

OPEN CALL

for contribution

12-13 november 2025 at Pianofabrik

GENDER STUDIES

: a state of the art

Gender studies are invaluable for understanding, explaining, and challenging processes of social inequality. They also contribute to the analysis, imagination, and practice of new and more emancipatory ways of embodiment, labour, care, governance, and relationships to land and nature. Despite their analytical and societal relevance, the legitimacy of gender studies is repeatedly called into question. The ongoing political battle over the very existence of the category «gender» once again highlights the crucial importance of research and initiatives that challenge binary, simplistic, and essentialist views of “men” versus “women”, “masculinity” versus “femininity”. In an increasingly polarised world, inclusive feminist and queer voices are essential to nourish democratic processes that can promote social justice for all.

Feminist movements in Belgium and around the world have always played a key role in developing inclusive policies and advancing gender equality. Gender studies strengthen that work through critical research and education, acting as a bridge between the academic sphere, civil society and the arts. This underscores that thinking about gender is far from a niche or abstract academic concern — it stems from collective reflection on lived experience and offers a powerful response to ongoing challenges such as austerity, exclusion, and polarising ideologies.

It is in this context of challenge and urgency that Sophia is organising its sixth edition of the **State of the Art in Gender Studies in Belgium conference**, on 12 and 13 November, at the Pianofabriek in Brussels. We aim to bring together people from academia, civil society, and the arts. Our goal is to exchange ideas and practices in a dynamic and interdisciplinary way. We warmly invite researchers from all backgrounds, activists, grassroots movements, artists, performers, and filmmakers to share their recent work (from 2022 onward) that draws **from feminist, queer, and intersectional perspectives**.

For this edition, Sophia has elaborated 4 key thematic streams (detailed below) reflecting a broad range (though non-exhaustive) of topics. Contributors are welcome to submit to one or more streams as the interdisciplinary nature of gender studies allows for many overlaps. Even if your work does not align perfectly with the streams, we warmly encourage you to apply and help us expand the scope of our conference.

Practical details

Who can submit?

- . Researchers: PhD, postdocs, professors, Master's student, unaffiliated researchers
- . Civil society organisations and activists, grassroots movements conducting research to foster their own practices through a gendered lens
- . Artists, performers and filmmakers using a gendered lens in their practice

What to submit?

- . Academic papers, works in progress, research projects
- . Roundtable and panel discussion proposals (with identified participants)
- . Workshops, reading groups, embodied practices
- . Audiovisual pieces such as films and documentaries
- . Performances

How to submit?

Download and fill in the Word template [here](#). Submit it by the 31st of May (end of day) to info@sophia.be with "NAME SURNAME (or ORGANISATION) State of the art submission" as the subject line.

For any question, contact us at info@sophia.be.

Be sure to share this open call with anyone in your professional or personal networks who might be interested!

A word about funding

Following Sophia's principle of equity and our budget constraints, there is a possibility for funding support to the selected participants, depending on the format and the needs specified in your proposal. For participants for whom this would pose a barrier, please contact us at info@sophia.be for further discussions.

Streams

Gender-based violence

A gendered perspective on systems and structures of power demonstrates that violence is not a side effect of power but a core mechanism through which it operates. Feminist thought highlights how systemic and structural violence are embedded within cis-heteropatriarchal societies both locally and globally. This violence is perpetuated through narratives ingrained in the very fabric of our institutions — the State, policies, culture, and media — through mechanisms of framing, disciplining, extracting, colonizing, punishing, marginalizing, and silencing. The rise of the far-right and the growing influence of anti-gender ideologies in campaigns and policymaking represent a direct threat to our democracies. Current rollbacks of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives and the reinforcement of securitized border regimes like «Fortress Europe» highlight how regressive policymaking exacerbates structural inequities. International support for settler colonial projects, such as in Palestine, further challenges the credibility of protection narratives based on repression rather than on justice and human rights.

Yet, intersectional feminism does not stop at critique — it also envisions pathways beyond violence. Feminist organizations and self-defense initiatives offer powerful, community-driven responses where institutional protections fall short, creating spaces of empowerment and resilience for women, gender-diverse, and/or racialized people. Within feminist movements themselves - which are diverse, complex - a growing awareness has emerged that the struggle for justice must be intersectional and include accountability. Moving away from carceral approaches, many are turning toward restorative and transformative justice models as hopeful alternatives that acknowledge and address systemic harm. Ecofeminism and decolonial feminism provide rich frameworks for reimagining our relationships with each other and the planet, emphasizing care, sustainability, and resistance to exploitation.

By weaving together struggles for social justice, intersectional feminist movements are not only resisting structures of violence but are actively nurturing the conditions for liberation, solidarity, and the creation of a world beyond violence — one rooted in care, community, and collective flourishing.

List of possible keywords and topics related to gender studies:

Gender-based violence	Transformative / restorative justice
Femicides	Intra-community violence
Obstetric and gynaecological violence	Securitization and gender
Institutional violence	(Neo)colonialism and gender
Structural inequalities	Coloniality of gender
Feminist resistances to violence	Decolonizing sexualities
Dismantling of communities and collectivities	Homonationalism / femonationalism
Attacks on DEI policies and initiatives	Trans-exclusionary/sex work-exclusionary feminism(s)
#MeToo movement(s)	Masculinities
Politics of forgetfulness and accountability	Manosphere and incels
	Anti-gender ideologies

Care

Care and reproductive labor - caregiving, cleaning, nurturing, child-rearing, community making - are foundational to society. And yet, in the context of capitalist racial patriarchy, this labor has historically been confined to the so-called “private sphere”, where it is routinely devalued, invisibilized, feminized and racialized. Despite its essential role, care continues to be treated as secondary, informal, and outside the scope of political and economic recognition.

