

Women's and Gender Studies Network

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Director's Chair

We are making an impact. Our half-day symposium "Gender at the Lectern: Perceptions and Expectations" attracted over 70 faculty, staff, and students, plus a few faculty members from local institutions (see page 2). One outcome is a pair of initiatives from both Dedman College and the Provost's Office to review the student questionnaires used for course evaluation, which a body of research indicates must be constructed carefully in order to minimize the effect of gender bias.

We worked with the Graduate Women's Organization and the Central University Libraries to present a panel discussion on April 19 titled "Telling Our Story: 100 Years of Women at SMU." We intend to create other events for SMU's centennial. Without this effort, women's contributions to and experience of SMU's first century would have gone unchronicled.



Former directors of the WGS program, Ann Early and Sandy Tinkham, speaking at the event "Telling Our Story"

We distributed \$12,000 in Betty Maynard Scholarships to seniors Courtney Cross, Jordynn Prado, and Angele Williams. Jessica Noel received a Betty Maynard Award for her project titled "Women's Basketball: A League of Their Own." Her essay and its accompanying PowerPoint may be viewed on our website at <http://www.smu.edu/Dedman/Academics/Departments/WomGenStudies/Awards>.



Claire Renzetti

We co-sponsored a lecture by anthropologist Claire Renzetti (University of Kentucky), who explored the role of religiosity in domestic violence. She argued that religious orientations emphasizing justice and equality serve as a "protective" factor against intimate partner violence, while authoritarian forms of religion create greater risk. We also contributed funding to two student groups (SMU Women's Interest Network and Spectrum), who brought speakers Robyn Ochs and Mia Mingus to talk about gender issues.

At this writing, we have more minors than we have had in recent memory: 25, plus two students pursuing the individualized major in Women's and Gender Studies. 8 students have enrolled in the graduate certificate program. We helped send two WGS minors and one grad student to the National Women's Studies Association conference last fall. (See pages 3-5.) We added course offerings in French women writers, Latin-American LGBT fiction and film, and feminism and pornography (see page 6). We are providing supervised teaching opportunities for two graduate

students each semester, who have been getting excellent reviews from the students in their classes.

As I said: we are making an impact.

I would like to thank my assistants Jessica Lott and Sammy Partida for all of their excellent help this year.



Beth Newman, Director, WGS

Does the Gender of the Instructor Matter?: Gender at the Lectern

by Sheri Kunovich, Department of Sociology

Building on the success of last year's symposium "Gender and the Professions in the Twenty-First Century Workplace," the Women's and Gender Studies Program co-hosted a second event focusing on women's experiences in the labor force. This symposium was a collaborative effort involving members of the President's Commission on the Status of Women, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and the Women's and Gender Studies Program. Titled "Gender at the Lectern," the symposium was organized around the central question: does the gender of the instructor matter?



Joey Sprague

In order to examine the question three panels comprised of faculty, graduate students and undergraduate students were assembled. The first panel considered the ways in which faculty and students both continue to hold gender based stereotypes and expectations. The second panel examined the use of standardized evaluations and the uphill battle often facing female faculty who do not meet students' expectations about appropriate gender behavior. The third panel explored the extent to which ideas about gender may or may not increase student incivility in the classroom.

One of the highlights of the symposium was when the keynote speaker, Dr. Joey Sprague of the University of Kansas, shared the findings from a large body of research about course evaluation. It consistently finds that students expect their male and female professors to behave in different ways. For example, while students give high scores to male instructors they deem "funny," they prefer female professors whom

they find "fun"—that is, companionable, comfortable, and non-threatening. Similarly, female faculty members are expected to be nurturing, and those who impose limits on their availability to students may be penalized on course evaluations far more than their male colleagues are.

The symposium was well attended by faculty, staff, students, and university administrators—including Associate Provost Linda Eads, who participated as a panelist. The event provided multiple opportunities for discussion, and has made an impact: at least one dean will convene a committee next year to review and overhaul its standardized course evaluation form in light of Dr. Sprague's analysis and remarks.



News from the National Women's Studies Association Conference

This year the Graduate Women's Organization secured funding in partial support of four students' travel to the National Women's Studies Association Conference. The Women's and Gender Studies Program and the Women's Center volunteered to supplement the funds. Three students attended, and they report on their experiences on the next two pages.

Overwhelming But Transformative: An Anthro/WGS Double Major Reports from the NWSA

by Sammy Partida



The National Women's Studies Association Conference in Atlanta, Georgia was an amazing event. The sheer number of workshops, covering topics ranging from Margaret Cho and Pee Wee Herman to Foucauldian power relationships and feminist pedagogies, was overwhelming. Even after strategic, methodical planning, attendees could experience only a fraction of the feminist convergence.

