OBERLIN COLLEGE
GENDER, SEXUALITY & FEMINIST STUDIES

DIRECTOR’S REPORT
2013-2014

I am very pleased to be serving as Director of the GSFS Institute for a second year. The Institute continues to maintain a strong presence at Oberlin, offering students and faculty indispensable intellectual space for critical reflection on gender, sexuality, and feminist issues from an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspective.

Let me offer a quick glance back at 2012-13 before telling you about our exciting interdisciplinary programming for this year. Last year was devoted to the issue of reproductive justice—which was apt, given the fact that 2013 marked the 40th anniversary of Roe v. Wade. Our speaker for International Women’s Day was Loretta, who has been part of the fight for women’s reproductive justice for over 3 decades. She was one of the first African American women to direct a rape crisis center in the 1970s. In 1997 she co-founded the “SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective” (http://www.sistersong.net/) and until very recently served as its National Coordinator. She was national director of the April 25, 2004, March for Women’s Lives in Washington, DC, where over a million people converged on the capital to make their voices heard for women’s health rights. At Oberlin Ms. Ross spoke passionately about the need to see reproductive justice as a fundamental human right.

GSFS also hosted an International Reproductive Justice Film Festival with three award-winning films. Winner of the Palme d’Or at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival, “4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days,” is a gripping story about abortion in 1987 Romania. Visiting Assistant Professor of History, Emanuela Grama, hosted this showing. Peris Kibera Cleary (recently Visiting Assistant Professor in GSFS) introduced the issue of reproductive services in Africa for the screening of: “Not Yet Rain: A Journey for Reproductive Freedom.” The documentary “Jane: An Abortion Service” is about the Chicago women’s health group that performed nearly 12,000 safe illegal abortions between 1969 and 1973. This film was hosted by Kim Schreck (Visiting Assistant Professor, Comparative American Studies) and was followed by a conversation with a physician (name withheld) who was a medical abortion provider until harassment from anti-abortion groups forced her to take a hiatus.

The GSFS Institute fêted the publication of Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity (Oxford University Press, 2012) by Oberlin’s own Sonia Kruks, Robert Danforth Professor of Politics. We closed the year with a faculty curriculum workshop entitled, “Revamping your Syllabus: How to Put More Gender, Sexuality and Feminism into Your Syllabus.”
Events for 2013-14 are in full swing. This year, we are co-sponsoring (with CLEAR and the MRC) a year-long series of events called “Roots and STEM,” focusing on women and underrepresented groups in the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and math). We began the semester with a “Women in STEM” faculty panel where Oberlin professors Yumi Ijiri (physics), Jan Thornton (neuroscience) and Rebecca Whelan (chemistry/biochemistry) spoke about their careers in the sciences. In October we invited Amy Graves, professor of physics from Swarthmore College, to speak on “Gender and the Physical Sciences.” Her talk was a first for GSFS, bringing in students and faculty from all three Divisions of the College. We will follow the Roots and STEM theme throughout the year with more speakers, student-run listening sessions, and faculty panels. For more on the subject of gender inequities in the sciences, see the piece by Kate Jones-Smith (visiting assistant professor, physics) in this newsletter issue.

Margaret Kamitsuka
Associate Professor, Religion Department
Director, Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies, 2012-2015

Leah Freed Memorial Prize

The Leah Freed Memorial prize is awarded to support student research, creative work, performance, or other academic projects. Awards are granted to help defray costs of deserving student projects. Competitions for the award are held every fall semester for work to be completed during that academic year. The Fall 2012 recipients were as follows:

Anna Dardick, Biology / Latin Language and Literature Major
Lost in Translation: Media Coverage of the US HIV/AIDS Epidemic’s Blood Bank Controversy

By influencing and informing (or misinforming) voters and policymakers, presentations of scientific theories through various media have the power to change the course of history. To investigate this broad topic, I am focusing on the case study of HIV/AIDS in the US, specifically the controversy surrounding blood banks and the idea of mandatory HIV blood screening tests and questionnaires, which occurred approximately from 1982-1985. A combination of conventional and summative content analysis methods will be used to evaluate newspaper and magazine articles from national news-setters (e.g. New York Times), gay media (e.g. Bay Area Reporter), and scientific sources (e.g. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report) published between 1/1/1982 and 12/31/1985. Articles will be analyzed for the presence of language which reflects a bias or subtext, and the frequency of this language will be analyzed using SPSS frequency and correlation functions, expressly to compare the content of national and niche sources. The articles will also be assessed for presence/absence of certain themes, such as: “Does this story favor the institution of regulations on who can donate blood?” and “Does this story mention civil rights/prejudice in relation to blood bank policies?” In addition, I will evaluate media responses during blood bank controversy under current models of effective communication. I intend to give educational presentations to employ said communication techniques and propel scientific research into relevant human reality.
A. D. Hogan, Politics Major

