

# Learning Through Service: Sex and Gender in Everyday Life

by **SANDY STAHL**, *Associate Dean of Students; Senior Lecturer, Women's and Gender Studies*

**WHEN I** first taught WGS 150 ten years ago, the course was entitled Images of Women. While there was significant latitude regarding the syllabus, the core of the course centered on literary images. Basing the course on literature was an interesting approach, to be sure, but one that sometimes obscured the connections between the readings and real-life women's issues. Relevance to real and continuing women's issues was a concern among instructors, who also knew that second wave feminism and women's liberation were essentially unknown to college students born after 1980. In 2003, after participating in a faculty seminar on service learning, I decided to use that approach in teaching introductory women's studies in order to make gender issues real and relevant to my students. The WGS program changed the name of the course to Sex and Gender in Everyday Life shortly thereafter, so my approach fit well with the new title. I also hoped that the course's new name might encourage more men to enroll in WGS 150.

Service-learning courses are designed to engage students in community service that leads to an understanding of real-world issues and challenges. Although a specific goal of service hours is required, the real goal of a service-learning curriculum is to cause students to engage with a community agency or existing program that serves the needs of a local population—in the case of my class, women and children. Students learn about economic and political issues that affect families and communities, women and men. When thus engaged, students actively use knowledge from a variety of disciplines.

Another component critical to service-learning pedagogy is reflection. Students reflect on their service activities, relate them to classroom learning, and process information in a personal journal as well as in class discussion. The proverbial “a-ha” moments that emerge from reflection are powerful teaching moments, and students benefit from this additional dimension to the traditional classroom experience.

Service learning is not, however, without challenges for the instructor. Each semester I must check in with

agencies that are trying to meet the needs of women and children in our community. The next step is to identify possible projects that would not burden the agencies but would also be enlightening to my students. I present the list of service opportunities with the syllabus, but students may also devise their own projects subject to my approval. In every case, I must follow up with the service provider and my students throughout the semester to ensure that the service work proceeds satisfactorily for all concerned.

One such follow-up involved two students who had volunteered at a women's health clinic, but who were not eager to accept the proposed project. The clinic director asked the students to survey local restaurants, malls, and other public venues about policies and practices regarding the accommodation of nursing mothers. While this project was preferable to doing office work for the clinic, the students were somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of discussing lactation and nursing with strangers. When I helped them consider the survey through a personal lens, they became more interested in doing the research and overcame their initial discomfort about asking male managers to explain their policies and attitudes toward accommodating nursing mothers in their establishments. These students quickly realized both that there was no consistency regarding accommodation of nursing mothers in venues open to the public and that the prohibitions against nursing in a restaurant or

*continued on page 7*



Celebrating Commencement Day (from left to right): Justine Chess, Professor Julie Fesmire, Emily Burton, Nakita Noël, and Professor Rory Dicker.

**WELCOME** to the 2010-2011 academic year! Women's and Gender Studies, better known as WGS, wishes to introduce you to *Intersections*, our newsletter. Revamped and reconceptualized, *Intersections* will be published annually every fall; its goal is to share with the Vanderbilt community the happenings of Women's and Gender Studies. I hope you will use the newsletter to stay informed about the courses, contacts, and experiences waiting for you in our program. As I enter my third year as director of WGS, I invite you to learn what Women's and Gender Studies has to offer, to discover what we teach, and to find out about the research projects of our students and faculty members.

2009-2010 was a busy year for Women's and Gender Studies. In addition to teaching our courses and graduating fourteen majors and five minors, the program held the second annual "Intersections" conference (see page 6), hosted the visit of internationally celebrated filmmaker Aishah Shahidah, and said farewell to Associate Director Shubhra Sharma, who accepted a faculty position at Connecticut College. After a thorough review process, a search committee of six professors and one graduate student voted to hire a new faculty member to teach Professor Sharma's classes in transnational feminisms as well as courses in masculinity and disability studies. David Rubin, who recently earned his Ph.D. at Emory University, was the unanimous choice of the committee. This fall, Professor Rubin is teaching a course we have wanted to offer for some time, WGS 243: Sociologies of Men and Masculinity. In addition, he will provide new insights for one of our core courses, WGS 201: Women and Gender in Transnational Context. We are delighted to welcome him to our program.

