

Mary & William

The Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program Newsletter

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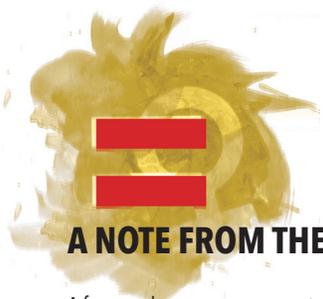
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A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

A few weeks ago, on our way to our martial arts class, my seven-year-old asked me, "Mama, is Daddy's job at William and Mary as important as yours?" My partner, Simon Joyce, is a professor in the English Department, and my kids have spent a lot of time in our offices and on campus. They have loved my move to the GSWS office in Morton Hall this year, as there is more room to run around and play with toys, a couch to rest on, and a really great automatic stapler that my daughter can use to staple her "paper books," as she calls them. It turns out not to have been the office that convinced Charley of my high-status job though; when I asked him what gave him the impression that my job was important, he said, "You're always telling me it is!"

It has been a busy semester and I do find it difficult not to brag about all we have accomplished. All told, our Program has offered thirty-two courses, thirteen of which originated within the Program; obtained permission to begin a W&M chapter of Triota (or Iota, Iota, Iota, which is much harder to say), the national gender and women's studies honor society; organized four brownbag presentations, a poetry reading by our own Bettina Judd, and our annual Braithwaite lecture; participated in many other campus activities and events, such as the Boswell Symposium on "Queer Youth" and the W&M Pride Festival; and started working toward new initiatives such as a graduate certificate in GSWS and an "Introduction to Gender Studies" for local high school students. (I'm tired just thinking about it!) The energy of our students, faculty, and our office coordinator, Kristen Sperling, is seemingly endless and I am deeply grateful to them for their full participation in our mission as a program.

In this newsletter though we honor our students—not just our majors and minors, but also countless other students who take our classes and attend our events. It seems obvious, I know, but it is worth stating that our students are the reason we exist and continue to thrive here at William and Mary. Much of what we do in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies is in response to students' interests and passions. When we began requiring an activist project in our "Introduction to Women's Studies" oh so long ago when we were still the Women's Studies Program, it was in response to student demand. Similarly, our Braithwaite lecture this year, which featured graphic novelists Nicole Georges and A.K. Summers, was prompted by continued student interest in comics and graphic novels in several of our courses. (More on that event later!) In many of our pieces for this issue of Mary & William, then, we will highlight students—their work for classes, their responses to events, their post-graduation plans and achievements.

We currently have thirty-five majors and minors, with four majors and six minors graduating this May. (See page 3 for their names and post-graduation plans of several of them.) This is more majors and minors than we have ever had before in our twenty-four years of existence! And it is a good sign, I think, that our shift from "Women's Studies" to "Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies" was a positive one for faculty and students alike. Under this new name of ours, we continue to offer the courses on women's history, literature, and religion that we always offered, but we've expanded as well, offering introductory courses on "Gender," "Black Gender," and

"In this newsletter, we honor our students...."

"Masculinity Studies" as well as upper-division courses on "Queer Theory" and "Hip Hop and Sexuality." Look out for courses on "Transgender Fiction" and "Queer of Color Critique" in the spring of 2016!

Our Braithwaite event this year represents the new direction of the program, as well as continuity with the past. As you'll see in Noah Brooksher's report on the event on page 5, Georges and Summers are both incredibly talented graphic artists and their artists' talks on the evening of February 24th were an enormous success. Their graphic memoirs, which were taught in several of our courses this spring, allowed students to think about

the intersection between text and image, as well as the representation of gender and sexuality in visual media. These artists and their work refute the notion that there is one lesbian narrative, one way in which to tell a story about lesbian women's lives and experiences. If you haven't read *Calling Dr. Laura* or *Pregnant Butch*, you absolutely should! And let us know if you have creative ideas for next year's Braithwaite; we'll be making that decision soon.

By the way, we're launching our newest GSWS t-shirt this spring! What do you think? Our own Zoë Mitchell, who is graduating in May, came up with the design and I am thrilled with it. If you'd like a t-shirt, then send \$8.50 to Kristen Sperling in the office and we will mail one off to you right away!

Thanks again to Kristen and to Noah Brooksher, GSWS major and work study student, for their assistance with this newsletter. If you have any ideas about features for our next newsletter or responses to this one, don't hesitate to contact me at jlputz@wm.edu.

Best wishes,

Jennifer Putzi, Associate Professor of English and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies



New GSWS T-Shirts

OUR GSWS MAJORS AND MINORS

Listed below are all students graduating with a major or a minor in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies this spring.

Shannon N. Butler (Minor)
Kelly S. Christiansen (Minor)
Carlton A. Fleenor (Minor)
Nell R. Garver (Major)
Claire E. Johnson (Minor)
Margaret (Maggie) G. Lundeen (Minor)
Victoria A. Mangiapani (Minor)
Zoë K. Mitchell (Major)
Margaret (Maggie) E. Perreault (Major)
Bernadene (Bernie) L. Stammer (Major)

FUTURE PLANS

SHANNON BUTLER (MARKETING/GSWS)

I am extremely ready to graduate. I've loved my time here at W&M, but I'm tired of school work! After graduation, I plan on staying in the area. I'm moving in with my best friend, since we both want to stay in Williamsburg. By graduation, I'll hopefully have a job working as a marketing manager at a local company.

