

May 2016

Gender, Sexuality, & Feminist Studies

Dear Students,
Dear Staff and Faculty Members,
Dear Alumnae/i,

For this issue of the newsletter we are proud to showcase our alumnae/i. The activities they are engaging with display the diverse pathways our students have adopted in their lives after Middlebury. Law, teaching, graduate school, NGOs: these are but a few sites in which they are translating feminist knowledge into action. We plan on continuing to highlight our alumnae in future newsletters both to celebrate their achievements and to cultivate an intergenerational sense of community among our current students. Alums and graduates please keep us updated on your accomplishments.

Intersectionality continued to be the theme of all our activities in the Spring semester. The spotlight event was the conversation between renowned writers Edwidge Danticat and Julia Alvarez, which we describe in the pages that follow. To end the year's activities, the Gensler Family Symposium too centered on intersectionality in media representations.

Finally, we want to thank visiting assistant professor Anson Koch-Rein for his incredible contributions to our program over the past two years. Anson has deftly taken on the task of teaching core courses for our major, while Laurie Essig and Sujata Moorti were on research leave over two consecutive years. Apart from providing continuity to the program Anson has been an amazing colleague and teacher; he has brought a new range of topics to our curriculum and some vital energy to Chellis House. In the fall Anson will take on a new position. On behalf of GSFS students, staff, and faculty we wish him best of luck in his new endeavors. We will miss him and thank him for all that he has done for GSFS, Chellis House, QSH and the larger campus community.

Sujata Moorti and Karin Hanta

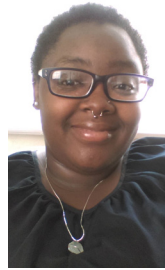
SPOTLIGHT ON SOME WAGS/GSFS ALUMNAE/I



Christine Bachman-Sanders '09 is a Ph.D. candidate with a minor in Feminist and Critical Sexuality Studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Christine's dissertation research

examines the relationship between the "new woman," American imperialism, and the bicycle craze of the 1890s. Her work explores the bicycle as a symbol of progress and a social technology that is galvanized to support a specific political and moral rhetoric for the "new woman," and to regulate a healthy (sober) civilization primed for global expansion. She is particularly concerned with how late 19th-century bicycle tourism depends upon classed, sexed, and racialized associations with leisure. At the 2016 NWSA Conference, she will present two papers titled "Citizen/Cyborg: The 'New Woman' as Agent of U.S. Empire-Building" and "Time, Space, and Bicycle Travel: The Queer Archive and Mapping Anachronistic Histories"

Luke Brown '13 is working at the fundamentally feminist organization Compass Working Capital, whose majority clientele is single mothers. Luke is the NGO's director of technology and a program manager for a partnership with the Cambridge Housing Authority. In the latter capacity, he serves as a financial coach to clients living in subsidized housing. In September 2016, he will start a feminist MBA program (as contradictory as that may sound) at Stanford University.



Veronica Coates '14 is pursuing an M.A. degree in ethnic studies at San Francisco State University where her emphasis is Black and/or African Studies. In the fall, Veronica will be working on her master's thesis titled "Gimme the Yam: Black

Women, the Academy and Practices of Self-Care in Liberal Arts Colleges." In this thesis, she will be researching resiliency and trauma, higher education, black women's student organizing, and the comparative study of black women's activism in the U.S. Veronica was recently accepted into the Institute for Recruitment of Teachers at Philips Andover, which supports underrepresented students who are applying to graduate school and who aim to teach. Through the program, she will be applying to PhD programs in American/Ethnic Studies with an emphasis on gender, sexuality and feminist Studies.

Aifuwa Ehigiator '09 left Bloomberg LP after six years to start his company Our Street. Our Street uses community investment via equity crowd-funding to create energy efficient affordable housing. Aifuwa also works part-time at St. John's Bread and Life as a development consultant.



Kolbe Franklin '08 is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Albany-SUNY. Kolbe's dissertation project "Queering Sexual Development Frameworks: A Dynamic Systems Approach to Conceptual-

izing Other-Sex Sexuality Among Lesbians” was accepted in late April. She will give a presentation about her dissertation research at the National Women’s Studies Conference in Montreal in November 2016. In the fall, Kolbe will also be teaching at Skidmore College.