Since we do not always have a chance to tell you about our core courses, we thought we would introduce you to one of them here. To begin our newsletter, Dean Sandy Stahl highlights her use of service learning in WGS 150: Sex and Gender in Everyday Life. I encourage you to read this piece to find out more about the innovative teaching that happens here in WGS.

We have some exciting speakers and events lined up for this academic year. On October 27, Kathleen Bogle (La Salle University) will be speaking on the topic of her book, *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*. Heather Russell (Florida International University) will discuss her new book, *Legba's Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic*, during the spring semester. In addition, as a result of the work of former WGS lecturer Donald Jellerson, Women's and Gender Studies will host Sexuality Studies at Vanderbilt, an interdisciplinary forum that will run the length of the academic year (see page 7). The purpose of the colloquium is to determine how students and faculty might work together to make WGS a site for wider conversation and collaboration in this area of theory and praxis.

We are thrilled about the work we have been doing; we are eager about all that is to come. I encourage you to stop by 124 Buttrick to tour our suite, and be sure to visit us virtually at [www.vanderbilt.edu/wgs](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/wgs).



Have a great semester,

**Charlotte Pierce-Baker**

*Director, Women's and Gender Studies*

*Professor, Women's and Gender Studies and English*

## TRANSITIONS IN WGS

It's hard to count the many transitions Women's and Gender Studies has experienced in the last academic year. But in the interest of keeping everyone up-to-date, here it goes!

- During the summer of 2009, the program moved from offices in Garland Hall and relocated to a suite in Buttrick Hall.
- In the fall of 2009, two members of the WGS staff announced their plans to leave Vanderbilt: Associate Director Shubhra Sharma assumed a position at Connecticut College in January 2010, and office administrator Gayle Parrott left to spend more time with her family.
- In February 2010, Barbara Kaeser joined the staff of the WGS program as its office administrator. A longtime member of the Vanderbilt community, Barbara has held many positions at the university, including ones at the Center for Medicine, Health, and Society and at the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture. Barbara is a wonderful addition to the WGS program, and we welcome her!
- During the spring, Women's and Gender Studies undertook a search for a senior lecturer to replace Shubhra Sharma. Headed by Karen Campbell (Sociology), the search committee, which included Charlotte Pierce-Baker (WGS and English), Rory Dicker (WGS and English), Julie Fesmire (WGS and English), Teresa Goddu (American Studies and English), Richard McGregor (Religious Studies), and graduate student Erin Rehel (Sociology), read through almost seventy applications and interviewed four candidates. The Committee selected David Rubin, who began teaching for WGS in fall 2010. Professor Rubin, who completed his Ph.D. at Emory University in April 2010, will teach classes on transnational feminisms, masculinities, and disability studies. ●

## CONGRATULATIONS

**Graduate Certificate recipients** in Gender Studies: **Stacy A. Clifford, Shannon E. Fyfe, Sarah E. Kersh, Heather H. Kettrey, Erin M. Rehel, and Jane M. Wanninger.**

**2010 majors:** **Kathleen Bradshaw, Emily Burton, Krishana Donaldson, Cristina Fioramonti, Mary Beth Harding, TaCara Harris, Kristen Hunter, Rebecca Maddox, Alexa Marcotte, Nicole Molina, Nakita Noël, Thomas Rosen, Erica Santiago, and Vanessa Yu.**

**2010 minors:** **Justine Chess, Angelica Ibezim, Betsy Isackes, Chanté Stubbs, and Megan Ward.**

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## INTERSECTIONS

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**Editor:** Rory Dicker

**Director, WGS:** Charlotte Pierce-Baker, Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and English

**Associate Director, WGS:** Rory Dicker, Senior Lecturer in Women's and Gender Studies and English

**Contributors:** Diana Bellonby; Julie Fesmire; Sandy Stahl; TaCara Harris; Lisa Waters

# Embracing Feminism

by TACARA HARRIS, *Women's and Gender Studies major, Class of 2010*

**BRA-BURNER.** Lesbian. Man-hater. Irrational. Angry. Asexual. When I entered Vanderbilt as a first-year student, the aforementioned nouns and adjectives on this far from exhaustive list were only a few of the stereotypes that my young, inexperienced mind had frequently associated with the term “feminist.” “I’m not a feminist, but I support efforts to eradicate domestic abuse and sexual violence,” I told people. Or, in intellectual discussions concerning women’s rights, I said, “I’m not a feminist, but I support diversity initiatives seeking to increase the presence of women and minorities in educational institutions and the workplace.” “Feminist” was a label that I sought to evade in an effort to avoid the negative stigmas that I felt were associated with it.