Embody Praxis: a Genealogical Exploration of Women Theorizing the Political

Hello! I’m A.D. Hogan, one of the recipients of the Leah Freed Memorial Prize. I’m using the prize money to travel to interview a number of leading women political theorists, philosophers, and thinkers. My project, titled, “Embody Praxis: a Genealogical Exploration of Women Theorizing the Political” traces the historical and existing topology and contours of female scholars, and, more specifically, “women” in political theory as an academic subfield of political science, of the “experience” of “women”, and the disciplinary mechanisms constituted in relations of power, knowledge, gender, and the academy. My project is part-oral history, including collecting stories, experiences, and autobiographical reasons for pursuing political theory and specific questions; part-genealogy, in the Foucauldian and Nietzschean senses, that is, questioning the formation of norms and values in specific contexts and locales; part-radical critique of exegetical political theorizing, because I’m claiming embodiment and oral history as legitimate academic methodologies; part-discovery as to where I can, if at all, “fit” in political theory and the academy; and, part-selfish, as I want to have an excuse to talk to and meet all of my favorite sheroes, writers, and thinkers.

Julia Melfi, Theater & Art History Major

The Bacchae in Edinburgh: Reimagining the Role of Gender in Classical Greek Tragedy

Last spring an ensemble of Oberlin students, including myself, adapted a devised, site-specific theater work based on the Classical Greek tragedy, The Bacchae by Euripides. Our goal was to reinterpret this tragedy into a piece that pushes contemporary notions of what theater is. The ensemble is deeply committed to the work’s continual evolution and eventual performance at the Fringe Festival for a week in August 2013. The Fringe Festival is the world’s largest arts festival that occurs every summer through the entirety of Edinburgh, Scotland. As Europe is the center for devised, experimental and interdisciplinary theater, participating will allow us to better understand this kind of performance. Our performance does not attempt to solve the numerous gender contradictions in this play, but rather, expose, explore and leave them open to new interpretation. But there are still issues we can further illuminate. The Fringe Festival provides a setting to engage in a global conversation with other theater makers about gender and feminism in Classical texts and how to best interpret these issues today. The funds I have received from the Leah Freed Memorial Prize will help offset the financial burden that taking a work like this abroad entails for me. Upon our return, we hope to present about our trip and maybe even set up an international exchange by hosting visiting artists if they are able to travel to Oberlin.

Daniel Quigley, Politics & Gender, Sexuality & Feminist Studies

“Every Story is Different: Queer Perspectives on Gender”

The way we view gender has certainly changed radically in just the last several generations. This is a short film exploring the perspectives of four young people and their own experiences with life and gender. Prompted with questions carefully designed to minimize any “demand characteristic” response, each volunteer was encouraged to be honest without regard to any goal beyond honesty. The intention of the film is not to reinforce an image or promote a thesis, but rather to provide an oral history. Every Story is Different is four people navigating four unique, youth experiences.

Sarp Yavuz, Studio Art

They Used to Call Me a Fag

Born into a secular Turkish family and raised in Istanbul, where the East and the West meet, my experience of traditional codes of masculinity has always been skewed. Nevertheless, over the course of my Oberlin College experience, I have realized time and time again that I have internalized many of the conservative values of the Middle East. This exhibition explores my personal dealings with the notion of becoming a man, and the manifestation of these dealings in the form of photography and performance.
I have spent my entire life terrified of becoming my father, a theater director whose absence shaped me. My clearest memories of him are from a TV show in which he portrayed a bohemian, chain-smoking writer who spent hours on the typewriter. I came to associate art with him, and thus have difficulty reconciling the practice of making art.

Growing up in Turkey, I had often been told that I needed to “be a man,” which implied a wide spectrum of responsibilities ranging from sporting a beard to having a wife and kids. Becoming a man meant drinking raki, an alcoholic beverage made from anise, and drinking it well. It meant letting the women clear the table, and watching soccer, swearing occasionally. It meant sounding assertive, and not letting my voice rise when I got excited. I was several points down due to my absent father, and my homosexuality was not doing me any favors either.

For a very long time now, I have wanted to understand this thing I needed to be, that I have felt the weight of my entire life. I thought perhaps reconstructing masculinity would offer insight: If I could dismantle it, build it, manipulate it, then maybe I could figure out how to be a man. The very act of re-creating the imagery I grew up with would be cathartic, because in time it would demystify masculinity. I would construct the fantasy, thus ensuring that it is, after all, fantasy, and needs not hang over my head.

Since 2010, I have been working on several series of photographs, all attempting to gain a better understanding of masculinity. My engagement with my models as well as the images that come out of my interactions contribute to the process of my understanding what it means to be a man. The invasion of the locker room space signifies both my personal act of entering spaces such as this one, over and over again, and also of inviting the audience to experience the fantasy and the alienation of male spaces.

Many people have called me a fag. Many will continue to do so.

