



SPARK!

A CENTER FOR WOMEN'S & GENDER STUDIES NEWSLETTER

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES
VOLUME 1

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA UPSTATE
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SPRING 2009

Bodies of Knowledge Symposium

In the spring of 2008, South Carolina Upstate hosted its 1st Annual Bodies of Knowledge Symposium. This joint project developed by Dr. Lisa Johnson, Director of the Center for Women's & Gender Studies, and Joyce Harrison of PFLAG Spartanburg was a huge success. With an audience of USC Upstate faculty, staff, and students, members of Spartanburg and surrounding communities, professors and students from local and regional colleges and universities, this event was one of the most well attended events of the 2007-2008 academic year. While it was certainly tough to measure up to the initial success of the Symposium, Dr. Johnson, along with a staff of volunteer student workers and a brain trust of representatives from across the disciplines, rose to the occasion with a line-up of speakers and topics that may well have surpassed the first year. Dr. York Bradshaw, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, opened the symposium by inviting the audience to broaden their horizons and think outside the

box. Kirk Read, a memoirist and performance artist, flew in from San Francisco to tell us how he learned to snap, and to teach the Spartans to snap with fierceness. Julia Serano, a San Francisco compatriot of Read's, drew on her positionality as a trans woman and as a biologist at Berkeley to reclaim femininity from the trash heap that western culture (including western feminism) often dumps it in. Serano suggested that femininity may not be any more artificial or superficial than masculinity, and she made a heartfelt effort to create a bridge between feminist knowledge and the many women who feel alienated from feminism because of their preference for gender-norm-conforming self presentation (the women who like being women and like wearing lipstick can still be feminists, Serano insists). After an earth-friendly vegetarian lasagna dinner, the symposium ended with Jennifer Baumgardner, who introduced the still embattled idea that bisexuals exist. She fielded questions about sexual fluidity with an elegance and level-headedness

that put the audience at ease. Steering committee member and Spanish professor, Dr. David Coberly, remarked that surely we could not improve on this event for 2010. We at the Center will let you decide . . .

SPEAKERS

- ✦ S. Bear Bergman
Butch is a Noun
- ✦ Robert McRuer
Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness & Disability
- ✦ Laura A. Harris
"Queer Black Feminism"
Femme: Feminists Lesbians & Bad Girls

NEW IN 2010

- ✦ Undergraduate Research in Gender and Sexuality Studies Solicited for Morning Paper Sessions.

SAVE THE DATE 3/19/10

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The Fine Arts Theater in Asheville recently featured *Wendy and Lucy* in its small two screen retro space, and I viewed it as a sort of sideline field trip while attending the bi-annual Queer Conference at UNC-A with a group of Women's and Gender Studies minors and Pride Upstate members. Led by a moving understated performance by Michelle Williams (typecast for too long by her role in the WB's series *Dawson's Creek* and more recently recognized for her breakout role in *Brokeback Mountain*, 2005), the film centers on Wendy, a young woman driving to Alaska with her beloved dog companion Lucy in hopes of gaining employment in a Bush II-era climate characterized by tough economic times, broken down cars, five-fingered discounts on dog food, and a quick tour of the county jail. Director Kelly Reichardt (*Old Joy*, 2006) offers a rich introspective portrait of a young woman on the outskirts

of society, struggling to make ends meet and maintain a firm sense of self in the homogenized dollar store world of present-day rural America, with patriarchal threats looming in the forms of heartless cops and city clerks and one particularly frightening man in the woods who seems to want to hurt Wendy but ultimately only robs her. Guided by the steady hand of Reichardt, who also co-wrote the screenplay with Jonathan Raymond, the film's narrative unravels with a deliberate meditative stillness throughout its 80-minute running time. Methodical and resourceful in its low-budget minimalist production, the film concentrates intently on the intimate journey of its central protagonist, even as the increasingly maudlin plot *Spark!* Assistant contrivance of Wendy's separation from the loving and lovable Lucy threatens to overwhelm it midway through, as the *girl on the road slash girl against*

nature slash girl against man's inhumanity to man (or girl) story turns into the far less compelling *girl loses dog* story. Yet, in the film's final moments, just as the attention of the plot seems to have drifted too far from Wendy's compelling internal conflicts over selfhood and daily subsistence, the camera closes in on Williams' sincere, tired eyes, wet with tears and bittersweet resolution, and the actress, in her most mature and fully realized work to date, reconnects the audience with the tragic soul of the character and the film itself.

The J Grade: B+

Wendy and Lucy is distributed by Oscilloscope Pictures and is rated R for language.

Jason Funderburk
Spark! Assistant Editor
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THE FIRE THIS TIME

Your art is your life.

Your life is your art.

As I approach the end of my third year as director of the Center for Women's and Gender Studies at USC Upstate, I am reflecting on the power of the stories we tell about our work lives. I could easily report on CWGS in 2008-2009 in terms of

a besiegement narrative, a phrase Alison Piepmeier, at College of Charleston, has used to describe the tendency of Women's Studies professors to talk about their work in the paranoid terms of being under attack or being at odds with the institution or with academia—or the world! However, this narrative covers up as much as

it reveals. It's true that in 2008-2009, the Center saw its final year of being funded by Student Affairs. The tight budget year led to a loss of one of our two adjuncts, cutting in half the labor that drives the Women's and Gender Studies presence in our general education curriculum. It's also true that the Advisory Board, a

longstanding support system for the Center, has ceased to meet.