Caroline Kahlenberg ’14 published a paper entitled “‘The Gospel of Health’: American Missionaries and the Transformation of Ottoman/Turkish Women’s Bodies, 1890-1932” in the peer-reviewed journal *Gender and History*. This work is based on her senior thesis for the history department, and was also shaped by her coursework in GSFS. Starting in the fall, Caroline will be pursuing a doctorate in history and Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University.

Jamie Mittelman ’10 is a Senior Marketing Manager on the Citizen AOL team, a foundation championing women. Jamie heads AOL’s cause marketing work, managing a media portfolio of \$30 million of in kind advertising media supporting nonprofit work.

Kate Silbert ’08 is a Ph.D. candidate in American history at the University of Michigan. She will most likely defend her dissertation titled “Committed to Memory: Gender, Literary Engagement, and Commemorative Practice, 1780-1830” in spring of 2017.



Ryan Tauriainen ’08, co-founder of the Queer Studies Academic Interest House (QSH), garnered the *Washington Post*’s Principal of the Year Award. Ryan has been working at the Apple Tree Institute Early Learning Public Charter School in Columbia Heights. Praised

for his immersive style and for creating a playful learning environment, Ryan constantly visits classrooms to check on 160 children. Within two years after his start as principal in 2013, 95 percent of Ryan’s students hit their language and literacy goals, and 91 percent their math goal. *The Washington Post* credited his success to Ryan taking care of his teachers. Mr. T., as he is affectionately called at his school, has also written five children’s books that incorporate math and science concepts. Ryan was honored at a ceremony at the White House, where he met President Obama and Secretary of Education John King (pictured on the left). In the fall, he will be moving on to the position of Director of Early Childhood Strategy for charter schools in Washington, D.C.



Zohra Safi ’09 graduated from the University of Ottawa’s English Common Law Program this month. She will be working with Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) as a duty counsel in Ottawa.

LAO provides legal services to low-income people in a number of areas, including immigration and refugee hearings, family and criminal matters. Zohra has always been passionate about social justice and is looking forward to applying the skills and knowledge she acquired at law school.

Katie Willis ’12 has moved to her native Alabama, where she works for a bakery, a farm, and the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network. She is also involved in queer organizing with the Atlanta-based organization Southerners on New Ground (SONG) and the #ShutdownEtowah campaign to end the human rights abuses at the Etowah County Detention Center.



SCHEHERAZADE'S SISTERS: JULIA ALVAREZ & EDWIDGE DANTICAT IN CONVERSATION

On March 16, writer-in-residence **Julia Alvarez '71** and Haitian-American novelist **Edwidge Danticat** engaged in a conversation for women's history month. This event was also designed to honor Julia Alvarez, who will be retiring from her position by the end of this school year. Julia Alvarez, renowned for her novels *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *In The Time of The Butterflies*, has been linked to the college for 47 years ever since she started her undergraduate education at Middlebury.

Edwidge Danticat rose to fame with her 1994 novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, which explores the centrality of the mother-daughter relationship to self-identity and self-expression. In her 1998 novel *The Farming of Bones*, she documented the 1937 massacre of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic at the Dajabón River by the Trujillo dictatorship.

In their conversation, both writers, who also consider themselves human (w)righters, pondered on the power of story-telling. Taking fabled storyteller Scheherazade as a model, they spoke about how stories can enter the heart of listeners, thereby effecting a change of heart. Like Scheherazade, Julia Alvarez explained, she has tried to not only save herself, but also to change the paradigm of cultural norms. When describing the life of a Tonton Macoute, one

of the henchmen at the service of the Duvalier dictatorship in *The Dew Breaker*, Edwidge Danticat followed the dictum of ancient writer Terence: "Nothing human is alien to me." By exploring the humanity of a character wedded to the ideals of toxic patriarchy, she was able to portray him in all his human facets. Edwidge has also come to realize that many of her novels

center on the effects of collective trauma and describe the creative ways survivors of a dictatorship have come to deal with it. "It is silences that draws me to stories," she said. "This silence [the fact that these stories initially are not told] makes them exceptional." She conducted her research

for *The Dew Breaker* in the Haitian-American community, which has included both survivors and perpetrators. Unearthing the stories was a delicate process.

