

# Sexy Selfies: Young People and the Fight for Bodily Autonomy

2025 Commencement Forum explores how to change the narrative around young people, sexuality, and sexualization online and in real life.

Leora Tanenbaum '91 has been tracking and calling out the shaming of women and femme-presenting people's self-expression (known as "slut-shaming," a term she helped coin) since the early 1990s. In her latest book, *Sexy Selfie Nation: Standing Up for Yourself in Today's Toxic, Sexist Culture* (released in May 2025), Tanenbaum continues her work changing the narrative about how young people present themselves, while accounting for a landscape changed by social media and technology. *Sexy Selfie Nation* argues that, counter to what many may think, young people post "sexy selfies" as a way of asserting bodily autonomy in the service of "trying to create meaningful and joyful lives." Tanenbaum was joined by Wendy Allison Lee AM'05, PhD'12, Director of Academic Programs and Outreach at the Pembroke Center and alumnae Gender and Sexuality Studies concentrators Connie Collins '23.5 and Priya Mosher '23.5 for a Friends of the Pembroke Center-sponsored forum about her most recent book.

Researching *Sexy Selfie Nation*, Tanenbaum conducted over 60 interviews with girls, young women, and non-binary people between the ages of 14 and 30 about their experiences with the policing of their self-expression by parents, school administrators, their peers, and the public. She came away from these conversations feeling that the current climate is dramatically worse than it was a few decades ago. "The situation for girls now," said Tanenbaum in a recent interview with the Pembroke Center, "is so despicable, outrageous, and frightening." Tanenbaum pointed to the proliferation of gendered school dress codes as well as the escalation of victim blaming as two of the major contributors.

While the misogyny that undergirds policies such as school dress codes and behaviors like victim blaming has not changed character since the early 1990s, *Sexy Selfie Nation* reveals a culture where sexist policies and behavior have been exacerbated thanks, in part, to the internet. The book identifies the rise of image-based sexual abuse ("revenge porn" and "deepfakes") as a trend that



▲ Above: Wendy A. Lee, Leora Tanenbaum, and Priya Mosher

has profoundly influenced how young people approach sexual self-expression. "Revenge porn" is the non-consensual sharing of intimate images and/or videos. "Deepfakes" are highly realistic, sexually explicit videos or images where a person's face is edited into the image to make it appear as if they engaged in the sex or nudity depicted. The rise in image-based sexual abuse, coupled with a substantive increase in dress code policing and victim blaming, has produced an overwhelmingly negative online and in-person experience for any young, femme-presenting person navigating how to express themselves.

"This whole generation is growing up with non-consensual sexualization," Tanenbaum noted during the interview, and their response to this sexualization is a desire to "own" their sexuality, and take opportunities that allow them to actively consent to how they are being presented. When parents and others interpret these young people's wardrobe choices and selfie-sharing as inappropriately sexual, they fail to recognize these as attempts to assert bodily autonomy in a no-win situation. "In a world where they feel they have no control, and their bodies are being judged and sexualized by other people," Tanenbaum said, young people "want to have control over something."



# From the Pembroke Center Archives

Speaking 61 years after graduating, Mary Jane Mikuriya '56 shares an account of her experience as a student of Japanese and Austro-Hungarian descent during the Second World War and after. [Listen here](#). Mikuriya's papers are also held in the Pembroke Center Archives.

## PEMBROKE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

*"My father couldn't get a job because he was an alien. My mother was naturalized twice, why wasn't he naturalized once? Well, he couldn't be. The Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924 said no 'Oriental' could become a citizen. So my mother, when she married him, she lost her citizenship."*

— Mary Jane Mikuriya '56

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Erin Perfect

Processing Archivist

Diane Straker

Administrative Coordinator

# From the Director

The 2024-25 academic year has been an extraordinary one on campus and in the world. Amidst everything, I have found myself grateful for the good work and camaraderie that characterize our Pembroke Center community. We have worked hard this year on an ambitious slate of projects and programs and are proud to share some of them with you.

This year's Pembroke Seminar, "Unwriting the Anthropocene: A Call to Experiment," led by Macarena Gómez-Barris, Timothy C. Forbes and Anne S. Harrison University Professor of Modern Culture and Media, gathered interdisciplinary scholars to consider humans' impact on our environment from creative and experimental perspectives. Professor Gómez-Barris brought scholars and creators to campus to meet with the Seminar and offer open-to-the-public talks. These included poet and artist Renee Gladman, literary scholar Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, writer Emily Raboteau, and art historian Salar Mameni.

