



# GENDER, DIVERSITY & INTERSECTIONALITY RESEARCH CENTRE

## Autumn Newsletter 2025

☕ Grey and rainy outside? Time for a cup of tea and some RHEA news! ☕

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**Editor's Choice**

## Young people's well-being and pornography:

### meet Nina Szyf

Exclusively for the readers of our newsletter, RHEA interviewed [Nina Szyf](#), PhD student at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Ghent University (joint PhD) within the SWYPPE-project. We discuss her current research on the sexual well-being of young people in times of online pornography.



*"It's important to involve minoritized groups throughout the research process, ensuring that their realities help to shape the questions we ask, and the knowledge we produce."*

*- Nina Szyf*

**You are doing your PhD research within the SWYPPE (Sexual Well-being of Young People in times of Widespread Pornography use) project, what is your role within the project?**

*SWYPPE is an interdisciplinary and interuniversity collaboration between researchers and professors from medicine, psychology, social sciences, education and gender studies. Together we aim to better understand how young people*

*navigate sexuality and well-being in a time where online pornography is widely available. My role is to study how pornography is used, perceived and experienced by young people from different backgrounds and how this connects to their sexual health, relationships and overall well-being. The goal is to move beyond traditional, one-dimensional perspectives and contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of how young people engage with pornography in the digital age.*

### **With intersectionality as your lens, who are you wishing to highlight?**

*Pornography research has long been centered on heterosexual, cisgender men. I aim to broaden this perspective by actively including diverse voices and experiences across gender identities, sexual orientations, ethnicities, religions but also young people with disabilities. Applying an intersectional lens means more than simply acknowledging diversity. To me it's very important to really involve minoritized groups throughout different steps in the research process, ensuring that their realities help to shape the questions we ask and the knowledge we produce. Ultimately, this approach could also help to create a more inclusive and representative framework for sexual education in schools, possibly moving beyond a one-size-fits all approach.*

[> Keep reading](#)

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Highlight

## **Danielle Fernandes wins KVAB Science Communication award**

*Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten*



The Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium and the Young Academy annually present the 'Science Communication Awards' to scientists with exceptional achievements in science communication. Danielle Fernandes has been awarded this prestigious prize for her project City Confessions, a participatory board game that raises awareness about sexual harassment in public spaces and builds skills for prevention.

**The laureates can also win an extra audience award, through a public vote. If you want to support Danielle, you can vote for her [on the EOS website!](#)**

All information about Danielle's project and the award on <https://rhea.research.vub.be/danielle-fernandes-wins-kvab-science-communication-award>

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## **Vulva Obscura book presentation**

*Event hosted at the Gents Universiteitsmuseum (GUM)*



On Wednesday the 22nd of October, [Dr. Hannelore Van Bavel](#) was invited to speak on the panel for the presentation of the book "*Vulva Obscura*" by photographer Hanne Lamon. The book was presented in Ghent University Museum (GUM), and showcases a hundred people's vulvas to highlight the wide diversity of genitalia through portraits. The speakers touched upon several topics, like practices of shame, female genital cosmetic surgery, and beauty standards surrounding the vulva.

The photography exhibition "[\(Un\)Shame](#)" runs until 04/01/2026. The press article about the presentation can be found [here](#).

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Vacancy: Research Coordinator

## Vacancy: Fulltime Research Coordinator RHEA

RHEA is looking for a fulltime Research Coordinator for a period of 10 months!



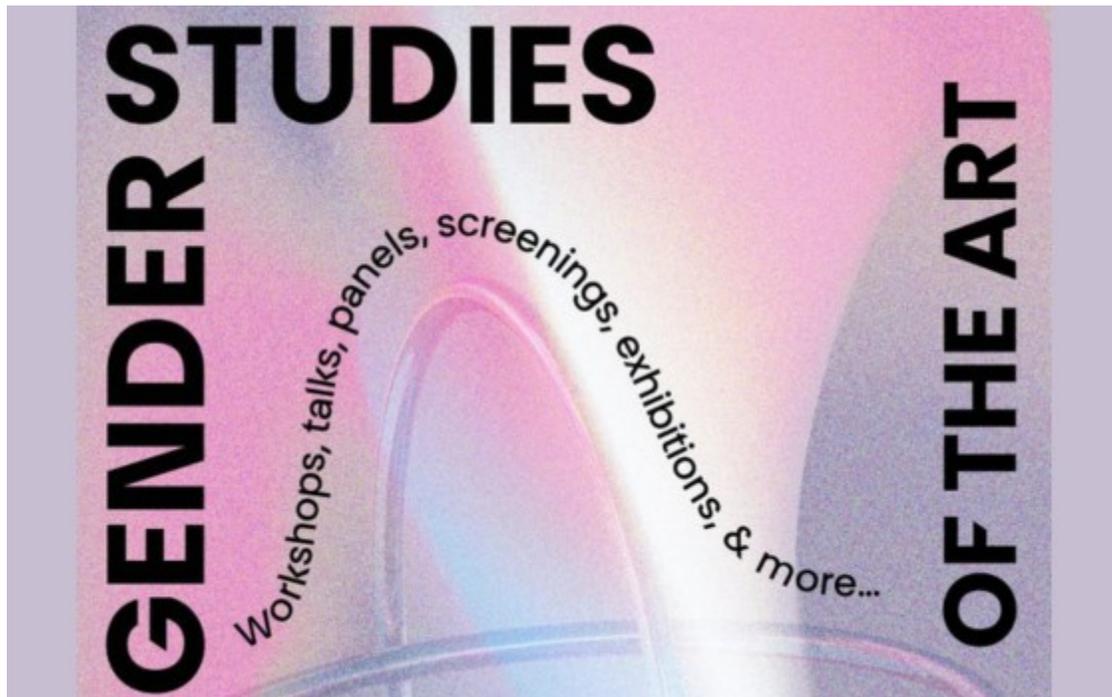
We are looking for the following profile:

- Min. Master degree in the Humanities or Social Sciences (preference: Gender & Diversity)
- Experience in writing grant applications
- Bonus points: holding a PhD, having research experience, and/or publications
- Good knowledge of Dutch & English (written & spoken)

All information on <https://rhea.research.vub.be/vacature-voltijdse-onderzoekscordinator>

Upcoming

**12 - 14/11 Gender Studies: A state of the art - Sophia**  
Workshops, talks, panels, and more



Over the course of two days and a half, Sophia is bringing together people from academia, civil society and the arts to exchange ideas and practices in gender studies in a dynamic and interdisciplinary way.

Look out for the workshop given by RHEA-member [Ella Oelbrandt](#) on Thursday from 13h - 16h "Gendered Spatial Practices in Brussels"!

**Practical:**

12 & 13/11 - Pianofabriek, Rue du Fortstraat 35, 1060 St-Gilles

14/11 - huisvandeMens, Sainctelette Square 17, 1000 Brussels

Registration is paying & mandatory

The programme of the conference includes sessions in **EN/NL/FR** (no simultaneous interpretation).

[Registration & Info](#)

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**28/11 Annual tribute to Fatima Mernissi:**

**An Evening with filmmaker and author Saâd Chraïbi**



As part of the annual tribute to Moroccan sociologist and writer Fatima Mernissi (27 september 1940 – 30 november 2015), this year's focus is on Moroccan filmmaker and author Saâd Chraïbi. For more than forty years, he has explored the major social and historical issues of his country, with particular attention to the position of women. As a leading figure of engaged cinema, he has also played an active role in shaping Morocco's cultural policies. The evening will be moderated by Brussels-based author and activist Fatiha Saïdi.

### **Programme:**

- Book presentation *Fragments de scènes (2024)*: a personal and powerful account of political divides, struggles for emancipation, and collective memory in today's Morocco.
- Film-screening *Le silence des violons (2025)*: a moving story of Hafsa, a young violinist defying her family's expectations, supported by her grandfather who passes on the precious heritage of his musical art.
- Live music: a chaabi trio bringing the vibrant Moroccan style that blends tradition with celebration.

### **Practical:**

Location: Espace Magh - Priemstraat 17, 1000 Brussels

Tickets: €15,75 (reduced €10,75)

Contact: [ine.de.boock@vub.be](mailto:ine.de.boock@vub.be)

Discussion in **French**. Film in **Arabic and French** with French subtitles.

*This event is organized by Espace Magh and the Fatima Mernissi Chair at VUB (an initiative of RHEA – Research Centre on Gender, Diversity and Intersectionality).*

[Tickets & Info](#)

## 11/12 Save the date: RHEA Gender Lecture Series



After last year's success, we are relaunching the RHEA Gender Lecture Series for a second edition!

The RHEA Gender Lecture Series is an initiative by our PhD-students, aiming to spotlight and open a fruitful dialogue on important topics in gender, diversity and intersectionality research. The lecture series is the successor of our previous initiative, the Genderweek, and will include a lecture in the week of the International Women's Day on the 8th of March.

Our first RHEA Gender Lecture takes place on **the 11th of December**, when we'll examine **the socio-political climate around sex education**, so mark this day in your calendar!

More information following soon!

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## Rhea On the Move



### **RHEA on the move to... Vienna**

From 16 - 19 September, [Dr. Hannelore Van Bavel](#) (3rd from the left) and Dra. [Lula Maris](#) (1st from the left) attended the "Redefinitions of Health and Well-being" 2025 **Medical Anthropology Europe Conference** at the Universität Wien.

Both were speakers on the panel "**Genital Expectations**: A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Gendered Meanings, Norms, and Practices Surrounding Genitalia". As convener of the panel, Dr. Hannelore Van Bavel both presented her research on why women opt for surgical correction of their labia, and moderated the discussion. Lula Maris presented her Master thesis research on online advice to parents of intersex children.