However, as a result of my intellectual development through exposure to the Women’s and Gender Studies curriculum, by my sophomore year at Vanderbilt, a previously loathed label had become an essential component of my identity. I realized that I was, am, and will forever be a feminist. This was a fascinating discovery for me considering that I do not

hate men, am pretty rational and happy, am heterosexual, and have never burned a bra in my life! Yet, the Women’s and Gender Studies program at Vanderbilt helped me not just to conceptualize and embrace the epistemological nature and historical context of the term “feminist” but also to recognize historical and existing forms of gender subordination and exploitation. It also helped me to embrace, celebrate, and nurture a value that had become an integral part of my lifelong passion to serve others: equality for all.

As a recent college graduate from one of the nation’s most prestigious universities, I am extremely grateful for my broad intellectual undergraduate experience, which was cultivated by Women’s and Gender Studies. When deciding on my major, Women’s and Gender Studies was very attractive because of its broad applicability. This interdisciplinary major draws on a variety of fields in the social sciences and humanities, fields such as anthropology, economics, history, literature, psychology, philosophy, and religious studies. The classes I took were small and interactive, and the professors were knowledgeable and

personable; I appreciated the open exchange and interaction in these classes. Upon declaring Women’s and Gender Studies as my academic area of focus, this curriculum quickly enhanced my cross-cultural competence and global understanding of gender as a sociocultural construct that serves to shape perceptions and practices and stratify societies into hierarchies. Women’s and Gender Studies therefore

provided an intellectual medium through which I could contribute and gain from a mosaic of feminist ideas and scholarship to further inspire and sustain my activism.

Additionally, Women’s and Gender Studies taught me something crucial about a seemingly very basic, but often overlooked concept—intersectionality: the idea that each part of a person’s social identity is interconnected to uniquely shape his or her life experiences. Within a capitalist nation in which resources, opportunities, and wealth are unequally distributed, some aspects of a person’s identity may prove more beneficial than others. Typically, those in positions of power, often White men of upper socioeconomic status, possess the most access to political, economic, and educational opportunities. In contrast, those who do not fit into these particular social categories are often faced with institutional barriers which may impede educational and economic progress and social mobility. Exploring this truth became a primary area of interest for my academic study and research throughout my undergraduate career.

My work through Women’s and Gender Studies has proven extremely beneficial to my future career as an attorney. My final research paper in my seminar on feminist legal theory argued that the legal system in the United States fails to address the unique concerns of black women as a result of the fact that black women face a form of oppression in which race and gender (and often, low socioeconomic status) are inextricably intertwined to create a unique, marginalized experience. As I prepare to begin my studies at Vanderbilt Law School, this project has sparked my interest in civil rights law and Title VII legislation.

I believe that the professional and educational opportunities that have been afforded to me through Women’s and Gender Studies are unparalleled. For example, I have not only implemented an educational program for Vanderbilt sorority women, but I was given the opportunity to present the data, methods, and results of my own independent research study during an annual Women’s and Gender Studies undergraduate research symposium. From providing excellent forums for peer exchange of current feminist scholarship to its professional and personal development opportunities, Women’s and Gender Studies has helped me to develop into an extremely open-minded and tolerant individual who embraces who I am: a feminist seeking to achieve equality for all. ●



Graduating seniors TaCara Harris, Mary Beth Harding, Alexa Marcotte, and Erica Santiago at the end-of-the-year celebration in the Women’s and Gender Studies suite.



# News from Cape Town

by LISA WATERS, Women's and Gender Studies Major, Class of 2011

**I HAVE** spent the past five months studying abroad in Cape Town, South Africa, interning with the organization Young in Prison. My primary work was at the youth prison, Bonnytown House, where I created and led an English literacy program for teenage boys who are awaiting trial on criminal charges. My work at Bonnytown gave me a close look into the issues facing the South African population, an insight which allowed me a more comprehensive conception of South Africa as a whole, and the social, racial, gender, and poverty issues faced by many South Africans on a daily basis.

In addition to my internship, I spent the remainder of my time taking classes at the University of Cape Town and becoming acquainted with the peoples of Cape Town. The combination of work, academics, and social life has given me a perspective on South African life and culture from various angles. Beyond gaining a broader understanding of the country itself, these experiences and insights have left me with a deeper understanding of my own identity and background.