KELLY CHRISTIANSEN (GOVERNMENT/GSWS)

I am very excited for graduation and for all the possibilities out there for me. I do not have any concrete plans yet, but after graduation I am looking to get a job on the Hill in DC. I am also looking at opportunities with non-profit organizations that represent women's issues, such as EMILY's List. Ultimately through whatever career path I take I hope to combine both my experiences with my government major and GSWS minor from W&M by becoming involved in politics in Washington, D.C. to advocate for women's rights.

CARLTON FLEENOR (LCST/GSWS)

I am a senior at W&M majoring in Literary and Cultural Studies and minoring in GSWS. I first became interested in GSWS while taking an "Intro to Women's Studies" class at John Tyler, a community college in Richmond, the summer after my sophomore year. I have enjoyed my time here, but I look forward to what the future will hold. After finishing my honors thesis at the very last possible minute (April 17th, woo!), I will be applying to jobs in Richmond, my hometown, though I also plan on applying to entertainment-related jobs elsewhere. (I've been an undergraduate leader for the W&M Global Film Festival the past two semesters, and would love to have a job where I can keep doing similar things.) I also harbor the dream of eventually getting a PhD in critical/literary theory, English, and/or anthropology, but I am heeding the advice of Arthur Knight, my advisor, and will not be applying to graduate school right away.

MAGGIE LUNDEEN (GOVERNMENT/GSWS)

I am feeling bittersweet about graduation. I don't want to leave the amazing campus of William and Mary, but I am excited to start a new chapter of my life. After graduation I plan to work as a law clerk for a firm in the Chicago area while attending law school this upcoming fall. My goal is to enter a field that deals with equality issues and civil rights. If I could pick one thing to fix in the world it would be the wage gap that women are still experiencing.

ZOË MITCHELL (GSWS/GOVERNMENT)

I have loved being a part of the small yet active community that is the GSWS Department. I have thoroughly enjoyed every GSWS class I have taken and I appreciate that the program encourages action on the issues that are important to students. GSWS has offered me a community of both mentors and friends. I have loved serving as the student voice on the Executive Council and a Fellow in my final semester as it has given me the opportunity to give back to the Program. As of now, I am considering both a position at a Charter School in Boston or a position in public media. I am inspired by all the staff and students in GSWS and am excited to see what the Seniors will all go on to do and to change.

BERNADENE STAMMER (GSWS/SOCIOLOGY)

This summer I think I will take a road trip to California to see the Giant Redwoods and Pacific Ocean. I am currently applying to graduate school at VCU for a Masters in counseling/ chaplain certification and hope to work for the Veteran's Administration after I earn my graduate degree.

"I am very excited for graduation and for all the possibilities out there for me."



BROWNBAGGIN' IT Spring 2015 Brownbag Presentations

February

Annie Blazer, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies

"Playing for God: Evangelical Women and the Unintended Consequences of Sports Ministry"

When sports ministry first emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, its founders imagined male celebrity athletes as powerful salespeople who could deliver a message of Christian strength. But combining evangelicalism and sport also gave athletes the opportunity to think about the embodied experiences of sport as a way to experience intimate connection with the divine. As sports ministry developed, it focused on individual religious experiences and downplayed celebrity sales power, opening the door for female Christian athletes to join and eventually dominate sports ministry. Today, women are the majority of participants in sports ministry in the United States. In this talk, Annie Blazer offered an exploration of the history and religious lives of Christian athletes, showing that evangelical engagement with popular culture can carry unintended consequences. When sport became an avenue for embodied worship, it forced a reckoning with evangelical teachings about the body. Female Christian athletes increasingly turned to their own bodies to understand their religious identity, and in so doing, came to question evangelical mainstays on gender and sexuality.

March

Monika Gosin, Assistant Professor of Sociology

"Racial/Sexual Appropriation and Erasure in the Veneration of Afro-Cuban Salsera Celia Cruz"

Celia Cruz, perhaps the most well-known salsa performer in the world, has come to function as a symbol of unity for Latino communities in the United States. Cruz' audiences have imbued her, a black woman born into poverty, with the power to break down ethnic and racial boundaries through her musical performance. This is despite the fact that blacks do not often have a place in the U.S. Latino imaginary, and that blackness is often marginalized in Latin America. Drawing from an analysis of news stories in the *Miami Herald* and the *New York Times* written after her 2003 death, this talk argued that the veneration of Celia Cruz as a pan-Latino icon has relied on both the erasure and hyper-visibility of Cruz' blackness. Discourses used to celebrate her universal and crossover appeal deem her a celebrated "virgin mother" while also reifying common gender stereotypes used to describe African Diasporic women. Furthermore, her blackness or "Africanness" is called upon to represent Cuban "authenticity" and the essence of Latinidad. Grappling with the contradictions in the representation of this beloved legend, this discussion brought attention to the need to disrupt Latin American racial democracy and United States post-racial discourses that idealize racial transcendence.

April

Simon Joyce, Professor of English

"Gender Identity, Sexuality, and 'Proto-Gay' Kids: Reading the Literature on Parenting Gender-Expansive Children"

Suddenly, gender-expansive and trans* kids are everywhere in the news, in photo exhibits and documentaries, on talk shows, YouTube, and reality TV. From the perspective of feminist and queer theory, even as the discourse about our kids begins from the assumption that gender is not biology, it often feels oddly essentialist: trans kids are, in some respects, an updating of the 19th-century sexuality that viewed gay men as being born with female souls in male bodies (and vice versa for lesbians). This talk explored the conundrum of raising a transgirl while remaining committed to anti-essentialism by looking at the progressive self-help literature that's addressed to parents of gender-nonconforming children. The discussion looked at two particularly problematic concepts—gender identity and proto-gay children—and used them to think about how the relatively new focus on gender-expansive and trans* identities unsettles theoretical orthodoxies about the relationship between sex, gender, and sexual identity. In the process, Joyce considered what theorists like Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and Kathryn Bond Stockton have told us about these kids, as well as what they can tell us in turn about our theories.