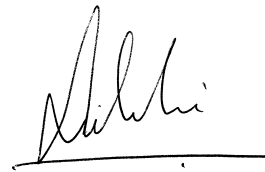
"Ambitious" is the correct adjective to describe the journal *differences*' work this year. For the first time in many years, the journal is able to hire a professional staff member into the much-needed role of managing editor. It's not a moment too soon: this busy year has featured two special issues, "The Black (W) hole," guest edited by Shoniqua Roach (a former Black Feminist Theory Project Scholar) and "Unaccountably Queer," a collection in honor of the twentieth anniversary of Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), alongside the growth of *differences*' [online forum](#).

The Gender and Sexuality Studies program was able to offer new curricular options this year, with courses on AIDS/HIV activism, experimental ethnography, Sapphic arts, and the concept of ignorance, among others. These exciting new courses, alongside the individualized attention our program is able to offer concentrators, keep GNSS popular with undergraduates.

The Pembroke Center Archives team has also expanded with the addition of a new three-year-term processing archivist position (more about Erin Perfect on page five). This means more support for reference and class instruction and materials processing, making collections available more quickly. In other news, this spring the Pembroke Center and the Brown University Library have completed a Memorandum of Understanding that delineates the relationship between the Pembroke Center Archives and John Hay Library, defines each unit's collecting scopes, and outlines the shared roles and responsibilities that uphold this partnership.

Around the time you will be reading this, Pembroke Hall - based staff will be transitioning to remote work in order to allow for the refurbishment of Pembroke Hall this summer. This project, begun over a year ago, will allow the full Center team to be located in Pembroke Hall and will provide expanded spaces for creative and archival exhibits, collaborative and quiet study, and events both public facing and academic. We are fortunate to be able to move ahead in this process despite the upheaval and uncertainty of the times, and we cannot wait to share our new space with you this fall.

Wishing you an enjoyable summer,



## A Note from Your Co-Chairs

This year, your generosity helped us offer timely programming such as "Patriarchy Redux," featuring former Gender Studies concentrator Kate Shaw '01 – now a constitutional law scholar and professor at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School – alongside Brown Political Science faculty Deva Woodly and Juliet Hooker.

Thanks to the Friends of the Pembroke Center, we also awarded student prizes recognizing outstanding undergraduate and graduate work in the area of women's, gender, and sexuality studies.

The Pembroke Center is devoted to critical scholarship on the struggles faced by people across national and transnational contexts, especially those whose gender identity or sexual orientation make them targets of violence. This work is more important than ever. Help us meet the moment.

If you haven't yet renewed your gift – or if you're considering becoming a Friend for the first time – there's still time. Every contribution makes a difference.

Wishing you a wonderful summer ahead. We look forward to welcoming you back to campus and celebrating the reimagined Pembroke Hall this fall.



Emily Coe-Sullivan '99  
Chair, Pembroke Center  
Advisory Council



Barbara Dugan  
Johnson '83, P'16  
Vice-Chair, Pembroke  
Center Advisory Council



Organized as an intergenerational conversation between members of “Generation X” (Tanenbaum and Lee) and “GenZ” (Mosher and Collins), the Commencement Forum discussion drew out the ways in which younger generations push back against everyday experiences of non-consensual sexualization, reframing the common misunderstanding of more revealing selfies as inherently sexual or seeking a sexual response. As Tanenbaum put it, “Sexuality is not the problem. The problem is the violation of consent.”

Mosher spoke about her practice of embodiment as a means of resisting non-consensual sexualization and shifting the focus away from how others see her to focusing more on “how I feel in my body” and “how can we feel safe within our bodies first?” Collins, who through her Instagram @thefirstdatediaries and her Substack gives sex and dating advice, discussed navigating slut-shaming comments as part of her professional role and pointed out that “there is literally no right way to be a woman on the internet” because irrespective of how she is dressed or what advice she gives, some of her audience will slut-shame her. She continues her work, in part, because as she noted, “people want practical tools and resources for navigating sexual and romantic relationships and navigating self pleasure and we owe it to people to give that to them.”

The conversation concluded on questions of individual autonomy within the broader context of corporate capitalism. Mosher and Collins agreed that they struggled with the question of



▲ Above: Connie Collins

whether disengagement is a useful strategy. Collins said, “I’m just trying to make my little corner of the internet less terrible.” Tanenbaum articulated the tension between individual acts of self-empowerment (such as posting selfies) and the idea of a greater common good that might require abandonment of such platforms altogether due to their exploitation of women’s images and unwillingness to substantively address online harassment. Regardless, panelists agreed that refocusing the narrative on solidarity with those who have experienced non-consensual sexualization no matter how they present themselves online or in person is a concrete way to move the dominant culture toward greater bodily autonomy.