I grew up in East Tennessee, a fact that became a significant part of my identity in South Africa, where I was the only student in my small program who was from the American South. I can identify the East Tennessee in me in my stubbornness, my independence, my private nature, and my pride. I don't like people to see me at my weakest. I don't like sharing my troubles with others, and I certainly don't like asking for help. The East Tennessee in me is a source of pride; I love where I grew up. Upon first arriving in Cape Town, I looked up to see a mountain range looming next to me; because of the mountains, I felt strangely at home from the beginning.

Beyond the mountains, I see further, deeper similarities between East Tennessee and the South African community around me, for better or for worse. I see the racism of the South African people that is sadly still present at home in Tennessee. I see the matter-of-fact, no-nonsense way of talking that South Africans and true East Tennesseans share. The stubborn, down-to-earth Afrikaaner farmers remind me of Tennessee hillbillies. I also see segregation between the races, and strict gender roles both in Cape Town, and at home.

The prejudices that are often hidden, though typically unsuccessfully, in Tennessee, are explicit and unconcealed in South Africa. I have interacted with South Africans more blatantly racist than the most prejudiced of my schoolmates or acquaintances in Tennessee. Racism between whites and non-whites in South Africa was not unexpected, but the deep racial tensions between the black and "coloured" races took me by surprise. The "coloured" population, the descendants of white male settlers and those native to the area, are considered a separate race from those deemed "black" in South Africa. The hostility between black and "coloured" people can largely be attributed to the remaining influences of the apartheid (which translates as "apart-ness") government, which deliberately separated the races and through unequal treatment gave each group a reason to detest and mistrust members of other races. A "coloured" boy in my class at Bonnytown wrote in his journal one day: "South Africa has given the country to the blacks, who have corrupted it." Even my open-minded and caring resident assistant, from Botswana, expressed feelings of mistrust toward the "coloured" population.

In addition to these blatant instances of racism, I have heard more gender stereotyping than I expected to. In fact, I witnessed more gender stereotyping in South Africa than I ever experienced from the arrogant, sexist male members of the country club where I worked last summer. When I went to the University of Cape Town gym, I was always the only female lifting weights. At traditional Xhosa ceremonies, the men sit in chairs while the women sit on the floor. Women cook the food and prepare the *umqombothi* (traditional beer), but are not permitted to serve themselves until all the men have full plates. Any man can override a statement of any woman at the gathering.

At the same time, while my East Tennesseee

roots and influence leave me fiercely devoted to my family and close friends, the *ubuntu* philosophy of black South Africans also emphasizes the strong bonds of community and brotherhood (note the lack of sisterhood!), leaving a culture of community, reminiscent of one of the admirable features of life in the United States South.

I see a culture of misunderstanding and a striking need for progress in both communities, but I also see a great deal of humanity and genuineness.

As my time in South Africa nears its conclusion, I can see my two worlds coming together. I will sorely miss the wonderful friends I have made, and will always hold the boys of Bonnytown House close to my heart and in my prayers. My semester has been exciting, challenging, surprising, moving, and disturbing, but as it comes to a close, what I have realized is that, at its heart, South Africa is not so far from Tennessee after all. The challenges seem united. I look forward to my return home, with a new perspective brought on by my love and understanding of two cultures that remain backward in many ways, but maintain a unique capacity for genuineness, love, selflessness, and humanity. I treasure every last moment in South Africa, a country with which I will always feel a deep connection. But, when the time comes, I will once again be humbled by the Great Smoky Mountains, and I will once again feel at home in the land where I grew up, a place that I have learned is not so far from Cape Town after all. ●



Professors Bonnie Dow (outside left) and Rory Dicker (outside right) congratulate Brenda Kao (left) and Janis Lee (right), the winners of the Susan Ford Wiltshire Essay Prize.

# The Art of Specialization

by DIANA BELLONBY, Graduate Student, Department of English

**THE QUESTION** on every Vanderbilt colleague's lips—"What is your field of study?"—haunted me when I arrived as a graduate student in English literature. Uncomfortably, I answered each inquirer with variations on the following: "I study gender and sexuality, but I am not sure which historical period." This near non-answer worried me, as all of my peers offered concrete answers about their research plans. I wondered incessantly, "How will I ever specialize? What do I want to spend my entire career studying? What if I make the wrong choice?" I fantasized about writing feminist criticism without "periodizing," but that would not solve the looming problem of how to create a focused dissertation that illuminates a specific body of literature.