But for the first time since 1999, I am dancing again.

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**Phyllis Jones Memorial Award**

The Phyllis Jones Memorial Award was established through gifts from students, colleagues, and friends of Phyllis Jones (1945-1982). This annual award recognizes and honors student work in areas related to Phyllis Jones’s interests: women writers, minority women, women in the community, and the integration of personal and professional goals for women. The Spring 2013 recipient was as follows:

**Sarah Bernstein, Theater & GSFS major**

**Windows**

I have chosen to submit the first act of an original play called "Windows." It tells a complicated story of female familial love. Mila, a 22 year old "half-a-student" has just returned from a gap year in Ghana. She comes home and everything has changed. It doesn't smell the same. Her mother is acting strangely and doesn't seem fully focused or engaged. Her sister is moving. This play tells the story of three strong women and complicates traditional assumptions about love, family, desperation, and communication.

My first goal with this play was to create complex female characters. When I was more dedicated to acting, I discovered very quickly that most female roles are shallow, even if they at first seem deep. Female characters'
struggles are often limited to their relationships with men or their personal insecurities. While those struggles are representative of some peoples’ realities, I want to tell stories about other circumstances. The main conflicts in the play are Bet's fear of abandonment and Mila's sudden romantic feelings for her sister. I was also excited to discuss queerness in a play where a character was allowed to be more than their sexuality and the major conflicts were about more than gay or straight sexuality.

Laura Grothaus, Creative Writing & Visual Arts major  
*Echoed*

Echoed is a sequence of prose poems using images as footnotes, loosely based off the myth of Echo. This myth allowed me to explore traditional gender relationships, the idea of losing oneself in a partner, while complicating it by imposing a new context. In my retelling, Echo does not lose her voice, but her sense of self is ruptured by this event and the process of re-thinking it allows her to eventually become more at home within her body. They explore her thought process, a search for articulation through the key of silence. The constant thread of sculpture is a key element in this question of body and voice. The way in which she expresses herself is two-dimensional, a queer form of images and words, which itself makes a case for something less binary than man/woman. However, they are still flat, a construction of the event and the sculptures, alluding to her own memory as a construction. In choosing the sculptors I would address, I tried to select a range of lesser-known artists with the secondary goal of bringing attention to their work.

Through the text, Echo also traces experiences of violence, particularly sexual violence and how those can relate to the idea of voice-- from the sculptor giving the lion his own tongue and Echo's story of the neighbor shoving his tongue in her mother’s mouth. Echo subverts ideas of how one can speak through silence and through another’s words (echoing), while addressing how women have been silenced.

Finally, the thread of motherhood runs through the piece. What does it mean to be the daughters our mothers have made? The mothers became a place to explore a range of the ways women are socialized, and for me to explore my own relationship with my mother, how I might be an echo of her, her own sculpture of flesh. Or how I might re-create and re-voice myself.

A.D. Hogan, Politics major  
*Theorizing Women*

My thesis, "Theorizing Women(?)", is a genealogical, theoretical intervention concerning the production of the "woman political theorist" and more broadly "woman public intellectual" within the past 50 years within the U.S. academy. In this paper, I ask, did the production of the woman political theorist fundamentally shift the discipline of political theory itself, or has this production been folded into the hegemonic, normalizing tendencies U.S. academic institutions? My data concerning this question is derived from a series of interviews I conducted over January and February 2013. Interviewees include Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Lisa Disch, Mary Dietz, Kathy Ferguson, Bonnie Honig, Sonia Kruks, Nancy Luxon, Mara Marin, Kristen Monroe, Jane Mansbridge, Martha Nussbaum, Carole Pateman, Hanna Pitkin, Nancy Rosenblum, Joan W. Scott, Molly Shanley, Jackie Stevens, Michelle-Renee Smith, Joan Tronto, and Linda Zerilli.

Madeline Meyer, Cinema Studies major  
*Leave Kentucky*

My mother died when I was three. For obvious reasons I never really knew her. I tried for several years to know her through her mother, which ended up doing me more damage (both personal as well as to the memory of my mother) than good. This project is a feature length (90-page) screenplay about my grandmother’s funeral, which hasn’t
occurred. The intention behind it was to write about the intimate discomfort that comes with the death (and consequent, absolution) of a difficult person, amidst a group of unfamiliar people, particularly when those people are family.

Unexpectedly, this project became more an exploration and mediation on the living than the dead. I am the middle child of three girls. My mother was the youngest of three girls. My father has three younger sisters. I have grown up, in a sense, surrounded by women. However, being mostly raised by a male figure made it difficult to embrace any real sense of female identity. Growing up, all of my friends were boys and I had a mild distrust or discomfort when dealing with women. This discomfort grew more debilitating as I entered college and found many of my peers identifying as or embracing a female identity (or whichever gender or identity they assumed) in a way that I had not yet comes to terms with. It took writing about women, particularly the women in my family, to acknowledge my own understanding of the benefits of self-identifying.