The first session I attended was called "Feminist Moves: A Multi-Disciplinary, Multi-media Performance on Representations of the Body." Sharing the hour-long program were several participants performing poetry, reading an autobiography, presenting a paper on Sylvia Plath, analyzing art, and playing the cello. What connected these selections was the focus on the female body and the discourse about it in contemporary society. It was at once an intellectual and visceral experience, as the academic material was consistently contextualized through biographical material and original music.

The term "feminist pedagogy" was frequently mentioned in a later panel discussion, "Pedagogy: 'Othering' the Classroom." Here, professors and grad students discussed their experiences teaching Women's and Gender Studies courses. They presented teaching as political, as a form of intimate and radical activism. Presenters explored authority in the classroom and the student-teacher relationship as it is structured by gender, race, and other identity categories. They emphasized teaching in the current moment, of being a critically charged instructor who instigates critical thought, awareness, and engagement with the identity and language politics that are present before, during, and after instruction.

I also attended one of the most controversial (but memorable) panels, "Gender and Sexuality: Orientations, Practices, and Desires." It discussed the porn and sex toy industry in relation to women's sexualities. Providing objective facts about the industries' products and market, presenters placed the sex toy in a critical context, analyzing its connections to capitalism. They argued that the sex toy industry commodifies sexual experience as something that can only be purchased. They also touched upon the heteronormative implications of many sex toys. But they also acknowledged that women's attitudes towards them, ranging from full rejection to enjoyment, seem independent of sexual orientation and other aspects of identity.

The conference theme was "Feminist Transformations," and it has had a transforming effect on me. I left politically and socially charged, encouraged not only to keep myself informed about academic feminism, but also to develop and strengthen my activism.

Sammy Partida, a sophomore, has declared majors in Anthropology and Individualized Study in the Liberal Arts with a Concentration in Women's and Gender Studies. He serves on the WGS Council and is the WGS undergraduate office assistant.

House Bunnies, Social Media, and Rape Culture: An Advertising Grad Student's Perspective on the NWSA

by Jingya Huang

As an advertising graduate student whose coursework is not in women's and gender studies, I found the National Women's Studies Association conference really eye-opening. Though sometimes I was lost in the quick flow of unfamiliar terminology, I found some of the presentations inspiring.

One panel I attended, titled "Queering the Norm? Comedic Interventions," included a paper about the movie *The House Bunny*. In this film a former Playboy bunny helps the members of a "geeky" sorority figure out how to strike a balance between geekiness and femininity. Though I had watched the movie before, I had not recognized the ways that the movie ultimately reaffirms the link between women's appearance and their identity even while seeming to offer a critique of the objectification of women. The presenter pointed out several ways in which the film reinforces

social norms. For example, it reaffirms the importance to women of popularity with men and the centrality of romantic relationships to a woman's identity. Also, despite the ethnic diversity of the sorority, the leader was white and the prettiest one.

I also attended some sessions related to new media. They made clear that feminists have discovered the power of the internet and social media, which offer them platforms with minimal threat of exclusion. One presenter talked about two Tumblr blogs where overweight people who do not like their bodies express their concerns. Another panelist

presented on African American women's hair blogs. She pointed out the political implications of stylists treating African American women's hair like that of a woman from the dominant group, and trying to make it look like "mainstream" hair. She mentioned that Afro-natural hairstyles are still not considered acceptable in some mainstream salons, creating problems for some African American women. The blogs offer a way for African American women to find out how and where to get their hair styled more naturally – and not have mainstream standards of beauty imposed on them. In both cases, social media can become powerful tools for minorities to fight against mainstream ideals of beauty and social



SMU attendees of the NWSA conference. From left to right: Amber Stubblefield, Val Erwin, Sammy Partida, Jingya Huang, and Karen Click.

norms. But the author who analyzed "fat" blogs pointed out that social media can backfire because they are open to everybody – there is, as a result, a threat of opening oneself to hostile comments that may further impair self-esteem and identity.

I also heard a paper about rape culture in college. That was the first time I heard the term "rape culture." The presenter, who was male, emphasized that the so-called sexual liberation of women occurred under a social system that continues to be dominated by men. He noted that rape culture is on the rise, and yet many people, both on and off campus, hesitate to use the word "rape" and are discouraged from expressing negative experiences publicly.

All the panels I attended provided perspectives helpful not only to feminists and activists but also to ordinary people who care about the well-being of society. They provided very good insights for my career in the business world, where socially responsible practices are increasingly important.

Jingya Huang, a student from Xiangtan, China, will receive her master's degree in Advertising in May.