Julia Alvarez revealed that she did not like to read as a child growing up in the Dominican Republic. There were just not too many interesting books to choose from. "Dictators just don't like people to read. When you get involved in a story, you become the other, thereby opening yourself up to a part of the world that you haven't known before."



Julia Alvarez and Edwidge Danticat at Dana Auditorium



REFLECTIONS ON JULIA ALVAREZ'S AND EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S CONVERSATION

by Emilio Ovalles-Misterman

On March 16, 2016 two domestically and internationally acclaimed authors, **Julia Alvarez '71** and **Edwidge Danticat**, shared the stage to engage in a conversation with the Middlebury community. They discussed the effect that their origins (Dominican Republic and Haiti, respectively) have had on their writing, the role of women in storytelling, feminism, and the experience of being a bilingual author.

On the topics of feminism, one response from Alvarez particularly grabbed my interest. She talked about how when she was growing up, feminism was not presented to her as an ideology. Alvarez noted that she became the strong-minded woman that she is today because of the overwhelming presence of strong-minded women, whether by nature or necessity, in her life. There was never a label that was attached to this particular way of thinking or being, it was simply about women who knew their worth and were willing to stand up for themselves in the face of patriarchy and misogyny... that was her feminism. It was only after she came to the United States that she learned about the formal concept of feminism and all of its ideals.

During the Q&A, it was invigorating for young artists in the room to ask questions about the creative process, more specifically as authors, and ask about how the author's developed a sense of style. Alvarez pointed out how she keenly studied her favorite authors. A key point she made was that she would read an author from their first work until their last work.

This way, as a writer she could see how

an author began, and how their style changed and developed as their life progressed. Often times it is easy to read an author's most famous work and feel a sense of intimidation as a burgeoning artist yourself, as you attempt create something as brilliant as those whom you draw inspiration from. However, by observing how an author began their career, and how they incrementally reached the summit of their work, the creative process becomes more humanized. In the process, emerging artists are able to see how other authors progressed to the epitome of their success, making seemingly far-fetched goals appear more attainable.

As someone who hasn't had the easiest time navigating Middlebury, hearing from such accomplished and empowering women had a galvanizing effect on me as I begin to close my first year. Furthermore, as someone who is a first generation Dominican and has traversed the same boarding school and college campus that Alvarez did, it reinforced to me that this path may not be travelled very often, but it is one that is possible. This event described Alvarez and Danticat as "Scheherazade sisters." While their stories might be what is keeping them "alive" every day, similar to Queen Scheherazade, hearing their stories as they spoke on stage has also prevented me from losing momentum. I would argue that the same goes for the other students that were in attendance, especially those that saw themselves represented on stage through these two brilliant women.

BLACK IS, BLACK AR'NT

by Nia Robinson

On February 24th, 2016, students **Tamir Williams '16** and **Najwa Stanford '16** showed their art in the show “Black Is, Black Ar’nt” together with works by Chicago based artist, educator, and activist **Turtel Onli**. The main purpose of the exhibit was to challenge historical and contemporary definitions of blackness, whether they be stereotypes or cultural markers. Students were able to come to the student space outside of Wilson Hall and see the three different artists’ interpretation of how blackness has been depicted throughout the years.

Turtel Onli addressed the stereotype of the watermelon in his work. The pictures did not try to gloss over the offensive stereotype of black people having an unusual appetite for watermelon. Instead, the artist twisted it in a way that made it clear that black people were telling the story, embracing the fruit—just like the term “black” was by civil rights activists in the 1960s.

Najwa’s work investigated how she has learned to see herself through the mainstream. Najwa created her own version of the Mona Lisa, but replaced Leonardo’s original face with that of a black woman. The work raised questions about the girl’s smile: black girls’ expressions are always questioned, whether they be smiling or looking serious. Incidentally, this work reminds some of



Mona Lisa Smiles Too by Najwa Stanford '19

us of Zora Neale Hurston’s anthology, *I Love Myself When I am Laughing and Then Again When I am Looking Mean and Impressive*. Another one of Najwa’s works centered around black women’s hair. There were many comments incorporated in the work that represented how people, including black women, are attentive to their hair, even when it

is not theirs. The work illustrated how the woman in the picture seems irritated by the shallow comments and concerns over her hair.

