



Spring 2012 Volume XIX

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Director's Chair

We are making an impact. Our half-day symposium “Gender at the Lectern: Perceptions and Expectations” attracted over 70 faculty, staff, and students, plus a few faculty members from local institutions (see page 2). One outcome is a pair of initiatives from both Dedman College and the Provost’s Office to review the student questionnaires used for course evaluation, which a body of research indicates must be constructed carefully in order to minimize the effect of gender bias.

We worked with the Graduate Women’s Organization and the Central University Libraries to present a panel discussion on April 19 titled “Telling Our Story: 100 Years of Women at SMU.” We intend to create other events for SMU’s centennial. Without this effort, women’s contributions to and experience of SMU’s first century would have gone unchronicled.



Former directors of the WGS program, Ann Early and Sandy Tinkham, speaking at the event “Telling Our Story”

We distributed \$12,000 in Betty Maynard Scholarships to seniors Courtney Cross, Jordynn Prado, and Angele Williams. Jessica Noel received a Betty Maynard Award for her project titled “Women’s Basketball: A League of Their Own.” Her essay and its accompanying PowerPoint may be viewed on our website at <http://www.smu.edu/Dedman/Academics/Departments/WomGenStudies/Awards>.



Claire Renzetti

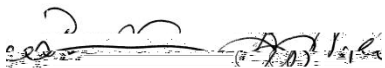
We co-sponsored a lecture by anthropologist Claire Renzetti (University of Kentucky), who explored the role of religiosity in domestic violence. She argued that religious orientations emphasizing justice and equality serve as a “protective” factor against intimate partner violence, while authoritarian forms of religion create greater risk. We also contributed funding to two student groups (SMU Women’s Interest Network and Spectrum), who brought speakers Robyn Ochs and Mia Mingus to talk about gender issues.

At this writing, we have more minors than we have had in recent memory: 25, plus two students pursuing the individualized major in Women’s and Gender Studies. 8 students have enrolled in the graduate certificate program. We helped send two WGS minors and one grad student to the National Women’s Studies Association conference last fall. (See pages 3-5.) We added course offerings in French women writers, Latin-American LGBT fiction and film, and feminism and pornography (see page 6). We are providing supervised teaching opportunities for two graduate

students each semester, who have been getting excellent reviews from the students in their classes.

As I said: we are making an impact.

I would like to thank my assistants Jessica Lott and Sammy Partida for all of their excellent help this year.

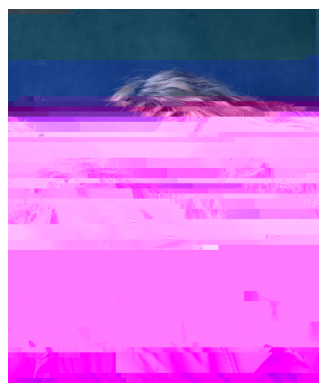


Beth Newman, Director, WGS

Does the Gender of the Instructor Matter?: Gender at the Lectern

by Sheri Kunovich, Department of Sociology

Building on the success of last year's symposium "Gender and the Professions in the Twenty-First Century Workplace," the Women's and Gender Studies Program co-hosted a second event focusing on women's experiences in the labor force. This symposium was a collaborative effort involving members of the President's Commission on the Status of Women, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and the Women's and Gender Studies Program. Titled "Gender at the Lectern," the symposium was organized around the central question: does the gender of the instructor matter?



Joey Sprague

In order to examine the question three panels comprised of faculty, graduate students and undergraduate students were assembled. The first panel considered the ways in which faculty and students both continue to hold gender based stereotypes and expectations. The second panel examined the use of standardized evaluations and the uphill battle often facing female faculty who do not meet students' expectations about appropriate gender behavior. The third panel explored the extent to which ideas about gender may or may not increase student incivility in the classroom.

One of the highlights of the symposium was when the keynote speaker, Dr. Joey Sprague of the University of Kansas, shared the findings from a large body of research about course evaluation. It consistently finds that students expect their male and female professors to behave in different ways. For example, while students give high scores to male instructors they deem "funny," they prefer female professors whom they find "fun"—that is, companionable, comfortable, and non-threatening. Similarly, female faculty members are expected to be nurturing, and those who impose limits on their availability to students may be penalized on course evaluations far more than their male colleagues are.

The symposium was well attended by faculty, staff, students, and university administrators—including Associate Provost Linda Eads, who participated as a panelist. The event provided multiple opportunities for discussion, and has made an impact: at least one dean will convene a committee next year to review and overhaul its standardized course evaluation form in light of Dr. Sprague's analysis and remarks.



News from the National Women's Studies Association Conference

This year the Graduate Women's Organization secured funding in partial support of four students' travel to the National Women's Studies Association Conference. The Women's and Gender Studies Program and the Women's Center volunteered to supplement the funds. Three students attended, and they report on their experiences on the next two pages.

social norms. For example, it reaffirms the importance to women of popularity with men and the centrality of

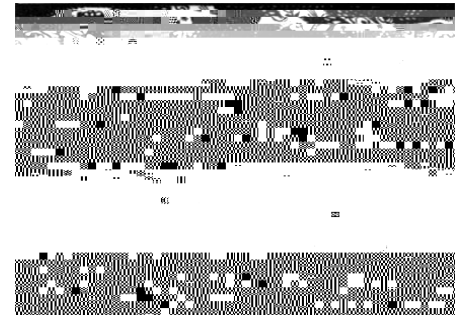


and witchcraft. I was taken aback at first to hear the older text of a familiar fairy tale being analyzed as the sexual exploration of a seemingly innocent girl.