I believe it took me so long to acknowledge and champion this female strength, because it was not necessarily feminine or defined by a hierarchical schema of qualities and traditions, making it difficult to identify. Rather, I came to know it as an inherent support structure designated to applaud the efforts of women professionally, personally, and holistically. In my writing I drew upon my realities to illustrate the often unspoken solidarity between sisters, both the proximal and the distal. The screenplay deals with a time of grief and the way differences of grieving practices are often problematized in the bonds of an implicit female understanding. Their ideas and practices are often different, but they struggle with these discrepancies because they are never alone or unconsidered. Meanwhile, it is easy to forget that the men in the script are dealing with their own grief as they are often solitary and unassisted. It was only through my writing process that I realized the male independence I often envied contains a loneliness that I feel grateful, because of my female community, to not experience in my daily life.

Nicole Nance, English major

*The Lady Doth Protest: Re-Writing Protest Ideologies in the Chicago Black Renaissance*

This project started like so many others with frustration; frustration that in Richard Wright's classic work, *Native Son*, I couldn't see a viable female character that was fully portrayed and empathetic. Wright's women often seemed one-dimensional, and his black women even more forgettable. In one English course, I distinctly recall one student admitting he had forgotten Bessie's existence. I had not. I was terrified to be her, to have my life used to further the agenda of another while remaining utterly insignificant. I had to find a better alternative; this led me to Gwendolyn Brooks and Lorraine Hansberry, and their works, *Maud Martha* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, respectively. Both women found a way to reassert the importance of African-American females by re-writing aspects of native son in their one works. In *Maud martha* Brooks is able to reinterpret the quintessential rat scene to show a feminine approach that precludes violence. Both women are able to find and model success in a bleak world.

Chinwe Okona, Neuroscience major

*black & gray*

*black&gray* is a photo project depicting body modification, in the form of tattoos and piercings, on the bodies on queer people of color. I come to this project exploring Carla Kaplan’s theory on the *subversion of identity*. To subvert, in this context, means to disconnect ourselves from the idea that we are indefinitely bound to the characteristics that compose our bodies. Instead, we are called to recognize the fluidity of identity; how it is constantly in flux and is performative. I began to think of and explore this theory specifically through the lens of body modification. Examining the (semi)permanence of piercings and tattoos, I wondered, do these forms of body modification further define our identities? Is there a way in which these modifications further describe ‘how’ we identify, rather than ‘what’ we are?
I chose to use queer, raced bodies as subjects to further complicate and explore this question of performative subversion. How do we perform our queerness subversively, within the bounds of our racial identities? What does queerness, as a performance, even mean for the raced body? Further, when one maps these body modifications onto a queer, racialized canvas, where does this body fit into societal understandings of identity and sexuality?

**GSFS Major Representatives**

**GSFS: The Most Liberal Arts-y Major (With Which You Might Even Get Hired!)**

*By Anne Buckwalker, GSFS Major*

*GSFS Major Representative, 2013-2014*

This semester, I did it. I declared a major. At first it was a great relief to no longer respond to inquiries with “Undecided.” Upon declaring a major, however, people seem to assume you have your whole life planned. As soon as I had a concrete answer to one question, an even more complex one arose: “And what do you want to do with that?”

The career question hits every liberal arts undergrad where it hurts. What do we want to do with that? In many cases we have no idea. (That’s why we go to a liberal arts school.) The recent job climate has done nothing to assuage fears of post-graduation unemployment, even if we do have a grand scheme for life after college. The threat of unemployment can feel especially imminent for those of us with uncommon majors. With fewer alums in the world than, say, the English department, we GSFS majors have to do a little more research (although perhaps only to the alumni section of this newsletter) to find examples of people who have been successful after majoring in our unconventional field.

Majoring in GSFS, however, has so far proven to be an unconventional advantage. While interviewing for Winter Term internships, I found myself presented with several offers not in spite of, but because of, my major. What type of intern is best poised to work with the ACLU to oppose a ban on same-sex marriage? A GSFS major, of course. That’s exactly the project I’ll be working on during Winter Term, alongside someone who also majored in (drumroll, please) Gender Studies. It’s reassuring to meet people who made the same choice of major that I’ve made and who are employed. It’s inspiring, furthermore, to see the kinds of cool work they are doing (at Planned Parenthood and the ACLU, for example).