Tamir’s works mostly focus on the black body and protest, mainly the Lindy Hop. She showed a few archival black and white photographs of people dancing. The pictures conveyed an appreciation of the dances that gave rise to Swing. Tamir also highlighted how the Lindy Hop is central to blackness as it can both express individuality and a communal spirit.

Overall, the art exhibit was a great way for students at Middlebury to rethink stereotypes that are attributed to black people. Further, it inspired students to look at the way they view stereotypes in their own lives.

Looking Back To Three Years Ago: The Lasting Influence of ElectHer

by Sarah Kotb

Those who know me know that I am a happy Economics senior. They also know that as a GSFS fan, I understand what it means to be a woman in the Economics Department at Middlebury. I am also dark skinned, and an international student (the combination of which makes me hesitant to claim myself as a person of color since I did not grow up with racial structural injustice. That is not to say I do not share many frustrating experiences with students of color at Middlebury). However, where I struggled the most was not in my Economics coursework. Today, I reflect on my freshman year experience stumbling through the film department with these identities and how ElectHer, a conference I attended, was crucial for my understanding of structural and interpersonal power dynamics.

Enrolling in film classes was my way of being obedient to the classical liberal arts messaging of exploration. I did not know that this exploration would lead me to dangerous territory until I took a hands-on filmmaking class over J-term that year. Each student made seven short movies throughout the month. Noticing patterns of misogyny on screen, I tallied all the student made films to count how many objectified women uncritically, and how many had silent women, or no women at all. As you may expect (or if not,

this can be your moment of enlightenment), the numbers were not good. I will never forget that one time a student made a movie about a character who speaks one sentence in Arabic, my mother tongue, and then goes on to bomb Mead Chapel.

To this day, I remain fascinated by how much effort, fear and hesitation it took me to call him out on it. When the professor facilitated a discussion during the next class based on my

complaint, the student who made the movie responded by saying that his film “was not meant for international audiences.”

The semester after that, I attended ElectHer, a one-day conference, organized by Chellis House, that aims to encourage more

women to run for student government bodies and public office. It is interesting that I walked out of the conference as disinterested in these institutions as I walked in. What the conference did for me, however, was highlight that there are power dynamics that were not in my favor. Simple as that may sound, it had mighty implications. Without this knowledge of power dynamics, I had internalized any dissatisfaction I felt as my own fault.

The conference was only the beginning of many things with the same end—I subsequently took gender classes and immersed myself in lit-



Rabeya Jawaid, Laura Nuebler and Sarah Kotb at ElectHer.



erature by authors of color. This was a rewarding journey, with no better way to describe it than with a metaphor by Junot Díaz: Sometimes, it is better to paint the cage. Otherwise, we will keep bumping into the cage wire, saying “Gee, freedom is fun.”

My support of efforts such as ElectHer is not to say that marginalized groups have to do their homework. I acknowledge structural injustices exist and it is on the perpetrators of

these systems to end them. However, understanding identity politics gave me a little more room to breathe. Once I understood that my hesitation to call out the appalling racism in my class stemmed from my conditioning as a woman to be “nice” and take fewer risks, I was ready to challenge that conditioning. But without this starting point, I would have been lost, or worse continued to bump into the cage.



Students Morgan Grady-Benson, Sarah Karerat, and Kyler Blodgett enjoy the first free Ben & Jerry's ice cream cone at the Dismantling Rape Culture Conference at the University of Vermont



Students working hard at zine festival.



Students Isabelle Shalcross, Will Brennan, Rebecca Coates-Finke, Molly McShane, and Anu Biswas at the 24 hour zine festival.



BEYOND THE VAGINA (MONOLOGUES): A PRODUCTION EVOLVES

by Rebecca Coates-Finke

When I started working for Chellis House three years ago, director Karin Hanta suggested that I consider using my theatrical talents to stage Eve Ensler's play *The Vagina Monologues*. For over a decade, performances of the play had been a mainstay at Chellis House. Over the years, students were able to raise thousands of dollars for WomenSafe, a local organization dedicated to ending domestic and sexual violence. During my first j-term at Middlebury, I directed a production of *The Vagina Monologues* with a cast of 12 students. It was an empowering and fascinating experience that launched all of the cast and crew into conversation about vaginas, empowerment, cultural imperialism and Western influence, biological essentialism, the idea of a single story and the power of telling your own. Two members of the cast decided to take on the role of director for the next production and I served as their producer. For *The Vagina Monologues* 2015, I wanted to expand on the single student-written monologue that had appeared in TVM 2014 (written by Jiya Pandya '17), so I published a book of student-written monologues, accompanied by student-created artwork.