But as these support systems fall away, new possibilities for coalition emerge and new horizons of success rise up with a force of energy that can reinvigorate this program and the campus it serves.

The 2008-2009 academic year has truly been the year of coalitions, as steering committees formed to make decisions about two of the most prominent programs sponsored by CWGS: the Bodies of Knowledge Symposium and the Reel Genders International Film Series. Both programs have been well attended, and both have stimulated organic alliances between CWGS and many other high-energy areas on campus, from the Office of Multicultural Affairs to the Center for International Studies, from the foreign language faculty to the biology faculty to the College of Business and Economics.

These programs will be offered again next year through a combination of external and internal grants to support diversity at Upstate.

In place of an Advisory Board, I will begin meeting with Affiliate Faculty in Women's and Gender Studies in order to build community among our widely dispersed interdisciplinary group. We have so much to share with each other, from the details of our text selections to the evolving shape of our pedagogy to the perennial questions of daily classroom management.

We have research projects!
We have conferences!
We have a wealth of knowledge about scholarly debates and networking opportunities!

All we need is a forum.
Bringing the Affiliate Faculty together will create this forum.
I look forward to seeing where AY 09-10 takes us.
Together.



Stay tuned for news of the first meeting.

If you are not yet affiliate faculty and want to offer a course that fits with the mission of CWGS, contact me. I'd love to hear more and I'm always on the clock—just a Blackberry message away :-)

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Spark! Editor
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CWGS is located in CASB 122,
and is available upon request
for group meetings & social events.
864-503-5758

Summer ✦ Fall 09 WGS Courses

✦ MAYMESTER

SWST 101
Intro to WGS
M-F 1:30-3:50
Dr. Tuttle Bell

✦ SUMMER I

SSOC 335
Sociology of Women
M-Th 6-8:15
Dr. Neary

✦ SUMMER II

SEGL 398/SWST 398
Women and Madness
M-F 11-1:15
Dr. Godfrey

✦ FALL 2009

SWST 355
U.S. Women's Movement
M 6-8:40
Dr. Tuttle Bell

SEGL 389
Gay and Lesbian Literature
TTH 9:25-10:40
Dr. Johnson

SEGL 398
19thC Afr-Am Women's Lives
MWF 10-10:50
Dr. O'Brien

SSOC 337
Gender and Society
MWF 9-9:50
Dr. Jennings



Spotlight On . . . Student Scholarship

While many students at USC Upstate were preparing for exams, getting those last few papers written, or catching up from all of the procrastination that took place earlier in the semester, students affiliated with the Center for Women's & Gender Studies geared up for a whirlwind conference season. During March and April, five WGS minors presented papers at local, regional, and national conferences, with generous funding from the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, Laura Puckett-Boler.

The first excursion was a quick trip to our flagship institution in Columbia on the weekend of March 19-21. Two extremely promising Upstate seniors, Lindsay Harris (English major, WGS minor) and Andrea Miller (IDS major, WGS concentration), joined Dr. Lisa Johnson on the opening panel of the biannual Feminist Epistemologies, Methodologies, Metaphysics, and Science Studies conference. Keynoting was the founding scholar of feminist epistemology, Dr. Sandra Harding. While Harding's work originates in the hard sciences, Harris and Miller drew on the concept of standpoint epistemology in the context of the social sciences and humanities. Their papers garnered them the Sister Spit Award for 2008-2009 for best feminist theory presentation by an Upstate student or faculty

member, and Miller took home the Emma Goldman award for Outstanding Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Major, while Harris took home the Lucy Stone Award for Outstanding Minor in Women's and Gender Studies.

Miller analyzed Toni Morrison's 1973 novel *Sula* and the contemporary HBO series *True Blood*, using these texts as vehicles through which to discuss the problems and possibilities of representing black female desire, and more specifically the open question in feminist narratology of how to bring a culturally suppressed narrative—such as black lesbian desire—into the realm of the visible. This project stems from a research paper produced by Miller for Johnson's course in Women Writers in Fall 2008. Miller has continued to flesh out this exciting work for her senior seminar project, synthesizing a rich mixture of theoretical frameworks.

Harris made an equally exciting inquiry into bisexual epistemology, reading against the grain of third wave feminist Jennifer Baumgardner's memoir of bisexuality *Look Both Ways*, asserting that the social sanctions against female speech about sexuality remains so fully intact that even an out bisexual and prominent feminist activist like Baumgardner writes in relatively indirect ways about alternative pair bonds. Harris has been exploring

representations of bisexuality in both her formal academic scholarship and her creative writing for over a year, following this thread through several courses in the WGS and literature curricula.