## Updates from *differences*

In April, the journal hosted the second Limits of Legibility colloquium. “The Climate of Critique” featured Lynne Huffer (Emory), Axelle Karera (Emory), Dixa Ramírez D’Oleo (Brown) and Jean-Thomas Tremblay (York), and was moderated by Elizabeth A. Wilson (Emory). These speakers were invited to comment on the turn to discourses of entanglement and relationality in the academic environmental humanities, which risks displacing the social and racial antagonisms that have given rise to ecological disaster. A recording of the colloquium can be viewed on the Pembroke Center’s YouTube [playlist](#).

*differences* also welcomes a new professional staff member to the editorial team. Since 2000, Denise Davis has dedicated a significant portion of her workweek to running the *differences* editorial office, a lean operation that has relied on the essential contributions of part-time graduate student assistant editors. As Denise leans into her work as senior lecturer of gender and sexuality studies and director of the graduate certificate program, she will remain on the journal’s masthead as a coeditor alongside

Elizabeth Weed, Ellen Rooney, and Elizabeth A. Wilson. New Managing Editor Scott Jackshaw AM’22

PhD’25 will take on key managerial responsibilities that will allow *differences* and its online forum to foster and publish work from a broadening range of scholars. Graduate student fellows, including Interdisciplinary Opportunities Fellows, will continue to provide editorial support. Jackshaw recently completed their doctorate in English under the direction of Kevin Quashie and comes to the managing editor role with several years of editorial experience at *differences*. They look forward to developing the journal’s online forum, which they established in 2022, and steering a lineup of special issues that ranges from lyric poetry to reproductive politics. They are also a poet and their collection, *Stigmata*, is forthcoming from Talonbooks this year.



▲ Left: Scott Jackshaw



## Judith Butler to Deliver Pembroke Center Publics Lecture in November

On November 5, 2025, feminist philosopher and gender and sexuality studies scholar Judith Butler (UC Berkeley) will deliver the 2025-26 Pembroke Center Publics Lecture.

Butler's body of work has achieved canonical status in the field of gender and sexuality studies beginning with 1990's *Gender Trouble*, which argues that gender is performative, that is, socially produced through the repetition of conventions that become naturalized over time. Butler clarifies and expands upon this idea in subsequent work, such as *Bodies That Matter* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004). Though perhaps best known for their scholarship in gender and sexuality studies, Butler has engaged questions of power and subjectivity, ethics and grievability across multiple domains, including politics and current affairs, and frequently speaks on issues of feminism, human rights, the rise of authoritarian movements, and Israel/Palestine. Their most recent book, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (2024) is an extension of and departure from earlier work. Butler's aim with the book is to reach a broad audience to explain and challenge attacks on "gender" that have become central to right-wing movements nationally and globally. Teagan Bradway, writing for the online forum of *differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, calls the national bestseller Butler's "forceful return to gender and sexuality studies."

The upcoming Publics Lecture continues Butler's long-standing relationship with the Pembroke Center. Most recently, they visited Peter Szendy's 2021 Pembroke Seminar, *Narratives of Debt*, where they gave a research lecture titled "Debt, Guilt,

Responsibility, Obligation." They have also committed to donating their papers to the Center's Feminist Theory Archive and served on the archive's advisory board from 2018 to 2021. Correspondence from Butler appears in other Pembroke Center archival collections, including the papers of Naomi Schor, Joan Wallach Scott, Hortense J. Spillers, Christina Crosby, and others.

Butler has had a long and productive relationship with *differences* as well. Most recently, the journal published a special issue in December 2024 marking the twentieth anniversary of their 2005 *Giving an Account of Oneself*. "[Unaccountably Queer](#)" was guest edited by Teagan Bradway, who interviewed Butler for *differences'* online forum. Butler's relationship with the journal goes back almost to the journal's founding in 1989, with the publication of their 1990 [essay](#) "The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess." Among the many articles they have published in *differences* are their much-cited "Against Proper Objects," which served as the introduction to a special issue called "Feminism Meets Queer Theory," and in the same issue, an [interview](#) with Gayle Rubin called "Sexual Traffic." Butler currently serves on *differences'* advisory board.

Butler's November Publics Lecture will be open to the public, with pre-registration required and a limited number of tickets available. The lecture will also be recorded and available on the Pembroke Center's YouTube playlist.

## Pembroke Center Archives Welcome Processing Archivist



Erin Perfect has joined the Archives team in a new role as processing archivist. This three-year position will enable the Archives to scale up its description, reference, and instruction services and help meet the needs of the Archives' growing community of researchers.