It was after this second production that a question arose: should TVM be done again next year? Following a successful production in February 2015, students were approaching the work with gratitude but also strong criticism. The Western, white savior narratives and biological essentialism of the script was grating intersectional feminists who expected more from a play that claims to empower and liberate, and the idea that saying "vagina" over 100 times in one night



Actors huddle during the BTVM performance.



Jenne Meneses delivers a powerful performance.

was enough to cover the play's multiple faults was beginning to seem laughable.

I was willing to give up on it; this is what I told myself repeatedly. But I wasn't ready to give up on it quite yet. Each year, the calls for critical analysis of the play was accompanied by just as many stories from actors, crew, and audience members who said themselves to be dramatically altered by the experience of this show. I didn't want to lose this yearly place for feminist theater making, didn't want to lose the conversations

it had sparked and the roads it had opened for those involved. I saw *The Vagina Monologues* as an opportunity for students to try on the role of



*Director extraordinaire
Rebecca Coates-Finke*

a feminist activist—to take up space and say things that many did not want us to say, to practice what discomfort and embarrassment feel like when we’re pressing against the boxes society uses to confine us and conform us. And I didn’t want to lose the opportunity to build a community like the one I saw built in each production

play while maintaining its reverence and celebration of (separately) the vagina, woman, and the feminine.

It was a difficult, and at times, frightening process. I wanted desperately to make this piece something I could stand by and love without hurting or alienating members of my community who deserve celebration. I was supported and inspired by my cast and crew, friends, advisors, and TVM alumnae*.i. I am proud of the final product, but there is still work to do, and journeys to take, and concepts to explore, and stories to tell. We will never stop pushing, never stop shifting, never stop imagining a world in which

of TVM: a community that practices the balance between individualized advocacy and solidarity within a group. So instead of letting the show go, I transformed it.

Over J-term, I studied with Professor Anson Koch-Rein, reading various criticisms of *The Vagina Monologues* and incorporating them into my editing process. I wrote segments and brought in new voices: Tovah Leibowitz’s article about queer crip sexual pleasure for Autostraddle.com; Mia Mingus’ speech on moving towards ugly and the power of magnificence; Julia Serano’s spoken word poem about being a transgender woman and the power of her penis; an article outlining the dangers of genital surgery performed on intersex infants. I cut monologues and introductions that reinforced a white savior narrative or slammed too hard on the metaphor that women are their vaginas. Ultimately, through a hectic, chaotic, and glorious process, I sought to undermine the central metaphor of the



Erin Reid gives her all.

this play does not have to exist, because this world will never stop changing while we work to change it. Next year will be another adventure.



Stella Boye-Doe in the spotlight.



FRAKER AWARD GOES TO ELIZABETH DUNN

On March 8, International Women's Day, the GSFS Program gave out the annual Fraker Award. The prize was named after Alison G. Fraker, an avid feminist who tragically died before her graduation from Middlebury. Sujata Moorti introduced the award, saying that it was a great time for faculty to "bask in the brilliance" of students' works. The prize is given to an essay that speaks to the topics of gender, sexuality, and feminist studies. This year's submissions were quite diverse and included podcasts, songs, and power points.

Elizabeth Dunn '18 won the Fraker Award for an essay titled "Race Play and Racism" for Anson Koch-Rein's "Sexuality in the U.S." class. She studied sexuality within race, noting how impossible it is to separate the sexual and the political. Race play, she said, has much to do with consent and fetishization of the desired race, but also fits in the historical context of slavery.

Sarah Kotb '16 earned an honorable mention for her self-reflective work "The Death of Scheherazade Or How Not to Write About Arab Men" for Catharine Wright's class on "Outlaw Women."