A Taste of Feminist Cultural Criticism: A Political Science Major's Experience at the NWSA

by Amber Stubblefield



As a political science major with a minor in women's and gender studies, I regarded the NWSA conference as a natural extension of my education. It was a chance for me to experience an intellectual atmosphere in which women and gender were the central topic of discussion. I was not disappointed. Upon arrival I felt overwhelmed by the volume of sessions and activities, but after careful planning I was on my way to having an enlightening and thought-provoking weekend.

One of the best panels I attended was titled "Demonic Temptress: Feminist Fantasy and the Molding of Social Reality" in which female power, sexuality and motherhood were main topics

of discussion. The first panelist compared Little Red Riding Hood with Native American narratives on female cannibals. She used these old folktales to demonstrate how women have struggled to define, control and shape their own identities through the expression and experimentation of their sexuality by way of cannibalism, bestiality

and witchcraft. I was taken aback at first to hear the older text of a familiar fairy tale being analyzed as the sexual exploration of a seemingly innocent girl.

The second panelist explored the progression of a young girl from innocence to sexual awakening in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. She revealed the story of temptation and sexual corruption beneath the children's story

about a young girl and her sister. Not only is one girl physically attacked for taking the "forbidden fruit," but her relationship with her own sister is analyzed as erotic. I was surprised by the fact that it was actually a children's tale, and intrigued by the message it sent to anyone straying from the path of innocence and chastity.

The last panelist tackled the traditionally male-dominated genre of science fiction film, pointing out the "damsel in distress" and "sex kitten" roles women inhabit in these films. He showed how the early 1990s redefined the roles of motherhood by transforming the very ideas of what "traditional" mothers did. Women in these films do not stay at home and cook. They are not damsels in distress waiting for someone else to save the day. Women like Ripley in *Aliens* take control and take action. Like Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2*, they are maternal figures who express a motherhood not confined to the home, but expanding through the dark recesses of space.

Attending the NWSA Conference benefitted me in ways that I cannot begin to explain. The panels have piqued my research interests and the conference provided me with an opportunity to interact with others who are motivated to promote women's and gender issues on college campuses and in the rest of society.

Amber Stubblefield, a member of the Women's and Gender Studies Council and winner of this year's Ann Early Award, graduates in May.



From Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862)



Georgia and the Virginity Institute

by Katrina Myers '10

During the past two years, I had the opportunity to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer in the country of Georgia, which is located in Eastern Europe. There I worked as a schoolteacher and lived in a tiny, homogenous Georgian village in the Kakheti region.

During my first month in Georgia, a huge explosion erupted in my house. Only barely able to comprehend basic Georgian phrases, I caught onto the phrase *tsudi gogo* which means "bad girl," a label that you do not want to attain and is usually not good even to hear. Confused, I asked my seventeen-year-old host sister, who

spoke some English, to explain. In a conversation of broken Georgian and English she told me that her mom was mad and was saying she was a *tsudi gogo* because she and her female friend had been out walking with one of her male classmates. When I asked her why this was a problem, she told me that in Georgia she was not allowed to do this, because "here, girls have to be..." She paused and grabbed the Georgian-English dictionary, "Girls have to be... virgins." When I inquired why, she gave me a version of "because the Bible tells me so."

A year after that initial, but certainly not only, conversation about sex and virginity in Georgian culture, an article was published titled "The Virginity Institute: Sex and the Georgian Woman." It describes the "The Virginity Institute" as a jesting name that refers to the cultural taboo on sex before marriage for Georgian women. According to this ideal, women should not want sex, think about sex or engage in sex. If a woman does have sex before marriage and others find out about it, she will become an outcast in her community, a *tsudi gogo*, destined to spinsterhood.

In contrast, Georgian men are encouraged and even expected to have sex at an early age. Of course, as the women

are not allowed to have sex, the men often visit prostitutes. It is even a rite of passage for a boy to be taken to his first *Natasha* (prostitute).

This culture of female abstinence prompts many Georgians to marry young. Marriage becomes the necessary license for sex, and many young Georgians think is worth it. While I was there, whenever I saw a wedding parade in my village or heard about an elopement, my gut reaction was always *please don't let it be one of my students, please*.

One devastating consequence of teenage marriage is when girls get married they are often forced to drop out of school. My first host sister told me a story about one girl in her class who had gotten married and chosen to continue to go to school. She told me, "It is bad she is at school. We are girls but she is a woman now. The boys look at her differently because they know she does *that*. She should not be allowed to go to school. I think she should stay home." My host sister continued to tell me that peer pressure had eventually forced

her classmate to drop out of the eleventh grade. Her husband was allowed to continue going to school and earn his diploma.

Additionally, many of these young girls quickly get pregnant (there is no sex education or readily available birth control), and once you are a mother in Georgia that is your sole role in life from then thereon.