Annie Blazer



Monika Gosin



Simon Joyce

QUEER COMIX: THE 2014 BRAITHWAITE EVENT

By Noah Brooksher (*GSWS/English, 2016*)

Inaugurated in the 1996-97 academic year, the Minnie Braithwaite Lecture is one of the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program's most notable and distinguished events. Named in honor of Minnie Braithwaite, the first woman to attempt to attend classes at the College of William & Mary in 1896, the series features speakers whose work in the field of gender, sexuality, or women's issues is particularly engaging and insightful.

Past lecturers have included distinguished writers and intellectuals Robyn Wiegman and Matt Richardson, as well as filmmaker Laurie Kahn Leavitt and television writer and producer Jane Espenson. This year, GSWS was honored to host an artists' talk and slideshow entitled "Queer Comix," by two exceptionally talented and gifted graphic novelists, Nicole J. Georges and A.K. Summers.

A prolific artist and writer, Summers is best known for creating the zine *Negativa*, the animated shorts *Topless Dickless Clueless* and *World Without Femmes*, and her graphic memoir *Pregnant Butch*, published by Soft Skull Press. This latest memoir, released in March 2014, is a fictionalized autobiography of Summers' experience as a butch lesbian whose pregnancy highlights the normative narrative that associates having babies with hyper-femininity. From "artificial" insemination to natural childbirth, Summers honestly and humorously details the disruption that pregnancy offers to her character, Teek's, masculine sense of self. In her talk, Summers focused particularly on the visual choices she made in her self-portraits, which were initially based entirely on Belgian cartoonist Georges Remi's iconic Tin Tin. Her presentation also combined humorous anecdotes about her childhood gym teacher with more serious and thought provoking discussions of lesbian beauty standards and the erasure of a butch identity.

Writer and illustrator Nicole Georges' work includes her diary comic, *Invincible Summer*, the zine *Tell It Like It Tiz*, and, most recently, the graphic memoir, *Calling Dr. Laura*, published by Mariner Books in 2013. *Calling Dr. Laura* has won the accolades of Rachel Maddow and Alison Bechdel, as well as the Lambda Literary Award for best graphic novel of 2014. A queer family drama in the same vein as Bechdel's own *Fun Home*, Georges' memoir centers on a particularly tumultuous time in the author's life when she discovers that her father, who her family had told her died decades ago, is actually still alive, all while dealing with the thrills and complications of a new romantic relationship with another woman. Despite the weighty themes of the memoir, Georges, like Summers, manages to imbue her work with a sense of humor and wit that makes it engaging and accessible without ever

seeming flippant. Indeed, this sense of humor and vibrancy were on full display during her presentation, as the author charmed her audience with stories of her own mother's negative review for her work on Amazon.com and her unironic enthusiasm for the right wing radio host for whom the book is named.

The Braithwaite Lecture was especially well attended, with nearly every seat in the 235 person capacity lecture hall filled, and many additional spectators left standing. As American Studies graduate student and "Introduction to GSWS" instructor Helis Sikk noted, "this was one of the best Braithwaite Lectures I've attended so far." She especially appreciated how "combining readings with the lecture [in her introductory class] showed that queer comix are an amazing and creative avenue with so much potential in terms of affective and effective ways of doing activism." Sikk received positive feedback on the event from her "Introduction to GSWS" class. Specifically, she mentioned how "Seeing the authors talk on campus really made the books come to life in the eyes of the students. I think having this kind of experience is invaluable." Senior Diana Floegel, a student in a one-credit "Queer Comix" course intended to prepare students for the Braithwaite event, similarly praised the talk, stating that "Despite Summers' and Georges' diverse graphic and narrative styles, both memoirs were funny, poignant, and compelling reads that entertained and educated; the authors' talks were no different." As these accounts attest, both Summers and Georges provided an engaging and insightful lecture that reflected the nature of their politics: accessible, thought provoking, and entirely queer.