All of this talk about jobs does not negate the intangible benefits of a GSFS major. I strongly believe that my GSFS major allows me to take some of the best classes Oberlin has to offer. Certainly I am being exposed to a wider variety of topics and taking classes in more diverse fields than some other majors allow students to do. For these reasons I posit that GSFS is the major most in line with the liberal arts philosophy. I won’t be trained in any one technical field upon my graduation, but I will have received a broad and mind-opening education. And if I get hired, well, that will be a nice bonus.
By Malisa Hoak, GSFS Major
GSFS Major Representative, 2013-2014

Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies has been a major part of my life and will continue to be. GSFS issues are at work in my academic studies, activism, and career goals. Currently, I am researching the sexual persecution of women in the military. Rather than being viewed as comrades in arms and responsible adults, many women are viewed as weak, passive sexual objects who should not be fighting, which has made it hard for women to earn respect and acceptance. The military's longstanding hostility towards women and the viewing of women as sexual prey has led to the sexual persecution of servicewomen for generations. Recently there has been an increased interest in publicizing the horrors to which women are subject while serving in the military, but there is much more that needs to be done in order to hold servicemen and the military accountable for the rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment of servicewomen. This issue will continue to be at the forefront of my academic work at Oberlin and my activism in the future. As a queer athlete and aspiring women's basketball coach, fighting for LGBTQ athletes is another issue at the center of my activism. LGBTQ athletes face many challenges due to a heteronormative sports culture. I plan to fight to make sports, especially women's basketball, an inclusive space where all athletes feel comfortable competing. I look forward to tackling these issues and many other GSFS issues while at Oberlin and in my future career.

By Sophie Meade, Biology Major
GSFS Major Representative, 2013-2014

As a GSFS student whose life often feels taken over by Chem exams and pre-med requirements, I sometimes wonder whether my contribution to GSFS studies is legitimate. I question whether I can truly act as a representative of the GSFS major while so much of my current brainspace is absorbed by topics seemingly irrelevant to GSFS issues, with a career path unlike that of most GSFS researchers. But herein lie some troubling classifications that I believe both the fields of GSFS and various sciences must work to eradicate. Ultimately, I quell these doubts of mine with the strong belief that we need more people in science not only of different genders, races, and backgrounds but of different disciplines. It is not enough for those in the sciences to leave the work of equal opportunity and justice in their own field to those in GSFS and related fields. Nor is it enough for those in GSFS fields to expect the science community to independently meet the standards of epistemology and methodology that exist within their own. I know that this statement will be met with scorn by some from both fields, respectively, but I really believe that I can practice the scientific method, with its current methodological guidelines, using a feminist methodology. And this is exactly what I expect to do by tearing 50-60% of my attention away from Butler and Foucault for a few more years or so while I drill rudimentary science into my brain, so that ultimately I will have the “credentials” to be a clinician or a researcher who can produce meaningful and feminist scientific knowledge about, say, intersex conditions. Think that’s oxymoronic? Just give me 8-10 more years, and maybe it won’t seem so.
FACULTY UPDATES

ANN COOPER ALBRIGHT

A dancer and scholar, Ann Cooper Albright is Professor of Dance, and Chair of the Department of Dance at Oberlin College. She is founder and director of Girls in Motion an award winning afterschool program in the Oberlin City Public Schools -- now in its TENTH YEAR! -- and co-director of Accelerated Motion: Towards a New Dance Literacy, a National Endowment for the Arts-funded digital collection of materials about dance. Combining her interests in dancing and cultural theory, she is involved in teaching a variety of dance, performance studies and gender studies courses that seek to engage students in both practices and theories of the body. She is the author of Engaging Bodies: the Politics and Poetics of Corporeality (2013); Modern Gestures: Abraham Walkowitz Draws Isadora Duncan Dancing (2010); Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loie Fuller (2007); Choreographing Difference: the Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance (1997) and co-editor of Moving History/Dancing Cultures (2001) and Taken By Surprise: Improvisation in Dance and Mind (2003). The book, Encounters with Contact Improvisation (2010), is the product of one of her adventures in writing and dancing and writing and dancing and writing with others.

CRYSTAL BIRUK

Crystal Biruk is Assistant Professor of Anthropology. Her research centers on the ethics and politics of intervention in the global South—broadly, how the growing presence of foreign humanitarian, development, and scientific projects in sub-Saharan Africa reconfigures local social geographies, producing new kinds of status, mobility, expertise, and exclusions. She is also working on a project that examines the emergence of same-sex activism and identities in Malawi, with a focus on how global flows of resources intersect local LGBT landscapes. This year, she is teaching Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Culture Theory, and Medical Anthropology. Her teaching interests also include: global health, humanitarianism, science studies, and transnational sexualities.

PAM BROOKS

Pam Brooks is Associate Professor of Africana Studies. Her comparative treatment of Black women's resistance histories, Boycotts, Buses and Passes: Black Women's Resistance in the U.S. South and South Africa, was published by UMass Press in 2008. Among her women-centered courses that count toward the GSFS major, Ms. Brooks teaches African American Women's History -- a straightforward survey of Black women's experiences in the U. S. from enslavement to the present; and Black Feminist Thought: A Historical Perspective -- a theoretical consideration of U. S. Black women's rhetorical work and political activism.
Harry Hirsch, Professor of Politics, is writing a book about academic life, tentatively titled Office Hours, and is resting up after last year’s Year of the Queer lecture series.