The second trip took student presenters and members of Pride Upstate to UNC Asheville for their conference on Queer Art, Queer Activism: The Politics of Possibility. The panel from USC Upstate presented papers on Queer Theory and contemporary media culture to a packed room. Seniors Adrienne "AJ" Jones (Non-Profit major) and Andrea Miller, and alumni Tatianna Hunt and Stacey Haney dazzled the audience with insightful readings of *Dirty Sexy Money*, *Transamerica*, *The L Word*, and *Dexter*, respectively. Upstate students Jason Funderburk, Treva Camp, Lindsay Harris, and Candace Lamb were among the audience.

A smaller group headed to Boone for a third conference weekend in a row to present papers at the Southeastern Women's Studies Association Conference. Tatianna Hunt continued her exploration of blaxploitation film history and representations of the black lesbian, and Andrea Miller mounted a Marxist critique of the Showtime series *Weeds*.

All in all, our students made a name for themselves, and for the campus, across the Carolinas.

If your students are presenting papers on WGS let us know and we'll share the spotlight!

GET FIRED UP FOR AN AMAZING 2009-2010!!!



→ REEL Genders International Film Series (keep in mind as you plan fall syllabi)

Keep an eye out for the bookmarks with dates in the CWGS!!

✓ L'Iceberg

✓ La Mala Educacion

✓ Together

✓ Once

✓ Beautiful Thing

✓ The Diving Bell and the Butterfly

→ Woman Up! Leadership Symposium

→ Tricia Rose

The Hip-Hop Wars & Black Noise

February 1, 2010

→ 3rd Annual Bodies of Knowledge Symposium

March 19, 2010

✓ S. Bear Bergman

Butch Is a Noun & The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You

✓ Laura A. Harris

Femme: Feminists, Lesbians, & Bad Girls & "Queer Black Feminism"

✓ Robert McRuer

Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness & Disability & The Queer Renaissance: Contemporary American Literature and the Reinvention of Lesbian and Gay Identities

→ SouthEastern Women's Studies Association Conference

University of South Carolina Columbia

March 25-27, 2010

We at the Center offer first class events on a shoestring budget.
Keep us in mind when the family fundraiser rolls around or donate anytime.

A free WGS sticker comes with every donation!!

EVERY DOLLAR HELPS!

Make Checks Payable to:

Carolina Piedmont Foundation w/ Women's Studies on the memo line.
Send all checks to Dr. Lisa Johnson, Center for Women's & Gender Studies,
800 University Way, Spartanburg, SC 29303

Meet the CWGS Staff

CWGS Director & *Spark!* Editor

Dr. Merri Lisa Johnson

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Dr. Johnson holds a Ph.D. in English from the State University of New York at Binghamton. She teaches Women's & Gender Studies, Feminist Theory, Feminist Cultural Studies, Black Feminist Theory, Gay & Lesbian Literature, Queer Theory, Gender & Autobiography, Women's Literature, and Creative Non-fiction workshops. Dr. Johnson is the Educational Liaison for Pride Upstate, a certified Safe Zones trainer, Co-founder of Upstate's National Coming Out Day Festival, and Founder and coordinator of SILHE (an outreach program for African American teen girls in Spartanburg County).

CWGS Adjunct Instructor & *Upstarts!* Advisor

Dr. Cara Tuttle Bell

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Dr. Tuttle Bell holds a J.D. from Vanderbilt University and a Master of Arts degree in Women's & Gender Studies from the University of Louisville. She teaches Women's & Gender Studies, Feminist Theory, Women & the Law, Women & Sexuality, Gender and Election, and U.S. Women's Movements. Dr. Bell is the faculty advisor to the student organization *Upstarts!* Dr. Bell is an active member of the National Organization for Women and previously served as the Legislative Issues Coordinator for its Louisville, KY chapter.

Upstarts! Executive Board member, LGBTQ Events Coordinator & Assistant Coordinator for the Bodies of Knowledge Symposium

Sarah Wilson

Sarah is a junior English major at USC Upstate with a minor in Women's & Gender Studies. She is from Union, South Carolina.

CWGS Operations Supervisor, Student Co-Coordinator for SAFE ZONES, & Vice-President of PRIDE Upstate

Adrienne (AJ) Jones

AJ is a senior from Greenville, SC and majors in Nonprofit Administration. She holds a B.A. in Mass Communications with an emphasis in Journalism from Winthrop University.

Upstarts! Executive Board member & Volunteer Feminist Education Coordinator for CWGS

Andrea Miller

Andrea is a senior at USC Upstate, where she majors in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Women's & Gender Studies. Originally from Dushore, Pennsylvania, Miller has lived in Greenville, SC for the past three years. She plans to attend graduate school in Women's & Gender Studies in the fall of 2010.

CWGS Student Assistant & SILHE Program Participant

Kyia Chandler

Kyia is from Anderson, SC. She is a sophomore Business major with an emphasis in accounting. She is also minoring in Non-Profit Administration. Kyia has worked in the center since August 2007.

Spark! Assistant Editor & CWGS Research Assistant

Stacey Haney

Stacey graduated from USC Upstate in December 2008 with a degree in Sociology. Stacey serves as the volunteer Research/Teaching Assistant to Dr. Lisa Johnson and Dr. Tuttle Bell. She will begin graduate studies in the Fall of 2009.