Dr. Hannelore Van Bavel also co-organised **an interactive lab** together with Vivien Lou (co-convener) and Austrian [artist Viktoria Krug](#): "Meet Vulvarium and Enter a Gallery of Vulva Statues". In this lab, participants could discover Krug's artistic work, which aims to break the shame and silence surrounding the vulva. She does this by creating casts of real, non-sexualized vulvas, and she brought a selection of these sculptures to the lab for participants to observe, touch, and be inspired by.

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## New Team Members

### **Dr. An Van Raemdonck**

Dr. An Van Raemdonck joins Rhea as a postdoctoral researcher on the Global Minds (VLIRUOS)-funded UCoBS project with MUST University in Uganda, particularly in the subproject of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. An has a background in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies and anthropology, and has extensive fieldwork experience in both the Middle East and Belgium. As a guest professor, she will also be teaching the course Introduction to Gender and Diversity Studies.

In the past, An's research has centred on the entanglements of religion and gender in discussions of Female Genital Cutting in Egypt; early marriages/childbirths among Syrian refugees in Jordan; and Islamophobia, Islamic ethics and conviviality in European contexts. She also founded the Islam, Ethics and Diversity (IED) Network, and is co-editor-in-chief of DiGeSt: the Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies.



#### **Key words that describe my work:**

Contemporary Islam, Gender, Racism, Politics of Reproduction

#### **My favourite book in gender, diversity and intersectionality:**

Pious Practice and Secular Constraints: Women in the Islamic Revival in Europe - Jeannette S. Jouili

#### **I look forward to...**

learning about reproductive policies and politics in the context of Uganda!



**My favourite book in gender, diversity and intersectionality:**

You can't keep a good woman down  
- Alice Walker

**Key words that describe my work:**

Political Philosophy, Intersex  
Advocacy, Feminism

**I look forward to:**

co-organising the Gender Lecture  
Series!

**Lula Maris(PhD)**

Lula Maris has (re)joined our team! After several years as Rhea's jobstudent and coördinator, she will now be returning as an FWO PhD Fellow within the domain of Philosophy and Ethics. Her research is titled "Narrative Resistance: a Feminist Ethical Inquiry Into the Use of Counterstories in Modern-Day Activism", and explores how narrative and storytelling can serve as tools of resistance by redefining identity and liberating moral agency. Combining theory and empiry, she will work with activist groups to revise existing philosophical frameworks.

Lula seeks to connect philosophical

**Emma-Jane Down**

Emma-Jane Down has recently joined the Rhea-team as the new jobstudent. She will be responsible for communcation, social media channels and assistance in event coordination.

Emma-Jane is completing her Bachelor's in Philosophy and Moral Sciences at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and is a member of Intersekse Vlaanderen and DSD Nederland. Her bachelor's thesis focuses on Karl Marx' economic Manuscripts and Sylvia Wynter's Black Metamorphosis.



**Key words that describe my work:**

Narrative resistance, Feminist ethics,  
Counterstory

**My current read in gender, diversity and intersectionality is:**

Enemy Feminisms: TERFS,  
Policewomen, and Girlbosses

inquiry with broader societal issues, and has previously worked on narrative identity and meaning in life, intersex identity, and feminist activism. In 2023, she interned and wrote for Knack Magazine. Aside from the VUB, she has studied at the Freie Universität Berlin (Germany), and will be a visiting researcher at the Erasmus University Rotterdam as part of her PhD-project.

Against Liberation – Sophie Lewis

**I look forward to:**

bridging philosophical thought and activist practice, and exploring how the two can interact and meaningfully contribute to one another.

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## Must-reads

- Article: **A genealogy of silencing: tracing the impact of critiques of the hegemonic discourse on female genital mutilation** (Authors: Hannelore Van Bavel, Natasha Carver & Dorothy Takyiakwaa, Journal: *Women's History Review*)
- Chapter: **The Benefit of the Doubt: The Logic Behind 'Radical' Gynaecological Operations (Belgium, 1890s–1900s)**(Author: Jolien Gijbels, In: *Dealing with Medical Uncertainty in and through the History of Medicine*)
- Press Article: **Fotografe brengt intieme zones van meer dan honderd vrouwen in beeld: “Er was spanning,**

- **Article: The racialization of radicalization and terrorism: Belgian political language on Muslims and Islam**

*(Authors: Elias Woodbridge, An-Sofie Vanhouche & Iman Lechkar, Journal: Ethnicities)*

- **Article: Norms of masculinity: community voices on sexual and reproductive health communication in rural southwestern Uganda**  
*(Authors: Dorcus Achen et al., Journal: Culture, Health & Sexuality)*

- **Interview with Dr. Hannelore Van Bavel on FGM vs. genital cosmetic surgery**  
*(Wetenschap Brussel)*

**soms schaamte, maar vooral trots” (Kaatje De Coninck)**

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