The ideas I have generated since that time—and since choosing to study nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British culture—finally began to coalesce last year. My research in 2009 and 2010 alleviated anxieties while exposing me to the messy process of establishing a sense of self as a feminist scholar. While I thought this process would require professionalization at the expense of personal idiosyncracies, I have learned that my intellectual development progresses precisely when I cultivate aspects of myself in academia.

The story of how a scholar finds her specialty varies as widely as stories of how a lover finds her partner. The task demands following what she wants and what is best for her—often incompatible (not to mention unpredictable) objectives in a fickle market. Perhaps more than trying to heed academia's whims, the art of specialization requires discerning and nourishing the objects of one's deepest passion and fascination. I love pictures; I am devoted to women's issues; and I am exhilarated by the powers of both. So I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that my research into what I call

"pictorial bodies" in late Victorian and early modernist fiction combines these interests.

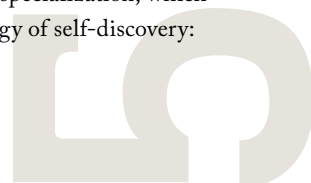
As inhabitants of the tech-frenzied modern world, we are surrounded by images of women's bodies, which pervade mass media forums from Hollywood films to popular magazines to celebrity blogs. These images often inspire insecurity in women readers (myself included), who feel pressure to alter their bodies according to current standards of female beauty. The explosive popularity of Facebook exacerbates these pressures by inviting users to post—and endlessly scrutinize—pictures of themselves. As a news-hungry nation, we are also forced (at least, I feel forced) to scrutinize images of Michelle Obama's toned arms, captioned always by comments about her stylish outfits. Confronted by all of these representations, I am torn between admiration and anxiety—between relishing the First Lady's beauty and erupting in rage at news outlets for discussing her body, not her achievements. What is the cultural history behind this pattern of representation and consumption—of perceiving and treating women according to static, idealized, imagistic social and political confines?

I spent the past year researching literary representations that contend with these issues, particularly dominant in a Victorian world famously "interdisciplinary" in its obsession with the Sister Arts of painting and prose. Last year I fed my interest in the feminized alterity of pictorial bodies—or, characters portrayed in terms of visual art, yet insistent upon exposing their socially determined materiality—through coursework and reading. As a third-year student in the English doctoral program, I waded through hundreds of texts on my book lists as I prepared for my comprehensive exams (i.e., a terrifying 10-day written exam). Feminism and Film:

Hollywood Pregnancy, the section of WGS 302 taught by Kelly Oliver in spring 2009, strengthened my understanding of female embodiment. Driven by the desire to research embodiment and visual art in verbal fictions, I spent the fall studying aesthetics with another philosophy professor, Gregg Horowitz, and taking Rachel Teukolsky's English course in Victorian temporalities. These final courses, preceding a fresh phase of scholarly independence, allowed me to test my approaches to nineteenth-century philosophy and fiction via the ekphrases—or translations of visual into verbal forms—that riddle Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*.

This anxious journey toward specialization resulted in—surprisingly enough—an emerging dissertation. Getting here deepened my sense of self because I have poured as much personal desire as professional know-how into the project's growth. My dissertation will focus on the painted portrait in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century novels as a fundamental, ekphrastic strategy that helped establish modernist aesthetics. Rather than claiming that women, constantly positioned as "silent images," bear rather than make meaning, I argue that the women and feminized men of Victorian fiction make meaning precisely in the act of rupturing pictorial impositions.

Arriving at this developing idea meant remaining open to the unlikeliest combinations of influence—to considering images of Michelle Obama alongside passages of German philosophy, my friends' Facebook profile pictures alongside the countless "portraits of a lady" in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature. Now, as I begin this project, I enter a new phase of specialization, which calls for another strategy of self-discovery: writing. ●



**IN APRIL** 2009, the Women's and Gender Studies Program instituted an undergraduate conference entitled "Intersections." The focus of this first conference was law and literature. This past spring, Women's and Gender Studies again provided an "Intersections" forum to showcase undergraduate research. The sessions centered around gender, race, and sexuality and included a number of excellent presentations.

May Frederiksen, a senior Arts and Science student and an Honors candidate in the history of art, delivered a paper entitled "Charles Demuth's *Calla Lilies*: A Publicly Private Memorial to Bert Savoy." Frederiksen argued that Charles Demuth's *Calla Lilies* not only serves as an emblematic/abstract portrait

with sexuality, the body, and romantic relationships. Harding's art was displayed in Branscomb during May.