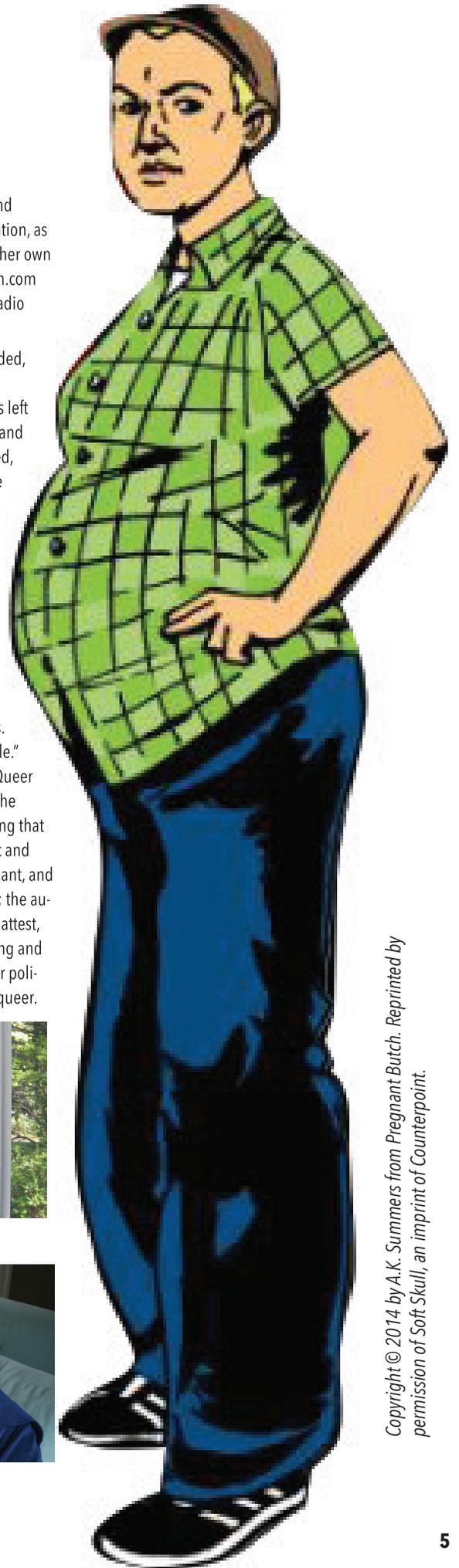


A.K. Summers



Nicole George

To see an example of Georges' art, go to p. 12.



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"Finally, when I was about two years old, I said, 'Mom, I don't do fancy.'"



Mary Walsh

GENDER BLOG: BLOG POSTS FROM STUDENTS IN GSWs 290, "GENDER"

By Jennifer Putzi, Associate Professor of English and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

Beginning next fall, the College will implement a new college curriculum which will require all first year students to take a "big ideas" course. Faculty were asked to pilot these COLL 100 courses (as they are called) during the 2014-15 academic year, with our current students serving as guinea pigs of a sort. In my COLL 100 pilot, simply titled "Gender," students looked at the "big idea" of gender, examining the varied ways in which gender is constructed, analyzed, and enacted. Students were required to contribute to a class blog throughout the course of the semester, posting responses to our class reading; artifact analyses; campus event reports; and analyses of news stories and relevant online content. What follows are blog posts by four students in this class. While they lose something by being removed from the context of the class discussion and the blog, where they initiated and participated in larger conversations, they represent the honesty and intelligence with which students in "Gender" approached this assignment.

I DON'T DO FANCY

By Mary Walsh (Kinesiology/Psychology, 2015)

My mom has told me the story a hundred times. When I was born she was so excited to have a girl after having five sons. She would get to dress me up in bows and skirts and I would be the cutest! She did this until about the time I could talk. Once I could verbalize my feelings, I started throwing tantrums about having to be dressed up. Finally, when I was about two years old, I said, "Mom, I don't do fancy." And from then on she rarely ever made me wear dresses.

Aidan Key's chapter on "Children" in the book *Trans Bodies Trans Selves: A Resource for the Trans Community* (2014) details the experiences that a transgender/gender nonconforming child might face, and offers multiple ways to help these kids and their families. In one section, Key explains what a parent might look for in order to decide whether their kid may be TGNC. The list includes a child saying things like "I'm not a boy, I'm a girl" or "When is my penis going to grow in?" (410). Certain behaviors might also be present like "allowing or encouraging other children to believe they are a different gender" or "adopting the identity of an animal in order to have a nongendered identity and experience" (410).

When I was reading that section I realized that a lot of the traits and behaviors listed totally describe me between the ages of three and five. Even the part about adopting the identity of an animal... I was a cat (surprise, surprise).

I fit a lot of the description that Key provides of transgender/gender nonconforming kids. (Disclaimer: I am not claiming the TGNC identity and I'm not trying to say I know how a transgender person feels, I'm just sharing my own experience.) When I was little I almost exclusively played with "boy" toys (Legos, Hot Wheels, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle action figures, blocks, etc). I hated Barbies and my mom quickly stopped buying them for me because I kept pulling their heads off. I preferred playing with boys in preschool and kindergarten because they played how I wanted to play. On career day in kindergarten I went as a construction worker, complete with hardhat and hammer. (I looked great.) I loved to wear my brothers' hand-me-downs. I remember I even asked my mom why I didn't have a penis like my brothers.

Key provides tips about what to do if you have a child who is transgender/gender nonconforming. Personally I think my mom did exactly what she was supposed to do. My experience with gender nonconforming behavior was a phase, but my mom never treated it that way. In his chapter, Key concludes that significant risks exist when a parent questions the veracity of a TGNC child's feelings and behaviors. Indeed, such a practice could completely invalidate or belittle a child's experiences (415). Instead of doing that, my mom created an environment that let me explore masculinity without facing judgment or negativity. I didn't question my gender as a kid. I was a girl and I liked being a girl. I just wanted to do "boy" things, and my mom gave me the space to do that.

I would have called myself a "tomboy," but after reading this chapter, I don't think I like that term. I was not a boy. I was a masculine young girl. Calling me a tomboy made my actions fit society's binary norms and luckily it never bothered me to hear that name when I was a kid. But for a gender-fluid kid who still can't articulate how they're feeling, a simple name with the word "boy" in it could be really disheartening.

Unfortunately, as Key points out, not all parents are like my mom. In this chapter, we saw examples of parents who said no and made their child fit into their gender assigned at birth. This reading makes me wonder what would have happened if my mom had done that? What would have been the implications? I think it was critical for me to be able to be a masculine girl and have a mom and siblings who encouraged it. But what if I had been forced to do fancy?

VAGINA MONOLOGUES: FEMINISM IN CRISIS

By Taylor Medley (GSWS/Public Health, 2017)

I am a loud and proud feminist. I am also the Vice President of VOX: Voices for Planned Parenthood. (VOX is not an acronym! It means "voices" in Latin.) VOX focuses on reproductive justice, the belief that everyone has the right to have children, not have children, and to parent

the children they do have in safe and healthy environments, but has also expanded to include all facets of feminism due to a lack of other feminist clubs on campus. We have been discussing the ways in which organiza-

"The Vagina Monologues has been described as an exploration of the variety of experiences shaped by being a woman—so are we then defining womanhood by the presence of a vagina?"

tions and communities can be more inclusive to trans, gender queer and non-binary individuals. As we know, the language we use is very important.