Kate Jones-Smith

If You’re Not Part of the Solution, You’re Part of the Precipitate

Science—it’s supposed to be objective, but it’s not. We now have compendia of studies and experiments that demonstrate women in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) persistently suffer from discrimination and are judged more harshly than their male counterparts by their peers, inferiors, superiors, and even themselves. [1, 2] How should we address the issue of gender in science, where we are all at least nominally devoted to the ideal of objectivity? Why is it so hard for scientists, who are trained to detect bias and systematic errors, to regard the work of women scientists with equanimity? At the recent Oberlin faculty panel that was part of the Roots and STEM series, one student asked more succinctly, “How do you respond to people who say that identifying the role of gender whatsoever just worsens the problem?”

I find it useful to couch the issue scientifically. Suppose we assume that scientists and their contributions are judged in a manner that is independent of their gender. There are several hundred studies that falsify this hypothesis, some with statistical significance that would be foolish to try and refute. From the data, we can safely rule out the hypothesis of equal treatment. Most people—especially those scientists who fancy themselves as objective—would agree that the contributions of scientists should be judged independent of their gender. So, having demonstrated that there is a disparity, naturally the next question is: what can be done about it? Correlation is famously not causality, nor is it part of the solution.

One thing we can do is give students tools, information, and real-life examples pertaining to gender bias. As an undergraduate I thought gender-based disparity would come in some overt package. Although there are plenty of cases of blatant sexism and disparity, it is also important to identify the subtle, persistent, and insidious ways in which gender bias is propagated. In a well-known study [3], women scientists who were roughly three times more productive in their field were only ranked as competent as the least competent males in their cohort. To make this more relevant to undergraduates I use the metaphor of having to do three times as many homework assignments (perfectly) just to get a C- (or worse) in a class. A less spectacular display is word choice in letters of recommendation. Females are not described as “brilliant” or “creative” nearly as often as the males with whom they compete for positions [1]; most students are quite keen to know the impact this could have on their imminent career goals.

I think it can also be useful to address that we are all part of the problem. Both men and women rank women’s work as being of a lesser quality, and women suffer from “stereotype threat.” Females who are asked to specify their gender at the start of a math exam do worse than those who are not asked. If told that men have historically outperformed them at the onset of a math exam, women will live up to that expectation. Merely having a competent female proctor present
in the room is enough to improve girls’ performance on math exams! (See [1] for more on these examples.) But it isn’t necessary to be female to have a positive impact in the cause of gender equity—just a willingness to try to correct the disparity and a belief that gender does not determine whether someone is brilliant and creative. To that end we can all be part of the solution.

Kate Jones-Smith
Visiting Assistant Professor
Physics and Astronomy Department
Oberlin College

References

Margaret Kamitsuka
Margaret Kamitsuka, Director of GSFS and Associate Professor in the Religion Department, has served on the Advisory Council of the GSFS from its inception. She teaches courses at all levels on gender and religion and upper-level courses on methodologies in gender studies and religious studies. Her monograph, Feminist Theology and the Challenge of Difference, was published by Oxford University Press in 2007. Abstracts of the book’s chapters are available at Oxford Scholarship Online: http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/search/results/1. She was the editor of and contributor to The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity (Fortress Press, 2010). Her current research focuses on the anti-abortion rhetoric in conservative Roman Catholic and evangelical religious circles. She published, “Feminist Scholarship and Its Relevance for Political Engagement: The Test Case of Abortion in the U.S.,” Critical Issues in the Study of Religion and Gender 1, no. 1 (Fall 2011), http://www.religionandgender.org/index.php/rg/article/view/2. This essay appeared in the inaugural issue of Religion and Gender, the first refereed online international journal dedicated to the systematic study of gender and religion in an interdisciplinary perspective.

For Spring semester 2014, she will teach RELG 367–Theologies of Abortion, which explores a spectrum of theological approaches to abortion from Roe v. Wade to the present day.

Greggor Mattson
Greggor Mattson, Assistant Professor of Sociology, joined the GSFS Committee in 2009. He also serves on the Law and Society Program Committee and teaches courses on urban sociology, the sociology of sexuality, law and society, and seminars on alcohol and prostitution. He was awarded a Powers Travel grant to complete interviews and research for his book manuscript, Governing Loose Women: The Cultural Politics of European Prostitution Reform. The award funded travel to his field sites in Germany, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands in the summer of 2010. Professor Mattson's work has appeared in City & Community, Contexts, and the Annual Review of Sociology.
Patrick O’Connor is Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies and Comparative Literature, and chair of Hispanic Studies. His field is contemporary narrative, especially Latin American fiction and film, including queer theory perspectives. In 2004 he published *Latin American Literature and the Narratives of the Perverse: Paper Dolls and Spider Women* (Palgrave Macmillan Press), which looked at Freud and other sexologists’ stories about perversions, and how they were taken up and reworked by Latin American novelists including Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Manuel Puig. He has just coedited an anthology of essays entitled *Latin American Icons*, forthcoming from Vanderbilt University Press, an outgrowth of his GSFS course *Che, Frida, Pancho Villa, Evita: Latin American Icons*. He was part of the Year of the Queer faculty organizing committee, and in Spring 2013 he taught GSFS 205--Queer Beginnings 1990, where the class read closely the early texts of queer theory from around 1990, and read novels and watched movies from that moment (the birth of the New Queer Cinema) which also looked backwards to find (or invent) stories of origins.

