

Women's Studies Program Spotlight on Faculty Series Fall 2011



Bordering on Desire: The Cultural Politics of Lesbian Asylum

Dr. Rachel Lewis
Postdoctoral Fellow - Women's Studies

Monday, October 17, 2011
11:30 AM – 1:00 PM
Beach Hall, Room 425

Although political asylum for persecution on the grounds of sexual orientation has been on the international human rights agenda since the early 1990s, lesbian asylum cases do not tend to figure centrally in analyses of the relationship between refugee law and international human rights law. During the past few years, however, there has been a substantial growth in cultural production and LGBT human rights activism devoted to the subject of lesbian asylum claims. In this talk, Dr. Lewis will discuss how lesbian asylum-seekers are turning towards new media and cultural production in the form of independent filmmaking, theatre and performance art, and online activism as a means of resisting deportation. By showing the complex and often contradictory ways in which media and cultural production can influence social policy, Dr. Lewis argues that it is possible for transnational feminist and queer critiques of human rights to intervene in the process through which LGBT asylum claims are evaluated. This presentation is drawn from her current book project also titled *Bordering on Desire: the Cultural Politics of Lesbian Asylum*.

Rachel Lewis is a Postdoctoral Fellow in Transnational Sexualities at the University of Connecticut. She received an MA and PhD from Cornell University, and a BA from the University of York (U.K.). Before joining the Women's Studies Program at the University of Connecticut, she taught feminist, gender, and sexuality studies at Oklahoma State University and Wells College. Her research and teaching interests include transnational feminism and queer studies, human rights, sexuality and immigration, cultural studies, and women and music. She has published articles in the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Social Justice*, *Women & Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, and *Music & Letters*. Her article, "Towards a Transnational Lesbian Cinema", is forthcoming in a special issue of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* on global lesbian cinema. She is currently working on a book-length manuscript entitled *Bordering on Desire: the Cultural Politics of Lesbian Asylum*. This project explores how lesbian asylum-seekers are turning towards new media and cultural production in the form of independent filmmaking, theatre and performance art, and online activism as a means of resisting deportation. By showing the complex and often contradictory ways in which media and cultural production can influence social policy, *Bordering on Desire* argues that it is possible for transnational feminist and queer scholarship on human rights to intervene in the process through which LGBT asylum claims are evaluated.

This event sponsored by the Women's Studies Program
For more information, please contact the Women's Studies Program
at 860-486-3970 or wsinfo@uconn.edu