, passive form of femininity was also celebrated; and conservative attitudes towards sex and sexuality were questioned even as students’ interest in sexual activity was denounced. In this paper I will attempt to explore and unravel some of these tensions and contradictions, and consider whether the schools in my study are, or could become, transformative spaces in which restrictive gender and sexuality norms are challenged.

Kourosh Kouchakpour: An analysis of students’ learning experiences of B.Sc. programmes in Iran: Case study of Civil Engineering at Kermanshah Razi University

Bio: Kourosh finished his MA in educational Administration at Shiraz University and his MSc in Social Research Methods at Sussex University. He is currently doing his PhD in Education at Sussex focusing on students’ learning experiences of BSc programmes in Iran. Email: k.kouchakpour@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: Iran Universities such as Kermanshah Razi University have established BSc programmes in Civil Engineering directed towards educating and preparing both male and female future engineers, technicians and professionals in local and international settings for over three decades. However, most of the engineering programmes are still highly populated with male students. Since Iran’s revolution in 1979, BSc in Civil Engineering and in particular its teaching-learning process has been considerably affected by political, social and cultural changes such as Islamisation, gender segregation, Cultural Revolution and Liberalisation (Moghadam 1991). However, to date no rigorous research has been carried out to examine how Iranian students interact with such programmes and how their learning experiences and activities involved are shaped by the wider national socio-political context. Specifically, while gender and education have been the focus of academic research in the Iranian context (Afkhami and Friedl 1994; Rezai-Rashti and James 2009), there has never been a focus on how gender shapes the experiences of students studying in disciplines such as engineering.
This research study seeks to address this void by examining and understanding the effect of this programme on the students' learning experiences, with a focus on their perspectives as well as the broader institutional context of the university. Accordingly, this research aims to investigate how students from diverse gender, regional and family educational backgrounds interact with various aspects of the Civil Engineering programme. The study will be drawing on Symbolic Interactionism, Community of Practice, and Bourdieu’s notions of habitus, field (Pryor 2003) and capital. Furthermore, the study will adopt a qualitative case study approach and the data will be collected through the documentary analysis of the national and institutional policies and by observing and interviewing purposively-sampled students (n=30) as well as their lecturers (n=7) from Kermanshah Razi University.
Panel 6: Gender and Religion
Chair: Ms. Kim Brayson

David Geiringer: The evolution of Catholic sexual knowledge; The Catholic Marriage Advisory Council in 1960s Britain

Bio: David is in his third year of his AHRC funded PhD research at the University of Sussex which explores the sexual experiences of Catholic women in 1960s Britain through first-hand oral testimony. It provides Catholic individuals with an opportunity to speak about their memories of the decade for the first time in historical analysis. He is particularly interested in the way Catholic women negotiated the reciprocal demands of spirituality and sexuality on a day-to-day basis. Email: d.geiringer@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: This paper explores the sexual instruction provided by the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council (CMAC) in 1960s Britain. Historians have recently identified this decade as a pivotal moment of cultural transition, as a process of sexual revolution suddenly and permanently destroyed Britain’s Christian culture (Brown, 2012). If a Christian, in this case Catholic, understanding of female sexuality was rejected by British women during the 1960s, what exactly was this understanding, and how, and by whom was it formulated?

The responsibility for disseminating sexual knowledge to Catholic couples had traditionally been reserved for members of the clergy. Although it was founded in 1945, the CMAC’s counsellors were still being instructed to only provide information about Natural Family Planning (the only method of birth regulation endorsed by the Pope) and never to advise on whether or not to actually use the method well into the late 1950s. This was to change during the 1960s, as the CMAC’s counsellors were given full licence to educate and direct Catholic individuals on contraceptive behaviour and marital love in general. In this way, the Catholic Church was to establish new forms of authority on sexual matters – lay specialists trained in psycho-therapeutic modes of communication. This paper draws on unpublished counsellor training manuals, internal correspondences and interview testimony from both counsellors and clients to examine the way female sexuality was understood in the CMAC’s ‘Preparing Engaged Couples for Marriage’ course. These sources suggest that, counter to existing perceptions of Catholic institutions in historical assessment and popular commentary, the CMAC approached female sexual pleasure in an open, frank and rigorously scientific manner. Compared to corresponding secular agencies like the National Marriage Guidance Council, the CMAC placed a heightened emphasis on the importance of women’s physical satisfaction to healthy marital relations. At the same time, interview responses suggest that Catholic women found such a clinical approach to sex to have neglected the emotional and spiritual dimensions of marital sexuality. It is therefore argued that this material offers a unique insight into the problematic task of reconciling ‘Catholic thought’ with the discourses of ‘sexual liberation’, while also destabilising the established definitions of both.