Renee Romano, Associate Professor of History, Comparative American Studies and Africana Studies, studies 20th century U.S. race relations. She has just finished a new book, *A Narrow Justice: Civil Rights Trials And America’s Racial Reckoning*, which will be published by Harvard University Press in Fall 2014. She is also the author of *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Harvard University Press, 2003) and co-editor of *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (University of Georgia Press, 2006) and *Doing Recent History* (University of Georgia Press, 2012). This spring she is teaching a new class on the history of white racial identity in the United States.

My research and teaching interests include the 18th- and 19th-century novel, Romantic poetry, Irish and Scottish literature, the Scottish Enlightenment, nationalism in literature, and postcolonial theory. I am currently working on a manuscript on the centrality of the legal fiction of inheritance for the rise of the Scottish and Irish novel of the Romantic period.

Rebecca Whelan is Associate Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry. As an Assistant Professor, she served on the Gender and Women’s Studies (GAWS) program committee and participated in the reconfiguration of GAWS into the GSFS Institute. After a brief time away, Rebecca is delighted to be back with GSFS. Her current research—which is supported by the NIH and which relies profoundly on the contribution of Oberlin College undergraduates as collaborators—involves finding new ways to detect and treat ovarian cancer in its earliest, most treatable stages. She is particularly committed to mentoring and supporting students interested in the sciences and participated this fall in the GSFS-co-sponsored “Women in STEM” panel. In addition to teaching general, analytical, and bioanalytical chemistry, Rebecca offers private readings in Gender and Science.
GSFS 305 – Feminist Research Methodologies

Each fall semester GSFS 305—Feminist Research Methodologies is taught. It is a required course for the GSFS major and normally precedes the senior capstone project. This course is a place for GSFS majors to reflect deeply on the meaning and significance of their GSFS studies in light of their respective intellectual and activist journeys. In response to readings and discussions in this course, Sarah Cheshire (GSFS, Creative Writing; OC ’14) drafted this thoughtful open letter, which we share with the entire GSFS community. We hope it provokes equally thoughtful responses and conversations among us all. This letter can be found on the GSFS Facebook page as well. We welcome responses.

An Open Letter to the Oberlin Gender, Sexuality & Feminist Studies Department

I'm going to take a leap of faith and stray from the prompt of the assignment due in my Feminist Research Methodologies class to address an issue that has been of concern to me for quite some time in this class. This is the issue of language—of if and how the terminologies that we are often taught in theory-based gender classes have relevance in the context of our own lived experiences. Although I recognize the power that comes with having an arsenal of big words at my disposal, I often wonder if these words can be limiting in that they can often give privileged people permission to articulate Social Justice as a formula, mindlessly regurgitating terms such as “Heteronormative,” “Hegemony” and “Intersectionality” without deeply engaging with the material realities and lived experiences from which these terms were derived. I know many folks come into gender studies classrooms not from the position of researchers or passive observers, but as activists, as allies, and as people who inhabit bodies that have constantly been made to feel small by the language and the actions of others. I sometimes wonder why the academic papers of scholars with PhDs are given infinite space within classroom environment whereas, say, the poetry of Andrea Gibson or the initiatives that are being launched everyday by fellow university feminists (such as Know Your IX or FORCE) are not. I wonder what this says about the ways in which academia often privileges some fields of knowledge and some modes of expression over others. I would love to see the Oberlin GSFS department being more proactive in decentralizing rationality as the most legitimate form of academic expression. I think having space within the classroom environment for narrative sharing, as well as theory, could be a powerful way to bridge the gap between theory and lived experience. I would really like our academic space to be a place where we can feel safe bringing our hearts and identities (as well as minds and intellects) into discussions in order to come to a deeper sense of how we can go about enacting personal, interpersonal, and political change.

Yours with Respect,
Sarah Cheshire (GSFS, Creative Writing; OC ’14)
Alumni Updates

Gabrielle Lyse Brown ‘05

Gabrielle Lyse Brown is the Director of Diversity Pipeline Initiatives for the New York City Bar, where she leads the Association’s efforts to enhance diversity in the legal profession through developmental support for high school, college and law students of color who want to pursue a legal career. In this role, she creates, develops, and administers comprehensive programming that provides inner-city students with academic support and enrichment, professional and substantive skill development, networking/mentoring opportunities and exposure to the legal profession.