An ironic follow-up came from another Georgian news source a scant two weeks after the initial article about the Virginité Institute. This one is titled "Georgian Women Seek Virginité Restoration: Tbilisi Doctors Report an Increase in Requests for Hymenoplasty."

Katrina Myers is a Women's and Gender Studies/Religious Studies alumna and former Maynard Scholar who is pursuing a master's degree at the Claremont School of Theology. This article is excerpted from Claremont's Feminism and Religion blog for October 9, 2011 (<http://feminismandreligion.com/2011/10/09/georgia-and-the-virginity-institute-by-katrina-myers/>).



Our Controversial New Course on Feminism and Pornography

by Beth Newman

Should a program in Women's and Gender Studies offer a course on pornography? That was the question before us this fall, when Professor Kevin Heffernan (Cinema/TV) asked the WGS Council to approve his new course, titled "Feminism and the Pornographic Moving Image," for credit towards the Women's and Gender Studies minor. His proposal sparked an impassioned but civil debate, paralleling the infamous "sex wars" of thirty-plus years ago, minus the acrimony.

The "sex wars" were a feature of the feminist movement during the late 1970s and early 1980s as feminists debated the meanings of pornography, prostitution, and sexuality--and what a feminist position on these questions would be. One position culminated in efforts of legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon, together with the late Andrea Dworkin, to create anti-pornography statutes based on civil rights law. They argued that pornography harms all women, which they saw as inherently degrading to women and conducive to male violence against them. But other feminists objected, claiming that these arguments tended to demonize men as well as women who dissented from the anti-porn stance, which defined "good" and "bad" forms of sexual experience that were just harmful to women's autonomy and right to self-expression and fulfillment as the old double standard. Others still chose to intervene in the arguments by making erotic films that incorporated the feminist critique of the way much cinema (pornographic or not) represented women. In the meantime, pornography was proliferating as it moved from the "art house" to the video store and then the internet.

Professor Heffernan's course engages with the vexed questions that these films and images raise, and complicates the idea that there is one pornography, which is inherently degrading to women. When members of the WGS Council offered constructive criticism of his syllabus, he promptly revised it. A strong majority ultimately voted to accept the course for credit towards the WGS minor, conscious that students will see pornography one way or another—most already have—and persuaded that a responsible Women's and Gender Studies program should offer intellectual tools for thinking critically about what they see.

News about Students and Alums



Jessica Noel

Aaron Barnes, '11, moved to Italy to stay with his mother and younger brothers while his father went on a six month deployment. He calls this the "gap year" that he didn't get to take between high school and college, and he's using it to work on some writing projects before pursuing a graduate degree, probably in Information Science.

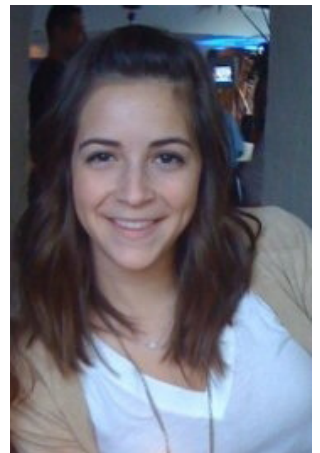
For graduating senior **Jessica Noel**, winner of the Betty Maynard Award, an internship at the Community Hospital Corporation in Plano has materialized into a position as full time planning analyst.

Amber Stubblefield, our Ann Early awardee, has received a Diversity Fellowship from the Bush School at Texas A&M University, where she will pursue a Master's degree in International Affairs.

Sophomore **Ruby Kim** has joined AmeriCorps and will hold an internship with Project Transformation, a non-profit organization that provides leadership development for college students who run summer day camp programs for underserved children and youth.

John Lind McAfee, a student of Professor Francisco Moran, one of our affiliated WGS faculty members (and creator of one of our newest courses), had an article accepted at an on-line academic journal titled *Habana Elegante*. This is a great achievement for any student, let alone an undergraduate. It can be read here: http://www.habanaelegante.com/Spring_Summer_2012/Invitation_LindMcAfee.html

Jordynn Prado will begin work as marketing coordinator for Meals to Live, Inc., which makes healthy foods for diabetics and others. Jordynn, a WGS Betty Maynard Scholar for 2011-12, was also presented with her fourth Award of Merit in Minority Academic Achievement at SMU.



Jordynn Prado

Graduating WGS minor and M award winner **Yvonne Pitts** will intern here at SMU with New Student Orientation and Student Support this summer, and directing AARO. In the fall she will move to New York City, where she will enter a Master's program in Higher and Postsecondary Education at Columbia University.

Please send your news to womnstud@smu.edu

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