Another student whose project arose from an independent study with Professor Pierce-Baker was Krishana Donaldson, an Arts and Science senior majoring in both women's and gender studies and African American and diaspora studies. Donaldson gave a presentation entitled "Missing Women and Racial Disparity," which examined the racial disparity in missing women cases, specifically addressing the issue of "Missing White Woman Syndrome."

Eliza Horn, a junior majoring in creative writing as well as working towards an interdisciplinary major in law and social justice,

how the protagonists work in full awareness of this knowledge and yet find ways to invert the denial of their subjectivity and create legitimate legal status for themselves or those in their immediate community.

TaCara Harris, a senior double majoring in sociology and women's and gender studies, presented a work-in-progress entitled "The Effects of Race, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status on Undergraduate Students' Academic Performance at Predominantly-White Colleges and Universities." This research study observes the intersectionality of social statuses—particularly race, gender, and socioeconomic status—and examines the way in which these aspects of identity individually and collectively affect an under-

# Intersections: The Conference

by JULIE FESMIRE, Senior Lecturer, Women's and Gender Studies and English

of vaudevillian Bert Savoy but also provides a site of both a concealing and a revealing of Demuth's own sexuality. Frederiksen argued that *Calla Lilies* provides an opportunity for Demuth to work through his own separateness as well as providing the audience with a space in which to engage their own experiences of separateness. Frederiksen subsequently presented this research at a conference in San Jose.

Continuing the notion of art as a means to order the chaos of human existence, Mary Beth Harding, a senior majoring in anthropology, psychology, and women's and gender studies, presented her installation art project entitled "Open Blooms: An Exploration of Intimacy after Sexual Assault." This project arose from an independent study with Women's and Gender Studies program director, Charlotte Pierce-Baker. Harding also worked closely with David Heutess, the director of the Sarratt Art Studios. Harding interviewed several survivors, co-survivors, and therapists, as well as professionals involved with sexual assault issues, to gain further understanding of how a survivor copes after rape, especially

gave a talk entitled "Teenage Mothers: Their Rights and Relationship to the State." Horn's paper discussed how the new welfare system has required more of teen mothers without providing more resources or addressing possible aspects of poverty that could contribute to teen girls giving birth. According to Horn's research, teen mothers are still not gaining the necessary support from federal policy.

Jordan Walker, a sophomore majoring in human and organizational development as well as women's and gender studies, gave a talk entitled "Women Who Kill: The Application of Feminist Legal Methodology in *Flyin' West* and 'A Jury of Her Peers.'" Walker used Giorgio Agamben's notion of the Paradox of Sovereignty to lay the foundation for understanding what it means to be classified as a "non-subject" under the law. Ironically, he argued, this status creates legal subjectivity under the guise of denying. Therefore, those who are assigned this status not only are denied proper subjectivity, but also are still regulated by the law that denies status to them. The application of feminist legal methods to the situations in the two literary texts reveals

graduate student's academic performance at predominantly white colleges and universities. Harris's theory is that, due to the increasing race, gender, and class inequalities in the United States, poor academic performance has become an anticipated component of the undergraduate experience of minorities, females, and students of low socioeconomic status within predominantly white colleges and universities. This theory suggests that blacks, females, and lower-class undergraduate students are more likely than white, male, and upper-class undergraduate students to fail to attain academic achievement at predominantly white colleges or universities. Findings and analysis revealed that females, blacks, and lower class students have an increased likelihood of a lower GPA, in comparison to white, male, and upper class counterparts.

All of the presentations prompted intriguing questions and lively discussions. Women's and Gender Studies plans to continue providing the "Intersections" forum each year as a way to highlight the exciting research projects of our undergraduate students. ●

Continued from page 1 another public place were contrary to all the good reasons for promoting nursing as an alternative to infant formula. The students compiled the information they gathered in the survey, and the director of the clinic used it to lobby the Metro City Council to allow mothers to nurse in public. The students were proud of their part in this advocacy program and learned much about the process of public activism and local government.

In another semester, three students agreed to work with a program called Better Decisions. Begun in 1985, Better Decisions is a curriculum designed to help women inmates, who are approaching the end of their prison sentences, learn a decision-making process that could help them avoid problems once they are released back into the community. The three students attended a training session and were each assigned an inmate partner for eight one-on-one mentoring sessions that supplemented a weekly group lesson.