Let me explain: every spring semester, VOX puts on a production of *The Vagina Monologues*, by Eve Ensler. This episodic play contains multiple monologues united by a common theme: the experience of having a vagina. Topics range from menstruation, sex, rape, orgasm, love, female genital mutilation, birth, vagina self-love, and reclaiming common slurs centered on having a vagina.

The production has been described as a feminist work that focuses on the idea of female empowerment and reclaims the vagina as something positive and wonderful, even though it has been historically deemed dirty and disgusting by our patriarchal society that upholds the male form as ideal.

So this sounds great, right? Wrong. Well, actually, yes. But no.

As many of you know, either through class, personal experience, or just your own interest, our ideas about gender are pretty screwed up. We have an idea that vagina = woman and penis = man; that is, we conflate gender and biological sex. However, for individuals who are transgender, these two things don't always align. For trans people, those who do not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth, the language within the feminist movement can seem exclusive and not representative of their experiences.

The Vagina Monologues has been described as an exploration of the variety of experiences shaped by being a woman—so are we then defining womanhood by the presence of a vagina? Is a transwoman who was designated-male-at-birth (DMAB) and has a penis less a woman than a cis-woman, a woman who identifies as the gender she was assigned at birth? Is a transman who was designated-female-at-birth (DFAB) more of a woman than a transwoman because he has a vagina? These nuances in gender and womanhood cannot be dismissed as nuisances. The experiences of all women must be acknowledged in any space claiming to be feminist.

Mount Holyoke, a women's only college, recently cancelled their annual production of the show for not being inclusive of trans individuals. This decision came in light of the school's decision to allow transwomen to apply

for admission to the college after tremendous support from the student body. In response to the canceling of the show, creator Eve Ensler commented, "It is and always has been a play about what it means to have a vagina. In the play, I never defined a woman as a person with a vagina." Although Ensler is right in her assertion that she never defined a woman as a person with a vagina, the cultural implications of exploring the feminine experience through the lens of having a vagina can feel very exclusive and uncomfortable.

I love my vagina. I think it's great. However, the idea of reducing my experience as a woman and what that means to me to having a vagina seems minimizing. If that idea seems minimizing to me, I can only imagine how it feels to a transwoman who feels as though she does not have the right body to be a "real" woman. However, I do see some positives in keeping the show: it is empowering to many women and it deals with very real and relevant issues. So I've been trying to find some ways to make it more inclusive without trashing it all together. VOX has discussed sending out an open call for personal monologues that reflect the experience of transwomen and opting out of certain monologues that are transphobic and belittling of their experiences.

If you have any ideas, please let me know! And thanks for letting me explore my feminist crisis in this space.

PERFORMATIVE GENDER IN ACTION: THE LENA/YITZHAK DYNAMIC IN HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH

By Diana Floegel (English, 2015)

Meet Yitzhak. Or Lena Hall. Or both. Yitzhak, currently played by Tony Award-winning actress Lena Hall, is one of two characters in Broadway's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. As I read Judith Butler's illuminating "Performative Acts of Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988), I constantly related Butler's stance on the "compelling illusion" (271) of gender

to Hall's performance. I was fortunate enough to see *Hedwig* over winter break, and I can honestly say it was as close to a religious experience as I will ever get. In my opinion, the work Hall does to create Yitzhak's character in *Hedwig* is a near-perfect correlate to Butler's theory.

Before I launch into Lena's relevance to Butler's discussion, which focuses on how performative acts of gender work to create and enforce gender perception and identity, I would like to write a few words on how (I hope) this will proceed. Lena identifies as female and uses feminine pronouns, while Yitzhak—the character Lena portrays in *Hedwig*—identifies as male and uses masculine pronouns (although Yitzhak's greatest joy is performing in hyper-feminine, glam drag). Because I will be discussing Lena's performance as Yitzhak as well as Yitzhak as a character, I am going to try my best to use only the names "Lena" and "Yitzhak" rather than any pronouns. Wish me luck, and forgive the repetitiveness.

According to Butler, "the transvestite . . . can do more than simply express the distinction between sex and gender, but challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality that structures a good deal of popular thinking about gender identity" (278). Lena demonstrates this idea in a video recording, available on YouTube, that showcases how Lena transforms into Yitzhak before every show.

In the video, Lena goes through an almost ritualistic procedure to become Yitzhak. Lena applies stage make-up to appear more conventionally masculine and



Lena Hall as Yitzhak

emphasize features that are often gendered male, such as the Adam's apple. As Lena continues to transform, stereotypically masculine clothing and a short wig with large sideburns contribute to the visual. Throughout the process, Lena gradually speaks in a deeper voice,

continued on p.8



continued from p.7

and finally changes body language and mindset to fully embody Yitzhak's gender identity. At the end of this transformation, "Lena" is left behind. Yitzhak walks onto the stage as a man who, when first encountered, follows a typical Western masculine script. As Butler says, "the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations" (278). Butler continues to say that "[gender] is real only to the extent that it is performed" (278), and "[gender] attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" (279). This logic further supports the idea that, while in Yitzhak's clothing and mindset, Lena's feminine identity has been replaced by Yitzhak's masculinity.