Sarah Karerat '18 earned another honorable mention for a paper titled "Policing Native Sexualities: Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code" for Sujata Moorti's Foundations in Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies.

Excerpt from Sarah Kotb's paper "'The Death of Scheherazade...'"

On her supposed death bed, Scheherazade has to think fast. She has to strategize. Like David facing Goliath, she can't use physical force. After all, force has been the king's craft, and the

silence of the dead virgins who have had her place on the same bed is the loudest testimony. So instead, "Scheherazade breaks the cycle of violence by choosing to embrace different terms of engagement" (Nafisi 19). To regain her safety, she resorts to storytelling.

Like Azar Nafisi, the author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, I too am awed by the power of storytelling and find this metaphor so mighty in its implications. (...) I was growing up in Egypt, unfamiliar with what my womanhood meant; discontent with my mother's and grandmother's invocations of virtue and purity, but unable to find any other narrative. It was not until I met the stories and novels of feminists, especially those who trace their origins to Third World countries, that I started converting. My body still remembers the almost electrical shock that went through it when one of Nawal El Saadawi's heroines in *She Was the Weaker*, spits on her father's portrait. She had just walked in on him assaulting the maid, who happened to be as old as his daughter. I emerged out of this book capable of asking questions and



Fraker award winner, Elizabeth Dunn '18

questioning assumptions. I found it soothing to immerse myself in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost their Accent* as she opened that can of worms called Catholic school and fleshed out so elegantly why my stomach gets cranky at the mention of Sacred Heart Girls' School in Alexandria. Reading these women's stories validated my voice. Their writing made my questioning legitimate. Whenever guilt visited after an episode of breaking the rules, I revisited the stories of these Scheherazades, and guilt went away, scared and exposed. So in a spirit of true concern, I write today with the worry that Schehrezade has yet another problem to deal with. If the fictional one is facing a sexaholic royalty that is about to kill her, the real Schehrezades, the Third World feminist authors, are facing attempts to silence them. I am not referring here to the all so familiar anti-feminist school of thought. That is merely old news. What worries me today, however, is the intellectual brand of silencing, the one made by critics and other policing feminists. A prominent pattern, and one that I focus on throughout this essay, is the critique of female writers with Muslim and Arab origins. As they write about gender oppression, their voices become accused of following the Western tradition of condemning the Arab man and exposing his violence and lack of civilization.

Excerpt from Sarah Karerat's "Policing Native Sexualities:"

In modern India, there is a common logic that homosexuality is an influence of the immoral West that debases traditional Indian

culture. This seems ironic, given that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is a remnant of the British colonial rule. Section 377 reads: "Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall be liable to fine." (...) It is important to first understand the fluid nature of Indian sexualities

in history. Ruth Vanita writes of same-sex sexuality being "one dimension of a wide erotic spectrum" ("Dear Supreme Court") in ancient Indian society. (...) The problematic nature of this series of occurrences arises when we consider who has come to constitute the sodomite subject. Despite the lack of explicit definition, "carnal intercourse" has been used by colonial and postcolonial Indian courts to describe anal sex, oral sex, and other non-procreative sexual acts like mutual masturbation. Even though het-

erosexual couples also commit these acts, the last 150 years have witnessed the burden of Section 377 falling almost completely onto homosexuals (Misra 21). Homosexual bodies, as part of the British rule's surveillance, have been conceived to be marked with appearances that indicate the possibility of committing the acts that Section 377 forbids. Consequently, Section 377 is used not only to regulate individuals caught in the act of sodomy, but also to dominate those whose bodies and behavior suggest they may be homosexual and therefore likely to commit the act ("Section 377 and the Dignity of Indian Homosexuals").



Sarah Karerat '18 earns honorable mention.



Excerpt from Elizabeth Dunn's paper "Race Play and Racism:"

Race play as a sexual fetish illustrates important and uncomfortable intersections between Blackness, violence, and sexuality. Although among some who practice it, there is a notion that it is possible to separate the sexual from the political, or from the historical, in actuality even when people engage in sexual acts in private, there are still significant implications for the public. On the level of individual practitioners, analyzing race play generates questions about consent, fetishization, and where the line between race play and other types of sex is. Broadening the scope, analyzing race play through a political lens reveals the ways in which anti-black racism, the historical legacy of slavery, and reluctance to include sexuality in modern conversations surrounding race that are important issues in the United States. (...)