A powerful teaching moment occurred that semester during a class discussion about sex work and prostitution. A student not involved in Better Decisions stated that people always had choices and that women arrested for prostitution had just made bad choices and were therefore rightly penalized. The three Better Decisions mentors exchanged looks and then took over the class. Without violating the confidences of their inmate partners, they explained that the incarcerated women they knew did not have the same choices that had been available to the students in class. The women behind bars had been brought up in environments of neglect, physical and emotional abuse, and drug and alcohol addiction; such environments presented a very limited range of choices. In the inmates' experience, most of the available choices would eventually result in felony charges. The Better Decisions mentors admitted that they had abandoned their initial inclination to be judgmental and critical of women in prison as they got to know their mentoring partners. The women in prison were close to their own ages and wanted the same

things as their student mentors, but the women in prison needed guidance and support that students took for granted. Through the reflective conversation led by the Better Decisions student mentors, the rest of the class came to recognize not just their own privileged existence, but the fact that the laws addressing sex work and prostitution are riddled with inconsistencies and injustice.

While service learning is not for everyone, it can allow students to engage with issues that involve sex and gender in everyday life. I have found that service learning engages students' passions and interests more powerfully than simply reading about the Seneca Falls Convention, the suffragist movement, and Title IX. Students come to know women who have limited education and work experience and are single mothers trying to support their children with jobs that do not pay a living wage. They speak with prison inmates who never had the opportunities afforded them and recognize their own privilege as well as the concept of social justice. I learn from my students' experiences shared with their classmates each semester. My life is enriched by the community connections I make while preparing each semester's volunteer service options list. If there is something amusing about teaching this class, it is watching it dawn on students that Sex and Gender in Everyday Life is not a course about hooking up or pornography, but is instead a class about their own lives, those of their parents and grandparents, as well as those of future generations. ●

## SCREENING OF *NO! THE RAPE DOCUMENTARY*

On November 2, 2009, Women's and Gender Studies hosted the visit of internationally recognized filmmaker Aishah Shahidah Simmons. Co-sponsoring the celebration were African American and Diaspora Studies, the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center, and the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center.

Simmons, a Philadelphia-based artist, has been traveling for more than ten years collecting interviews, images, and narratives in order to highlight the interconnection of black women and men in the narrative of rape. Her travels have culminated in the feature-length film, *NO! The Rape Documentary*. The first film of its kind, *NO!* focuses on black men and women in their socially constructed struggles of sexual violence; the film has engendered controversy, as well as praise. Alice Walker, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Color Purple*, has stated, "If the Black community in the Americas and in the world would save itself it must complete the work *NO!* begins."

Simmons screened *NO!* at the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center on campus. She presented her work to a standing-room-only audience and entertained lively post-film discussion. As part of her visit to campus, Simmons, who is a lesbian activist and advocate, spoke with students at the K. C. Potter Center, the home of the office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Life.

Simmons has shared her research and filmmaking expertise on university campuses in the United States and abroad. She has traveled to India, Japan, the Caribbean, France, Italy, and Africa. Schools and colleges have used her images, information, and research to supplement classes in race and culture, clinical psychology, and trauma studies. Organizations supporting initiatives aimed at ending violence against women have found Simmons's film and activist work impressive and valuable. A survivor of rape and incest, Simmons infuses her public conversations with words of "healing" and emphasizes the necessity for men in the struggle against violence. ●

## SEXUALITY STUDIES @ VANDERBILT

### 2010-2011 Women's and Gender Studies Interdisciplinary Colloquium

#### Fall 2010

September 23 <sup>RD</sup>	4:10pm	— Sexuality Studies at Vanderbilt
October 21 <sup>ST</sup>	4:10pm	— Supporting Queer Research
November 18 <sup>TH</sup>	4:10pm	— Supporting Queer Pedagogy
December 9 <sup>TH</sup>	4:10pm	— Envisioning Sexuality Studies at Vanderbilt

#### Spring 2011

January 13 <sup>TH</sup>	4:10pm	— Feminism and Sexuality Studies
February 10 <sup>TH</sup>	4:10pm	— LGBTQI Studies and Sexuality Studies
March 17 <sup>TH</sup>	4:10pm	— Institutionalizing "Sexuality Studies"
April 14 <sup>TH</sup>	4:10pm	— Envisioning Sexuality Studies at Vanderbilt

Open to Faculty and Graduate Students from all departments and programs, the colloquium will ask the following questions:

- What paradigms currently exist, at this institution and others, that structure and encourage engagements with sexuality studies?
- How does "sexuality studies" share concerns or diverge from "women's studies," "gender studies," "queer studies," and "LGBTQI studies"?
- How might the structure of the Women's and Gender Studies program change given these emergent categories?