Anneke Newman: Embracing access, contesting ideology: Women’s engagement with Islamic schooling in Senegal

Bio: Anneke is currently finishing her PhD at Sussex. Her scholarly interests lie at the intersections of anthropology, development studies and critical international education. Her approach stresses the importance of using participatorymethodologies to promote indigenous epistemologies. Prior to coming to Sussex she obtained degrees from Oxford and IDS. Email: a.newman@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: My doctorate uses a gender lens to analyse educational decision-making processes among parents and youth in a village in northern Senegal. In this strongly Muslim context several Islamic educational institutions are available: (1) Qur’anic schools dating from the precolonial era, and (2) ‘reformist’ Islamic schools dating from the 1940s which blend Western pedagogies and secular subjects within a Muslim worldview. Through long-term ethnographic fieldwork I explored how people negotiate these educational options to realise their ideal future
selves. The schools reflect contrasting and sometimes conflicting discourses and practices: the older Qur’anic schools are embedded within a mystic Sufi understanding of Islam, and are open only to boys. The more recent Islamic schools reflect an alternative interpretation of Islam which is explicitly anti-Sufi, but are much more open to female students. To illustrate the lived negotiation of these competing discourses, I present the case study of one young woman who established an Islamic school in a village where previously formal religious education for women was unheard of. In this paper, I analyse how local women both engage with and contest the school – sending their daughters to access learning they didn’t have access to - while simultaneously challenging the teacher’s religious ideologies they disagree with. This case study provides two novel contributions to studies of religious education dynamics in Senegal. First, scholarship tends to explore ideological conflicts between male ‘reformist’ Muslims and Sufis. This reflects a male-bias, and reinforces a binary opposition between these interpretations of Islam not supported by everyday realities. Second, research on gendered dynamics of reformist schools focuses on the rise of female religious authority and power struggles between the sexes. This paper fills these gaps by considering the struggles between women and illuminates the complexity and diversity of female Muslim subjectivity in contemporary Senegal.

Mahrokhsadat Hosseini: Iranian Women’s Poetry from the Post-revolutionary Islamic Literature to Feminism Consciousness and Expression

Bio: Mahrokhsadat is a second year research student in Gender studies, University of Sussex. In her thesis, she studies the question of the ethical subjectivity (diagolism) in the work of Iranian female poets, whose poems, I believe, are enclosed with dialogical elements and ethical tones. I show how the concept of “the Dialogic subjectivity” and Irigarian reading acknowledge ethical questions in their poetry. Email: m.hosseini@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: The themes, characters and mainly the dominant literary discussions in the literary works of Iranian women writers have long been connected to subversive discourse within the central patriarchal (male dominated) structure that has been in power after the 1979 revolution. The themes that cover this period of women writers appear to challenge the gender hierarchies, women’s experience and the suffering within their social context. Talattof, as a secular writer and reader, explains that the plots and storylines of these women writer’s convey their voice of opposition against “sexual oppression and reflect their struggle for identity”. This can be compared to the pre-revolutionary period of literature in Iran that was created by women whose works did not provoke any feminist literary movement. Rather, they gave voice to socio-political issues over gender relations. Even if their works were engaged with women’s issues, they were produced in the socially conscious perspectives within patriarchal devoted literature. In other words, these women’s works were marginalized against male-dominated works of literature and became powerless. Hence, we can define two literary discourses within women’s literary works before and after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The revolution itself is responsible for this major movement in women’s writing. The emergence of Literature concerning the Islamic Revolution (Adabiyyat-e Engelab-e Farhangi) restrained the literary works of pre-revolutionary committed writers and created a new movement in literary writing with the application of distinct religious themes. However, during 1990s with the start of Khatami’s presidency a new phase of writing developed. The new state reduced its controls and restrictions on writers’ works and provided a moderately unguarded setting for writers to enjoy the diversity in discourse. The change was most noticeable in women’s writings which let the growth in the feminist literary movement. In order to demonstrate the shift in post-revolutionary discourse, two post-revolutionary eras will be explored: 1) the post-revolutionary Islamic committed literature, and 2) the inclination of feminist consciousness in women’s writing.

Each period will explore the themes, forms and types of characters that shaped women’s literary writings after the revolution. In addition, in each period some selected poems will serve as the primary sources for this paper to indicate the themes within each era.
Panel 7: Single Mothers
Chair: Dr. Tamsin Hinton-Smith

Jessica Gagnon: Mother as ‘monster’: the social vilification of single mothers as told by their daughters

Bio: Jessica Gagnon is a PhD student at the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) at Sussex researching the university experience of the daughters of single mothers. She is a first-generation student from an American working-class, single mother family. Email: j.gagnon@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: Single mothers are a popular topic in the media and the language often used about them is negative. The concept of family is in flux and in transition. Yet popular discourse still clings to the concept of the nuclear family as if it is the norm against which all other families can be judged and punished for nonconformity.