Mollena invokes the common argument that as long as what is happening is consensual, it should be accepted. But what exactly is consent? A simple working definition is that consent is achieved when all parties involved in a sexual act are aware that what they're engaging in is sexual, are not being coerced or manipulated, and are in full control of their mental and physical situations, who have agreed to engage in specified sexual acts, and have communicated this clearly. However, consent may be more complicated than that, because as effective as this definition may be on an individual basis, the above outline of what makes sex consensual leaves out analysis of how political structures such as racism can

complicate the concept of "consent". (...) People are more than receptacles for power or bodies that political and social identities are inscribed upon. Although influenced by power, individuals still have the ability to make their own sexual choices, and just because consent is complicated doesn't mean it's impossible. To say it is impossible for marginalized people to consent to sex

under the systems that oppress them is to strip them of the autonomy they have over their own bodies. (...) Race play may be political, but so are all sexual practices, even the so-called "vanilla" ones; they're just less titillating. Every form of self-expression, every sexual act, is political, not just the ones that are taboo. The question

then becomes not whether race play is political or individual (it's both), but whether it is politically useful to queer, feminist, Black, or any other number of groups. There has been a trend in queer theory for the idea of transformative political potential to attach itself to queer theory; could race play be theorized to be transformative in a way that is useful and progressive, or like fake orgasm would it be viewed in the same way as fake orgasm, in a way that reinforces oppressive structures (Jagoose 521). In one sense, race play and the discourse it generates could be a form of consciousness raising, because it makes people aware that these types of issues do still exist. It forces the people involved to be aware of race in a political sense. Race is impossible to escape, but ignoring it leads to the institutionalization of certain sexual practices that once entrenched are incredibly difficult to dismantle. And the more smoothly they function, the less noticeable they are.

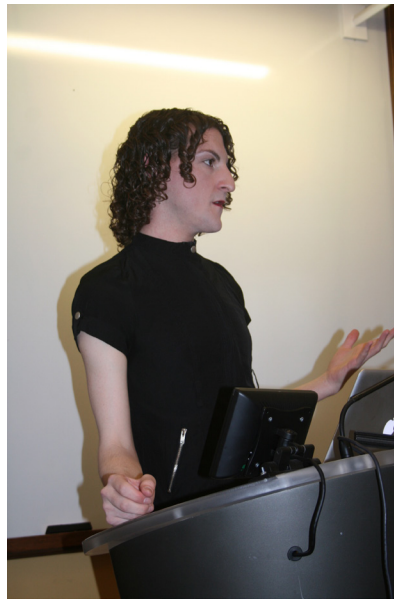


Sarah Kotb '16 earns honorable mention.



ECOSEXUALITY IN PERFORMANCE

Professor **Michael J. Morris** was invited to Middlebury by Andrew W. Interdisciplinary Choreographer **Maree Remalia** for a series of talks and performances in early April. In their lecture for the GSFS Program, Professor Morris presented their views of ecosexuality, a term used to describe the entanglements of human sexuality with the non-human world. Since our human bodies are already vast ecosystems of nonhuman lives—our DNA is cohabiting with billions of bacteria and fungi etc. in our body—sex is never simply a human affair. The majority of safer-sex practices—our careful use of pharmaceuticals and latex barriers, gloves and condoms and dental dams—strategically mediate between our open, permeable, vulnerable bodies and the plethora of viral and bacterial sexual partners that may be in bed with us. Synthetic pharmaceuticals and materials that enable our intimacies have become the most used pharmaceutical molecules in the whole of human history, not only in human bodies but also in ecosystems beyond our bodies. A number of studies have shown that the synthetic hormones used in birth-control pharmaceuticals are excreted in urine and waste, and have come to circulate in water supplies and ecosystems, with effects ranging from mutated inter-sexed amphibians to impacting the reproductive potential of aquatic life.



Michael J. Morris talks about ecosexuality.