All sessions will be held in Buttrick 123. Refreshments will be served.

Please sign up to participate in the conversation by emailing  
barbara.kaeser@vanderbilt.edu or david.a.rubin@vanderbilt.edu

colloquium organized by David Rubin and  
Charlotte Pierce-Baker





VANDERBILT  
UNIVERSITY

Vanderbilt University  
Women's and Gender Studies  
VU Station B #350086  
2301 Vanderbilt Place  
Nashville, TN 37235-0086

## Women's and Gender Studies Fall 2010 Course Schedule

Course #	Course Title	Day / Time	Instructor
WGS 115F-03	Where the Girls Are	TR 11:00-12:15	Dicker, R.
WGS 150-01	Sex and Gender in Everyday Life	MWF 1:10-2:00	Fesmire, J.
WGS 150-02	Sex and Gender in Everyday Life	MWF 2:10-3:00	Fesmire, J.
WGS 150-04	Sex and Gender in Everyday Life (service learning)	TR 11:00-12:15	Stahl, S.
WGS 150-05	Sex and Gender in Everyday Life	TR 1:10-2:25	Rubin, D.
WGS 150W-01	Sex and Gender in Everyday Life	MWF 3:10-4:00	Rubin, D.
WGS 150W-02	Sex and Gender in Everyday Life	TR 8:10-9:25	Spetalnick, T.
WGS 240-01	Intro to Women's Health	TR 2:35-3:50	Salisbury, M.
WGS 243-01	Sociologies of Men and Masculinity	MWF 2:10-3:00	Rubin, D.
WGS 246W-01	Women's Rights and Women's Wrongs	TR 1:10-2:25	Dicker, R.
WGS 288A-01	Internship Training	**to be arranged**	Dicker, R.
WGS 288B-01	Internship Research	**to be arranged**	Dicker, R.
WGS 288C-01	Internship Readings	**to be arranged**	Dicker, R.
WGS 289-01	Independent Study	**to be arranged**	Dicker, R.
WGS 291-01	Senior Seminar	**to be arranged**	Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 298-01	Honors Research	TR 11:00-12:15	Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 299-01	Honors Thesis	**to be arranged**	Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 301-01	Gender and Sexuality: Feminist Approaches	**to be arranged**	Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 389-01	Independent Study	M 3:10-5:40	Guenther, L.
		**to be arranged**	Pierce-Baker, C.

## Women's and Gender Studies Spring 2011 Course Schedule

Course #	Course Title	Day / Time	Instructor
WGS 150-01	Sex and Gender in Everyday Life	MWF 12:10-1:00	Dicker, R.
WGS150W-01	Sex and Gender in Everyday Life	MWF 1:10-2:00	Rubin, D.
WGS 150W-02	Sex and Gender in Everyday Life	MWF 2:10-3:00	Rubin, D.
WGS 201-01	Women and Gender in Transnational Context	MWF 10:10-11:00	Rubin, D.
WGS 242-01	Women Who Kill	TR 2:35-3:50	Fesmire, J.
WGS 239-01	Medieval Women in their Own Words	MWF 9:10-10:00	Barrett, T.
WGS 248-01	Humor and Cultural Critique in Fannie Flagg's Novels	TR 11:00-12:15	Stahl, S.
WGS 271-01	Feminist Legal Theory	W 2:10-5:00	Fesmire, J.
WGS 288A-01	Internship Training	**to be arranged**	Dicker, R.
WGS 288B-01	Internship Research	**to be arranged**	Dicker, R.
WGS 288C-01	Internship Readings	**to be arranged**	Dicker, R.
WGS 289-01	Independent Study	**to be arranged**	Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 298-01	Honors Research	**to be arranged**	Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 302-01	Gender and Pedagogy	M 1:10-3:00	Dicker, R.
WGS 299-01	Honors Thesis	**to be arranged**	Pierce-Baker, C.
WGS 389-01	Independent Study	**to be arranged**	Pierce-Baker, C.