She is a member of the Executive Board of Directors of Practicing Attorneys for Law Students, Inc. (PALS), The Association for Legal Career Professionals (NALP), The Council of Urban Professionals (CUP), and the Bronx School of Law and Finance Advisory Board. She has spoken on numerous panels about professional readiness, mentoring, and developing diversity pipeline initiatives.

Gabrielle is a 2005 graduate of Oberlin College where she majored in English, Gender Studies, and Law & Society.

Karen Friedman ’78

While I am not technically a WOST/GAWS/GSFS alum, I suppose I am officially - I graduated in 1978, before the creation of the departments. Since there was no such area while I was a student, I created my own major in Women’s Studies (honestly, mostly to be able to take all the courses I wanted to take and make them count!). I’ve actually never sent Oberlin any updates, so figured this is as good an opportunity as any to do so. Thanks for your request.

I won’t fill in all the gaps of the intervening 35 years, but the upshot is that I pursued graduate school in one of only 2 (at the time) direct-entry Nurse Practitioner programs (that is, programs geared to folks with non-nursing undergraduate degrees), and in 1984 began practice as a Family Nurse Practitioner. Other than the 2+ years of graduate school (in NY), I’ve lived in the Boston area since graduating Oberlin in 1978, mostly in Cambridge. My career has allowed me the flexibility to work in ways that have been meaningful (for me, that means providing advocacy and voice to those who have been disenfranchised). In the earlier years, that flexibility included shifting positions w/different work hours, as I juggled raising 2 kids in a shared custody arrangement with their father. While I have worked in many different settings and in a variety of roles (though clinical work has been a constant), my clinical focus has been in adolescent health. And all of it has led me to the work I’ve been doing since 2009, on the Family Team of Boston Healthcare for the Homeless Program - all my work on the Family Team is in outreach, providing health care, support & advocacy to homeless families (while many families comprise single fathers or 2 parents, most are single women and children) living in state-funded family shelters and motels, and domestic violence shelters. I love what I do, and the way that I'm able to do it, despite the increasing bleakness of the landscape. Additionally, I serve as Board Chair for Found in Translation (www.found-in-translation.org), a wonderful young non-profit offering free training in medical interpreting (with many other common sense and workforce development supports) to homeless and low-income multilingual women. But by far, my proudest achievement has been being mom to 2 amazing kids - who are no longer kids at all, of course, but always will be to me.
VICTORIA GONZALEZ ’90

I am still living in San Diego with my family. My children are now 12, 10 and 7. I am an assistant professor at San Diego State University. I have two forthcoming articles. "The Alligator Woman's Tale: The Story of Nicaragua's 'first self-declared lesbian'" will be published by the Journal of Lesbian Studies in early 2014. Another article, titled "'Undemocratic Legacies: First-Wave Feminism and the Somocista Women’s Movement in Nicaragua, 1920s-1979" will be published by the Bulletin of Latin American Research (BLAR) in 2014. I am currently working on a book documenting 100 years of LGBT history in Nicaragua and on a number of other projects dealing with the U.S. Mexico border.

Dr. González-Rivera
Ph.D. in Latin American History

CATHRAEL HACKLER ’91

Cathrael has been living in Oakland, CA for 22 years. She works as a Sign Language Interpreter, has a wonderful 6-year-old son and tries to sing, do yoga and hike in her spare time.

JENNY MATKOFF-SANDLER ’07

In honor of her late grandparents, Jenny Sandler has recently taken on her mother’s maiden name, becoming Jenny Matkoff-Sandler. She is currently in her second year as a dual degree student at Widener University getting her masters in Social Work and Human Sexuality. Jenny is a student and teacher of mediation and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. She presents workshops on mindfulness and sexuality and gives private meditation instruction. Jenny also works part time as a consultant for small businesses in the sexuality and mental health fields. As part of her degree, she is an MSW intern with a local agency serving at-risk youth in Southeast Philadelphia, and is learning to adapt meditation and mindfulness for children and young adults. She lives with her partner in Philadelphia, PA and occasionally remembers having free time as an Oberlin student.
Programming and student fellowships in the new Institute for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies significantly rely on the contributions of alumni and friends. Such contributions of whatever amount facilitate the growth and vitality of gender, sexuality, and feminist studies at Oberlin College for majors and students throughout the college. We hope you can make such a contribution. The following URL allows you to do so directly and online: http://www.oberlin.edu/giving. When you reach this page, click the “Give Online” link on the left. Donations will be directed to the new GSFS Institute if Option “c. Other” is chosen and “GSFS Institute” is typed in the empty box to the right.

Thank you for your support. Your generous contributions enable us to schedule and sponsor events both on and off campus, benefiting the Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies majors as well as the entire student body at Oberlin College.