Ecosexuality thus directs attention towards various ways in which sexuality is already ecological, and the ways in which ecology might be understood as sexual or erotic. Morris illustrated this point by describing Green Wedding, an artistic performance by Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens, who in 2008 married the Earth. In this and subsequent performances, they want to shift the metaphor from “Earth as Mother”

to “Earth as Lover.” Sprinkle and Stephens have thus taken this very human, fairly normative institution/practice and utilized it as a performance structure with which to recognize long-term, necessary, life-affirming relationships with our planet. By using the structure of a wedding, they adapted a way of thinking about love and commitment and utilized those familiar ways of thinking about relationship to transform how we think about our relationship to the Earth. At the same time, they ask why is it that we elevate particular

forms of human relationships above all others—above all other human relationships as well as the countless other relationships in which we live and thrive? Why is it that we neglect our longest and most vital relationships, those with the planet? At the same time, this wedding is not a utopic vision of ecological harmony. Even while requesting no gifts, it depends quite a lot on consumption, all of the fuel used to bring collaborators from all over the world to this one spot,

all of the materials needed to fabricate elaborate costumes, the electricity used to run the sound system, the waste produced by the reception, and so on. This wedding, too, is part of the mess of our relationship with the planet. There is no illusion here of a “pure nature” or a return to Eden. This bright, colorful, campy wedding stages a wedding to an Earth full of the organic and the inorganic, the biotic and the synthetic, an Earth for and with which we are responsible, and it is an Earth of which we are a part.

In sum, Morris argues, addressing the nonhuman dimensions of sexuality is necessary for the deterritorialization of human sexuality, specifically when “human sexuality” continues to func-

tion as a domain in which both human exceptionalism and normative/naturalized sexualities are defended and maintained. Sexuality specifically functions as an ideological frontier along which we steadfastly maintain that separateness, an area in which we insist on maintaining some fantasy of our own purity. By insisting that sexuality has never been a purely human affair, ecosexuality challenges the mythology and ideology of human exceptionalism that would set “humankind” apart from and above other life on this planet, and in doing so, creates an opportunity to intervene in the often violent ways that we engage with nonhuman lives.



CLAIM

by Karin Gottshall

I spent most of fourth grade in outer space.
Those red pants with the slight flare.

This restlessness--obviously not new. Ruined
with everything translucent.

One fevered day in bed, another, another.
My mother in the kitchen, cooking a fish.

When I light a cigarette our bus will come,
she always said, and it did. Ground under her heel.

Lemon-scented soap, pine sap, roses.
A jump-rope truth I can no longer access.

In dreams my mother is without substance,
without dimension. Without love, an empty boat.

A day like a heavy black kettle.
The half-asleep feeling I could go back and claim it.

A cup of coffee forgotten on the windowsill:
a conjugation of the verb “to haunt.”



A FAREWELL TO ANSON KOCH-REIN

If you've been at Middlebury the past couple of years, you've probably met Anson Koch-Rein. After completing his Ph.D. at Emory University, Anson came to Middlebury in 2014 to teach core GSFS courses while Sujata Moorti and Laurie Essig each took year-long research leaves. Anson taught the core courses in our major with great aplomb. Anson also brought his own research interests in transgender studies and disability studies and invigorated our curriculum with new approaches and cutting-edge materials. Students particularly loved

Anson's class on dogs, a course that highlighted his ability to bring cutting-edge feminist studies approaches to Middlebury.

Not only will GSFS miss Anson but, so will the rest of the Middlebury community. Within his first few months on campus, Anson established himself as a familiar face. He was a member of several campus committees, served as faculty head of Queer Studies House, and

initiated several reading groups within GSFS and across the campus community. Amidst this hectic schedule Anson also found the time to present his own research in different venues across campus. Whether it was a talk on Caitlyn

Jenner or one analyzing blogs about transgender children Anson has drawn audiences from across the disciplines. On each of these occasions Anson was able to bring insights that enriched and deepened the discussions our campus has engaged with topics of difference and diversity.

With his signature bow ties Anson's presence has enlivened Chellis House. His dedication to the program,

our students, the project of feminism, and, of course, dogs has been remarkable. We are sorry to see him leave us. We wish Anson luck at Grinnell. We in GSFS and Chellis House cannot thank him enough for all that he has done to ensure our continued success.



*Anson Koch-Rein reading at the
Fraker Award Ceremony*

Questions or comments about this newsletter?
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