Butler also asserts that, in our society, "gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control" (279). I believe that Yitzhak as a character, as well as Lena's portrayal of Yitzhak, serve to challenge this notion. Throughout the show, audience members learn that Yitzhak was once a legendary drag queen in Slovakia who finds nothing more sublime than dressing in women's clothes. At the end of the performance, Yitzhak is able to once again don a femme costume, and the look of absolute euphoria on Yitzhak's face implies that Yitzhak has, in terms of Butler's theory, transformed from a stereotypically male gender identity to a gender identity that does not conform to the male/female binary.

At the same time, Lena's very performance challenges what Butler describes as society's tendency to regulate gender through performative norms. Lena has embraced Yitzhak as an almost alter ego. Lena refers to Yitzhak as Yitzhak rather than a mere character, and Lena's Instagram account (@lenarockerhall) is full of pictures from life outside the theater as well as "Yitzograms," which are taken only when Lena has "become" Yitzhak.

The Lena/Yitzhak dynamic is a really amazing theatrical event. Of course, Lena is able to do this because Yitzhak is a character. Butler points out, "On the street or in the bus, the act becomes dangerous, if it does, precisely because there are no theatrical conventions to delimit the purely imaginary characters in the act" (278). Yitzhak is imaginary, and I doubt that someone who transitioned from female to male to gender-fluid on a daily basis would face the applause Lena receives for playing Yitzhak (quite the opposite, actually). Additionally, critiques that apply to Butler's theory can also apply to the Lena/Yitzhak dichotomy—individuals in real life, especially transgender and/or nonbinary individuals, face many more challenges than merely modifying how they "act" in order to change their gender. It may also be worthwhile to point out that Lena and Yitzhak are both white, and thus subject to the privileges that come with their dominant racial

identity. In terms of Butler's theory (and just in terms of fabulous theatre), however, the Lena/Yitzhak dynamic is a fascinating study.

THE GENDER FILES

By Andrew Wood (*Neuroscience*, 2015)

"Indeed, a key reason for having IDs is to make an inescapable link between the-person-now and the-person-that-was. The ID nails you to your past: your national origin, your gender... and (increasingly, via online systems such as Google) your past patterns of consumption. 'Identity' then, can be a matter of surveillance and regulation." (Raewyn Connell, 'Identity,' *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender*, 168)

I was making a new Spotify account the other day when I was asked to identify myself as "male" or "female" before clicking "SIGN UP."

So innocuous, right? My mouse hovered for a moment over the two bubbles before I adamantly clicked male and finished making an account. If I were cisgender, I probably would not have hesitated or given this final question a second thought. But as a transgender male, the ubiquitous "male or female?" question strikes fear and annoyance in my heart.

Honestly, I'm tired of being asked my gender. Not because of the sheer monotony of such an asinine question, but because, in my personal experience, this question has been used to undermine my entire identity.

"Spotify's requirement that I specify my gender in order to make an account is a form of social control that relies on putting me in a box."

It's something I've been asked directly ("Are you a boy or a girl?") and indirectly (for example, a bouncer giving me a twice-over and asking "Andrew?"). Most of the time it is an innocent question from a kid, and there have only been a few instances where I have encountered someone being offensive. Still, the question is always asked with an air of distrust, as if I'm trying to trick someone.

Besides my personal reaction, what's the issue with Spotify asking my gender? First of all, there isn't even a question, just two answers: male or female. Are we talking based on my genitalia? My gender presentation? What my license says or what bathroom I use? In addition

to not providing any context, this "question" serves to further oppress anyone who has an answer outside M or F or would simply prefer not to answer. Spotify's requirement that I specify my gender in order to make an account is a form of social control that relies on putting me in a box.

This question does not oppress me, per se, but it enforces the idea that at any given time if a person is asked, "Are you male or female," the answer will be singular, definite, and congruent with past answers, typical gender presentation, and "standard" genitalia. This principle is used to separate and define men and women and does not allow for variation. In this social system where (quite often, but not always) discerning someone's gender is important for interaction and understanding, variation poses a threat. It threatens to undermine the omnipresent construction of separate and opposite genders upon which inequality and social control rests.

In addition, marketing is completely based on this binary. Perhaps one reason society dislikes gender variance is because we don't know exactly how to sell to the gender variant. Spotify most likely wants to send me gender based ads. Our gender isn't just physical or personal but it's how society controls us through methods like gendered advertising. Our ideas about gender are tied to all sorts of things: reproductive organs, social roles, secondary sex characteristics, clothing, consumption, etc. In a way, gender has become a bit like Frankenstein's monster: society decided all these different pieces should be components of the same whole, and now look what we've done. The gender monster has a mind of its own and is, quite frankly, very ugly.

COURSE SPOTLIGHT: "BLACK GENDER"

An interview with Bettina Judd, Visiting Assistant Professor, Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies
by Tom Linneman, Associate Professor of Sociology

In the fall of 2014, Visiting Assistant Professor Bettina Judd taught a new course entitled "Black Gender," and she will teach this course again next fall.

Her syllabus explains: "This intermediate course engages with issues in popular culture, scholarship, and art that negotiate the complex terrain of Black Gender. We question the concepts of manhood and womanhood and their intersection with racial constructs as categories of personhood through the critical lens of Africana Studies and Gender Studies. In Black gender, we explore the ways in which gender in the U.S. is mediated by race." I asked Bettina a few questions about her course, and collected several raves about the course from students.

Tom: The title of the course is "Black Gender," and it encompasses both Black women's experiences and Black men's experiences. Obviously, there is enough material for you to teach two separate courses. Why do you feel it's important to combine the two?

Bettina: The class is really modeled on intraracial conversations on race and gender. Conversations within what we call "The Black Community" that are about gender, race, and sexuality. In addition to that, I want students to question the false boundaries of the concept of "The Black Community." While the course presents men, women, and individuals elsewhere on the spectrum's experiences, the goal of the course is to consider how race has really influenced ideas about manhood for Black men and womanhood for Black women. These are interrelated concepts, and discussing them separately would give the impression that manhood and womanhood are fixed concepts.