The second panelist explored the progression of a young girl from innocence to sexual awakening in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. She revealed the story of temptation and sexual corruption beneath the children's story

about a young girl and her sister. Not only is one girl physically attacked for taking the "forbidden fruit," but her relationship with her own sister is analyzed as erotic. I was surprised by the fact that it was actually a children's tale, and intrigued by the message it sent to anyone straying from the path of innocence and chastity.

The last panelist tackled the traditionally male-dominated genre of science fiction film, pointing out the "damsel in distress" and "sex kitten" roles women inhabit in these films. He showed how the early 1990s redefined the roles of motherhood by transforming the very ideas of what "traditional" mothers did. Women in these films do not stay at home and cook. They are not damsels in distress waiting for someone else to save the day. Women like Ripley in *Aliens* take control and take action. Like Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2*, they are maternal figures who express a motherhood not confined to the home, but expanding through the dark recesses of space.



From Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862)

Attending the NWSA Conference benefitted me in ways that I cannot begin to explain. The panels have piqued my research interests and the conference provided me with an opportunity to interact with others who are motivated to promote women's and gender issues on college campuses and in the rest of society.

Amber Stubblefield, a member of the Women's and Gender Studies Council and winner of this year's Ann Early Award, graduates in May.



Georgia and the Virginitude Institute

by Katrina Myers '10

During the past two years, I had the opportunity to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer in the country of Georgia, which is located in Eastern Europe. There I worked as a schoolteacher and lived in a tiny, homogenous Georgian village in the Kakheti region.

During my first month in Georgia, a huge explosion erupted in my house. Only barely able to comprehend basic Georgian phrases, I caught onto the phrase *tsudi gogo* which means "bad girl," a label that you do not want to attain and is usually not good even to hear. Confused, I asked my seventeen-year-old host sister, who

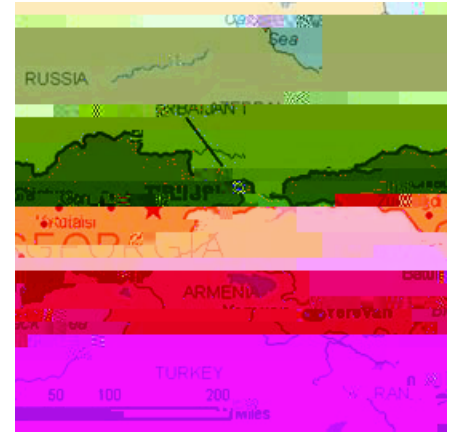
spoke some English, to explain. In a conversation of broken Georgian and English she told me that her mom was mad and was saying she was a *tsudi gogo* because she and her female friend had been out walking with one of her male classmates. When I asked her why this was a problem, she told me that in Georgia she was not allowed to do this, because "here, girls have to be..." She paused and grabbed the Georgian-English dictionary, "Girls have to be... virgins." When I inquired why, she gave me a version of "because the Bible tells me so."

A year after that initial, but certainly not only, conversation about sex and virginity in Georgian culture, an article was published titled "The Virginitude Institute: Sex and the Georgian Woman." It describes the "The Virginitude Institute" as a jesting name that refers to the cultural taboo on sex before marriage for Georgian women. According to this ideal, women should not want sex, think about sex or engage in sex. If a woman does have sex before marriage and others find out about it, she will become an outcast in her community, a *tsudi gogo*, destined to spinsterhood.

In contrast, Georgian men are encouraged and even expected to have sex at an early age. Of course, as the women

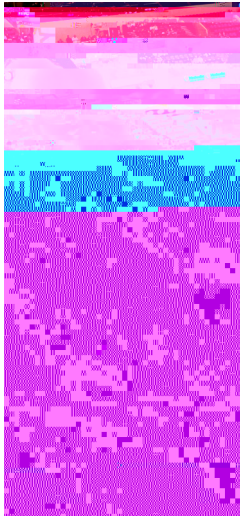
are not allowed to have sex, the men often visit prostitutes. It is even a rite of passage for a boy to be taken to his first *Natasha* (prostitute).

This culture of female abstinence prompts many Georgians to marry young. Marriage becomes the necessary license for sex, and many young Georgians



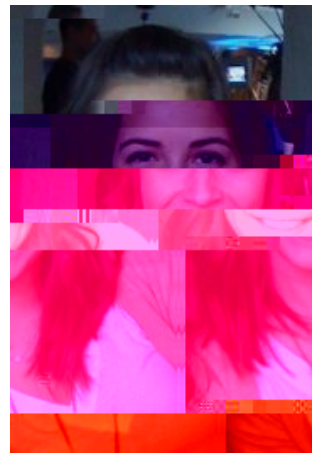
Professor Heffernan's course engages with the vexed questions that these films and images raise, and complicates the idea that there is one pornography, which is inherently degrading to women. When members of the WGS Council offered constructive criticism of his syllabus, he promptly revised it. A strong majority ultimately voted to accept the course for credit towards the WGS minor, conscious that students will see pornography one way or another—most already have—and persuaded that a responsible Women's and Gender Studies program should offer intellectual tools for thinking critically about what they see.

News about Students and Alums



Alexander B. ..., '11, moved to Italy to stay with his mother and younger brothers while his father went on a six month deployment. He calls this the "gap year" that he didn't get to take between high school and college, and he's using it to work on some writing projects before pursuing a graduate degree, probably in Information Science.

For graduating senior **J ...**



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