A longtime archivist and librarian in the Providence area, Perfect served in roles at the Providence Athenaeum, the Rhode Island School of Art and Design, and most recently at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts. Perfect joined the Pembroke Center in May 2023 as a contract archivist. In this role, she migrated the Pembroke Center Oral History Project to a new platform and processed the collections of Xochitl Gonzalez, Jennifer Terry, Wendy Brown, and Donna M. Hughes.

Perfect holds a Master's in Library & Information Science from San Jose State University and a Bachelor of Fine Art in Photography from The School of Visual Arts in New York City.

▲ Above: Erin Perfect

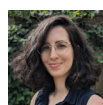
# Pembroke Seminar and Fellows Announced for 2025-26

The 2025-26 Pembroke Seminar, “The Civic Work of Monuments,” will be led by Juliet Hooker, Royce Family Professor of Teaching Excellence in Political Science. Reckoning with public monuments as forms of speech that express civic values, the year-long, intergenerational seminar will consider the histories that public monuments are designed to commemorate as well as the ways in which people respond to and sometimes resist the narratives monuments tell.

## FACULTY FELLOWS



**Juliet Hooker**  
Royce Family Professor of  
Teaching Excellence  
in Political Science



**Alejandra Rosenberg Navarro**  
Assistant Professor of  
Hispanic Studies



**Hieyoon Kim**  
Assistant Professor of  
East Asian Studies



**Rahma Haji**  
Shauna M. Stark '76, P'10  
Postdoctoral Fellow  
Ph.D. 2025, Women, Gender,  
and Sexuality Studies,  
University of Maryland, College Park  
Dissertation: “Palimpsestic Blackness:  
Memes, Aesthetics and Relation”



**María Camila Palacio**  
Pembroke Center  
Postdoctoral Fellow  
Ph.D. 2025,  
Spanish and Portuguese,  
Northwestern University  
Dissertation: “‘Ese pueblo es zona roja’:  
geografías del conflicto colombiano en las  
narrativas testimoniales del siglo XXI”



**Miša Stekl**  
Artemis A.W. and Martha  
Joukowsky Postdoctoral Fellow  
Ph.D. 2025, Modern  
Thought and Literature,  
Stanford University  
Dissertation: “Accursed Races: (Anti)  
Blackness and Queer/Trans Modernity”

## GRADUATE STUDENT FELLOWS



**Looghermine Claude**  
American Studies



**Shannon Constantine**  
Theatre Arts and  
Performance Studies



**Monaye Johnson**  
Africana Studies

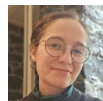


**Sam Washington**  
History



**Amelle Zeroug**  
History

## POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS



**Eliana Chavkin**  
Nancy L. Buc '65 LLD'94 hon.  
Postdoctoral Fellow  
Ph.D. 2025, History,  
University of Minnesota Twin Cities  
Dissertation: “‘The Monument Does Not  
Remember’: America’s World War I  
Memorials and the Struggle to Create  
History from Memory”

## UNDERGRADUATE FELLOWS



**Samantha Ho**  
English Literature and (IC)  
Global Arts and Politics



**Jenny Hu**  
Classics, International and  
Public Affairs

## Congratulations, Graduates!

Sincerest congratulations to the Brown class of 2025, including our outstanding Gender and Sexuality Studies concentrators and doctoral students in our graduate certificate program.

### UNDERGRADUATE CONCENTRATORS

Anusha Gupta  
Marlie Kahan  
Elie Lubin  
Lena Noya  
Alissa Simon  
Imani Stewart

### GRADUATE CERTIFICATE STUDENTS

Tali HersHKovitz,  
*Religious Studies*  
Scott Jackshaw, *English*  
Katherine E. A. Preston,  
*English*  
Harper Shalloe,  
*Modern Culture and Media*

## Faculty Seed Grant Recipient

This grant was awarded during the 2024-25 academic year for a 2025-26 project.

Harini Suresh  
*Computer Science*  
**Project** | “Reframing the narrative: participatory workshops to co-create data on femicide reporting practices”

## Grants and Prizes Recognize and Support Innovative Work

Each year, the Pembroke Center awards prizes for exceptional undergraduate and graduate student research, and grants to support promising student research projects. Here are this year's recipients.