Tom: The variety of materials you use for the class is impressive. Which specific element provoked the most memorable reaction from students? That is, what reading (or poem, or film, etc.) REALLY worked in getting students to understand the issues with which they were grappling?

Bettina: It is never what is on the syllabus, but generally what is happening in popular culture, or in the news that provokes some of the most powerful moments in class. The last days of class last semester were very difficult because the grand jury decision in Ferguson came out. I think it made the material we'd read in class more salient. We'd read about the power of stereotypes in constructing our ideas of racial difference. We'd read Ida B. Wells' *Southern Horrors*, and discussed the history of

lynching. These readings helped students make sense of how that grand jury decision was possible, how it is a part of a legacy of racial violence. It helped them make sense of why there is overwhelming anger and sadness in the surrounding communities, in communities around the country, and around the globe.

Tom: You assign one book of poetry—*Sacrilegion* by L. Lamar Wilson - in this course. Why did you choose this one volume?

Bettina: This was another great moment in class because Wilson is a dear friend and agreed to Skype in for the class to read poems and answer questions. The collection explores religion, disability, and black queer sexuality in a very multidimensional way. His poetry allowed for very frank and beautiful discussions on sexuality and religion to happen simultaneously. The students had an opportunity to consider the presence of queer Black men in what we call "The Black Church." This shatters the myth that Black spiritual space is inherently homophobic, or that such homophobia means that queer folks are absent from that world. It also sheds light on the fact that the erotic and the spiritual are very closely related concepts for many Black folks.

Tom: What is the most challenging concept in the course for your students?

Bettina: It is more of a meta challenge in the classroom than a particular challenge with the material. This is in regards to the foundation of the classroom dynamic as conversation based. I generally run the classroom by asking questions of the students, challenging them to take up their own questions about readings and research them in order to bring a more complex comment or question to class discussion. This can be intimidating and confusing. Students read from Paulo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* so that they can understand the format of my classroom, and particularly the course on "Black Gender." Most of my classes are discussion based, but "Black Gender" truly relies on this concept because it is a course modeled on the public and private discussions on

gender and race within Black communities. I have students read Friere so that they understand the expectations I have for their input in class discussions. I cannot merely dispense information via readings and lectures to these students regarding this material. It would be disingenuous to the dynamism of the conversations that are centered in the course, and the legacy of Africana Studies and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies—interdisciplines that exist because students spoke back to their teachers and administrations demanding that the curriculum be expanded. This history is important to me as



Bettina Judd, Visiting Assistant Professor, Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies

someone who is an interdisciplinarian (my PhD is in Women's Studies) and because my mother was one of those bright-eyed students who demanded an African American Studies program at University of Maryland, Baltimore.

Tom: If you can recall, what was the single "best day" in class? What made it the best?

Bettina: The day after we read Friere. Students understood the pedagogical and political importance of their voices being the center of class discussion. After that, it was managing how much we talked!

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Tom: I see that you use D. W. Griffith's 1915 silent film *Birth of a Nation*, but that you ask students to watch it on their own before class. What are students' reactions to this film, especially since they've watched it on their own?

Bettina: Watching the film on their own is partly a logistical issue, but I also want students to be able to process what they are seeing along with the readings associated with the film viewing. *Birth of a Nation* is a pretty long film that could not be covered in two class sessions, really. Not with discussion anyway. I have them view the film in order to understand the magnitude of the issue of representation in intraracial discussions of race and gender for the next century. So our conversations in class are about the repetitions of the stereotypes that *Birth of a Nation* gives us at the beginning of film. I think the students can find the stereotypes in the film rather ridiculous because of the presence of blackface and the false history it portrays. I think what is more gripping is realizing how these same stereotypes continue to be played out in ways that dupe present day audiences into thinking they are real, just as contemporary audiences thought when they viewed *Birth of a Nation*.

Tom: I see from your syllabus that you use Twitter in this class. How has using Twitter in the classroom gone for you?

Bettina: It is a very mixed bag. When it works, it works very well. When it doesn't, it really doesn't. Twitter, at least for this class, is still crucial for me because it is a public platform where conversations among Black folk about race, gender, and sexuality are truly happening. Black Twitter is a force and I'd like, at the very least, for the class to see how these conversations continue and how social media is a place where communities of color have found a public forum to talk about issues of race, gender, and sexuality.

Tom: On your class schedule, you call Thanksgiving "Thankstaking." What is the origin and meaning of this? How do students react to this?

Bettina: It started out innocently enough in introductory classes I was teaching at the University of Maryland when I was also teaching about gender, power, and first nation's people in introductory classes. I've made it standard practice in my fall syllabi. If students react in any way to my re-naming the holiday on the syllabus, it is usually a short chuckle. I think they understand my critique, even if there is disagreement. In other classes on that holiday break, I have them read about the Pequot Massacre. I don't intend to decry anyone's Turkey Day, but to push students to reflect on the narratives we are told about our nation's history and to continue at home the hard conversations about race and gender that we have in class. If anything, reactions come after the break, and we discuss how having those hard conversations felt.