To reimagine care as fundamental to a just and inclusive society, feminist research-action and civil society organisation call for investments in childcare and elderly care, understanding care as a right rather than a privilege, and include racialized women providing care work under precarious conditions into actions and policies that strive toward a society where care is valued, accessible to all, and undertaken as a collective and public responsibility. The global dimension of care chains also highlights the underpinning power structures that shape how we care for one another. Care is not just intimate: it is deeply geopolitical and embedded in racial capitalism and coloniality.

Care is also affective. While care can be a propelling force, it comes with difficult emotions — exhaustion, anger, grief. Relations based on care do not escape the underpinning relations of power that uphold our societies. In queer/marginalized communities and violence-ridden sites such as settler colonies, care is both a lifeline to survive and thrive, and a site of tension. How can care be reclaimed as a joyful and militant political force resisting devaluation and invisibilization? What does it mean to center stage care in a world built on violent extraction, exploitation, and disposability?

List of possible keywords and topics related to gender studies:

Social reproduction	Care in times of genocide
Reproductive justice	Disability and care work
Reproductive futurism	Invisibility of care work
Gendered care divide	Restorative and transformative justice
Chain of care	Intra-community violence and accountability
Commodification of care	Community-making
(In)formal care	Queer home-making
Housewifization / undervalued domestic labour	Intimacy work
Coloniality of care	Affect theory/politics of feelings
Ethics of care	Militant /queer joy
	Revolutionary kitchens and tables

Bodies

Bodies have long been a site for social debates and political struggles. Some might even say the body is a battleground: regulated upon, fixed by norms, naturalized by social consensus, bodies are shaped by power. As such, bodies and embodiment have stood central to the development of gender studies because they expose what is hidden in plain sight: the power structures of social and biopolitical control that underpin our societies.

Bodies are also not just physical, they are a reflection of our imaginaries. What kind of liberation is manifested by imagining our bodies as freed from oppression? Moving, existing, being without fear, judgment or restriction. Bodies unburdened from the need to conform to narrow norms of whiteness, thinness, youth, cis- and heteronormativity, gender roles, ability, or class privilege.

Interdisciplinary feminist theories and practices have shown that bodies that challenge social consensus both experience and resist inequality. In that sense, gender studies have highlighted the transformative counterpower of the out-of-the-norm body as a revolutionary existence rather than a revolting one: bodies that deconstruct norms, challenge normativity, and resist normalization. The subversive potential of out-of-the-norm bodies sits at the core of contemporary battles for liberation, emancipation and resistance, and how bodies inhabit and attempt to change power structures.

List of possible keywords and topics related to gender studies:

Bodily autonomy	on the move (refugees and migrants)
(De)/(re)colonizing the body	Misogynoir
(De)/(hyper)sexualizing the body	Fatphobia
Sexual and reproductive health and rights	Crip/disability studies
Medicalization	Queer, trans, and intersex bodies
Racialized/colonized bodies	Ageism
State-control, biopolitics and the imprisoned body	Representation politics
State surveillance, borders, and the bodies	Embodied practices
	Posthuman and virtual bodies
	Heteronormativity and homonormativity

Space

Space is never neutral. Whether physical, social, digital or liminal, space is shaped by power, by the choices of who is welcomed and who gets excluded, and what possibilities can emerge from dismantling the structures that space may embody. Space is not something that we simply move through; it is constructed, and therefore, it can be contested. The struggle for space is a struggle for visibility, legitimacy, and for some, survival.

Space is an arena in which the possibilities of imagination can run free and create new configurations for inclusion. Protest occupations such as the student-led movement of university occupations in solidarity for Palestine, queer parties, feminist marches and celebrations, and reimagined uses of existing buildings offer new ways of reenvisioning and reshaping space as sites of solidarity, joy, survival and resistance.

Beyond the reappropriation of space, laboratories of liberation are born from the very ambition to not seek inclusion. There is power in the revolutionary refusal to be embedded in existing spaces, and rather to step outside of imposed norms to create counter-hegemonic spaces through care practices, creativity, and collective worldmaking.

To hold space is to disrupt it. To reoccupy, reclaim, and remake it. In these acts—quiet or loud, personal or collective—space becomes not only a reflection of power relations and structures, but also a site where new ways of being, relating, and belonging can take shape.

List of possible keywords and topics related to gender studies:

Spatial justice
(Counter)mapping
Speculative reimaginings of space
Acts of occupation and spatial resistance
Community spaces and holding space
Representation politics
Space invaders
(Hyper)/(in)visibility of gendered and racialized bodies in media and politics

Digital space
Surveillance technology
Algorithmic bias and digital erasure/silencing
Policing
Technofeminism
Gender mainstreaming
Institutionalisation of social justice movements

Calendar

The selected participants will be contacted in June. The complete program of the event will be disseminated in September. We are looking forward to receiving your contributions!

About Sophia

Sophia, the Belgian Gender Studies Network, supports research and education in the fields of gender studies, feminism, intersectionality and queer studies. Through our projects, we facilitate connection and collaboration between academia, activism and civil society across linguistic communities in Belgium. Most notably, we organise yearly conferences and events that offer an international platform to everyone researching gender studies from an academic, artistic and/or activist approach.

Our vision of gender studies is expansive and rooted in an intersectional approach to existing power relations and imbalances. As gender researchers, we adopt a fundamentally critical attitude towards institutionalised knowledge. In our events, we therefore aim to valorize different knowledge forms equally. We particularly strive to make visible subaltern and experiential forms of knowledge as valuable expertise. By creating spaces that allow actors from different backgrounds and disciplines to engage in dialogue, we actively work towards transforming the common understanding of science and bridging the gap between institutionalised and non-institutionalized knowledge.

Learn more about our work on www.sophia.be and follow us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Linkedin](#).