### STUDENT RESEARCH GRANT RECIPIENTS

#### Barbara Anton Community Research Grant

Anusha Gupta '25, *Public Health and Gender and Sexuality Studies*

Jo Ouyang '26, *Ethnic Studies and Painting (Brown/RISD)*

#### Enid Wilson Undergraduate Fellowship

San Kwon '25, *Comparative Literature*

Alissa Simon '25, *Political Science and Gender and Sexuality Studies*

#### Helen Terry MacLeod Research Grant

Rachel Kamphaus '25, *English and Classics*

RL Wheeler '25, *Ethnic Studies and Literary Arts*

#### Linda Pei Undergraduate Research Grant

Sophi Aronson '25, *Health and Human Biology*

Olivia Hanley '25, *International and Public Affairs, English*

#### Pembroke Center Research Development Grant for Graduate Students

Mickell Carter

*Africana Studies*

**Project** | "Stylin' Black Power: Fashioning Identity and Masculinity"

Victoria Cheff

*French & Francophone Studies*

**Project** | "Stérile Volupté: Productive Sterility in Baudelaire, Vivien, Rachilde, and Colette"

Tara Holman

*English*

**Project** | "Aestheticizing the Maternal: Creative Enactments toward Relationality"

Madeline Nicholson

*Anthropology*

**Project** | "Adopting Change: An Ethnographic Investigation of Transnational Adoptee Activism in Norway"

Semilore Sobande

*English*

**Project** | "Ghostwriters: Black Women and Representation in 20th-Century Anglophone and Francophone Literature of the African Diaspora"

Amber Hawk Swanson

*Theatre Arts and Performance Studies*

**Project** | "Hemings and Lewinsky Studies, as made imaginable by Marisa Williamson's Sally & Monica's Hot Tub Hangout (2014)"

#### Steinhaus/Zisson Pembroke Center Research Grants for Undergraduate and Graduate Students

Shravya Sompalli '25

*Ethnic Studies and Computer Science*

Luiz Paulo Ferraz

*Graduate student, History*

**Project** | "'The Original Earth Defenders': Gender, Environment, and the Rise of Brazil's Indigenous Women Leaders"

Kiana Knight

*Graduate student, Africana Studies*

**Project** | "Translating Racial Uplift: Black Women, Language, and International Politics, 1918-1965"

Mohadeseh Salari Sardari

*Graduate student, History of Art and Architecture*

**Project** | "Craving Her Space: Negotiating Architectural Boundaries in the Lives of Taj Alsaltane and Bibi Maryam Bakhtiari"

### STUDENT PRIZE RECIPIENTS



#### Ruth Simmons Prize

Shravya Sompalli '25

*Ethnic Studies and Computer Science*

"Mapping 'Tech Against Trafficking': State Surveillance, Corporate Datafication, and Grassroots Cartographies"



#### Ruth Simmons Prize (honorable mention)

Anna Brent-Levenstein '25

*Sociology and History*

"Women Are Our Rehabilitation: Familial Labor and Advocacy in an Era of Mass Incarceration"



#### Ruth Simmons Prize (honorable mention)

Alexandra Mork '25

*History and Political Science*

"State-Crossed Lovers: Evasive, Interracial Marriages in Nineteenth-Century Virginia"



#### Joan Wallach Scott Prize

Alissa Simon '25

*Political Science and Gender and Sexuality Studies*

"Private Bodies, Public Protections: Imagining an Affirmative Privacy Right in Domestic Violence Legal Reform"



#### Marie J. Langlois Dissertation Prize

Harper Shalloe PhD '25

*Modern Culture and Media*

"Sick, Sad World: Holism and Less-Than-Human Thought"



#### Marie J. Langlois Dissertation Prize (honorable mention)

Allyson LaForge PhD '25

*American Studies*

"Materializing Futurity: Networks of Native Organizing in the Northeast"





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[pembrokecenter.org](http://pembrokecenter.org)

### I'd like to make a gift to the Friends of the Pembroke Center!

Gifts to the Friends of the Pembroke Center support the research, teaching, archives and alumnae/i programs sponsored by the Pembroke Center.



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YouTube [playlist](#).

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Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women

#### *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*

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## The Pembroke Hall Update Has Begun

Work has begun on the Pembroke Hall update, and staff members are working remotely this summer as the project speeds forward. Many in the Pembroke community anticipate this much-needed refresh.

"What exciting news. I'm sure Sarah Doyle and her Pembroke colleagues are cheering from on high. A building of our own after all these years. In the earliest days, my office was on the first floor of Alumnae Hall, next door to the men's room. The Pembroke Center has come a long way!!" – *Joan Wallach Scott*  
*Ph.D. ADE'81 hon. LHD'92 hon., P'92 and Inaugural Director of the Pembroke Center, 1981-1985*