STUDENTS TALK ABOUT "BLACK GENDER"

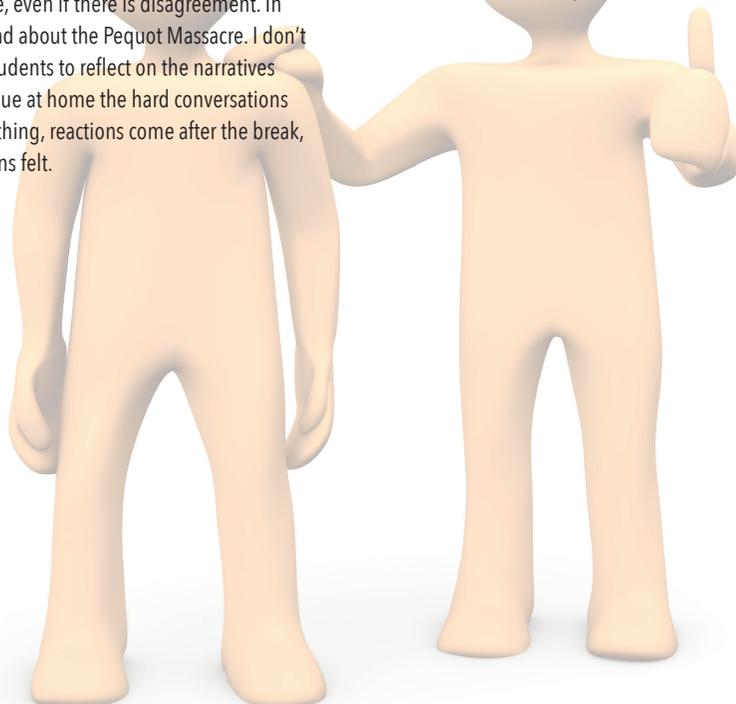
"The course was raw, eye-opening, and engaging."

"It has been one of the best courses I've taken, hands down, and has been a course that I feel shed light on gender and its dynamics within the black community, something I'm passionate about and was enthused to learn in an academic setting."

-Nia Ladson (Sociology/Africana Studies, 2015)

"As a professor Bettina Judd is exactly what I have been waiting for--a person first, professor second, and a friend. I appreciate the vast amounts of discussion that she formulates her class around because they force the student to form independent beliefs about their place in society and charge the student to feel something and say it. The voice of the student gets lost in academia, but the courses I have taken from Bettina makes me feel like my thoughts on social issues are equally as important as the claims of scholars. Bettina recognizes the importance of a story--and everyone has one. Bettina's teaching style recognizes the position of self as grounds for scholarly debate and uses literature as a way to further emphasize that position. The Black Gender course opened my eyes to my own position in society as a black woman and challenged me to discover my own identity as a black woman without influence from society. This class awakened a sense of anger inside of me that has left me proud to be a part of such a resilient culture. I left this course feeling empowered and educated and relieved that in an unjust world I know that I am surrounded by other students who strive to incite change in our society." -Shakeria Hicks (GSWS, 2016)

"I enjoyed "Black Gender," as it approached issues of Black manhood and womanhood not only through an academic lens but also allowed me to hear the voices of peers - many that I probably wouldn't have encountered otherwise - about their experiences with racism and sexism at the College and within our community/society. Professor Judd encouraged us to explore these issues of racism and sexism creatively; I appreciated that the final project allowed students to create prose, videos, and artwork for our online zine "Behind the Veil," as I believe it resulted in a piece that had a real message, one I will look back on in the future. There is tremendous academic value in art and creative pieces especially when reflecting on race and sex in America." -Zoë Mitchell (GSWS/Government, 2015)



WHERE ARE THEY NOW? GSWS ALUMNI

Carolyn Wacker (Women's Studies/Sociology, 2007)

I graduated from William and Mary in 2007 with a major in Women's Studies and a minor in Sociology. Thereafter, I attended and graduated from Wake Forest University School of Law. I decided to pursue a career in indigent defense after an internship with the Federal Public Defender's Office in North Carolina where I assisted in the defense of a capital case. I became passionate about defending those charged with blue collar crimes after witnessing the deep-rooted racism that is embedded in our criminal justice system - starting with whom officers decide to detain, who is further prosecuted, and what sentences they received. My Women's Studies background helped me understand jury bias and how to select a jury panel that will treat my client fairly. I remain happily employed at the San Diego County Public Defender's Office, where I have been practicing as a trial attorney for the past five years.

As far as my life outside the courtroom, I spend my free time training for half marathons and playing on various soccer teams. A year and a half ago, I married my wonderful wife, Stefanie. We recently bought our first home together in the suburbs of San Diego, about 15 minutes from the beach. My wife and I are expecting our first child this August. We are thrilled to start this new journey into motherhood.



Tanya Mir (Women's Studies/English, 2009)

After graduating from William and Mary in 2009, I worked as a Fellow with Polaris Project, an anti-human trafficking non profit in Washington D.C. I then moved back to New York and went to law school at Hofstra University, where I concentrated my studies in child and family advocacy. During law school I worked at different non profit organizations that assisted survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, and also worked in a clinic where I represented children in abuse and neglect proceedings. My career throughout law school was very much influenced by my past as a Women's Studies major, as I was always interested in working with female clients and advocating on their behalf. Presently, I am a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Nassau County where I work in the Family Court bureau. In my work, I represent respondent parents in child custody and visitation, child support, paternity, and family offense proceedings in Family Court. I would love to talk to any new or old Women's Studies majors that are in NYC or Long Island! Feel free to contact me at tsmirx@gmail.com.





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"Grief." by Nicole Georges

MARY & WILLIAM NEWSLETTER

Editor

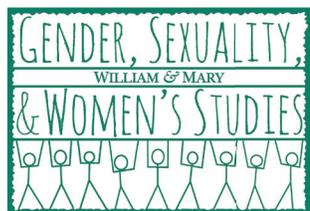
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WILLIAM & MARY
GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

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