The negative social construction of single mother families is very raced and classed. The common discourses through which single mother families are socially constructed often suggest that the mere existence of single mothers is the root cause of the social ills with which they are correlated. ‘Mothers bringing up children without a resident man have long been seen as transgressing various boundaries and denoting the state of the nation in some way. ... Lone mothers have been regarded as members of an underclass, spawning anti-social children and corroding the nation’ (Edwards and Caballero, 2011, p. 531). The impact of that negative social construction is not a burden borne solely by the single mother. The messages her child is likely internalizing about her family is that it is dysfunctional, incomplete, and inferior compared to the favoured nuclear family norm.

Through a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with and reflective writings from 26 daughters of single mothers in the United Kingdom, this paper will explore the social construction of single mother families and the impact that has had on their daughters, with a particular focus on misrecognition and identities. Data was collected during spring and summer of 2013 and analysis of findings is currently being conducted. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks upon which this study is built include feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and the concept of social exclusion.

Charlotte Morris: Single mothers’ management of their everyday intimate lives

Bio: Charlotte Morris is a single mother of three and a Doctoral Researcher in Gender Studies at the University of Sussex. She recently completed her thesis on the intimacy narratives of heterosexual single mothers. She also works in the field of Higher Education and research interests include undergraduate and postgraduate learning, student disability, mental health and wellbeing. Email: cam40@sussex.ac.uk

Abstract: This paper will discuss findings from narrative interviews with 24 heterosexual single mothers. It will explore ways in which single mothers manage their intimate lives with particular reference to ways in which they may feel judged by others. Relationships with children were described as the central, most meaningful and valued relationship in participants’ lives, at times experienced as intense. However, this was a concern, with participants commenting that children are not a substitute for couple relationships. Becoming single for some represented an opportunity to experiment with relationships; several participants engaged in internet dating, others had been introduced to prospective romantic / sexual partners through friends. The emphasis was on creating boundaries between their sex and family lives. Some chose casual sex or long-term sexual arrangements, not wishing to re-partner due to bad experiences, wanting to maintain stability for their children by keeping their sex lives separate or wanting to experience sexual pleasure and experimentation missing in previous partnerships. There was often concern about being judged and not meeting normative gendered expectations of how mothers should behave. While romantic partnerships often did not play as central a role as previously in participants’ lives, they were still seen as ideal if not always possible and participants sometimes contrasted themselves negatively in relation to those in couples. Friends became increasingly central to participants’ lives, offering emotional and practical support. Significant friendships were often formed since becoming a single
mother, with other single mothers and local parents who were not judgemental about their situations. Friendships often took on a heightened status, idealized as the pinnacle of intimate connection as opposed to insecure and unfulfilling heterosexual relationships. For others, limited opportunities and resources to make friends and other barriers to intimacy led to experiences of social isolation.

**Emma Salter: The media and political discourse around lone parents: informing public perceptions**

**Bio:** Emma Salter is investigating the social outcomes of the children of lone parents for her PhD research, using UK longitudinal data. She also works on a project looking at the educational trajectories of young people and their social outcomes. Email: e.j.salter@sussex.ac.uk

**Abstract:** A number of factors generated immense interest in the 1990s in the topic of single parents and their children. Rising benefit budgets, perceived increases in youth crime and delinquency and teenage parenthood all needed to be explained. The unified cause? Single parenthood. Or so some sections of the press and some members of parliament would have you believe. The denigration of single parents and by extension their children was widespread. Fast forward twenty or so years and family structures have diversified, and a range of family types have become more acceptable. Yet the negative stereotype of the single parent remains, mainly due to the popular press.

This paper discusses initial findings from a discourse analysis of the media portrayal of lone parents and their children from the 1990s to the present day. The large readership of certain British tabloids indicates the extent of the influence they have on the opinions of the general population, specifically in creating and reinforcing stereotypes of single parent families. I look at the speeches of politicians and articles from the British popular press, to see how the negative stereotype of a single parent family has been portrayed and reinforced over the last two decades. I examine who is really been discussed in these arenas and the relevance of gender and class in the portrayal of lone parents and their children. The number of lone parent households has not increased since the 1990s, but the causes of lone parent families are more diverse. Yet, rather than moderating the media and political discourse, the portrayal of lone parents remains unchanged, maintaining a stigmatised and shamed stereotype of what it is to be a lone parent family.