

Department of Women's Studies

Fall 2007

Edited by Kim Burrow and Katie Aase



Notes From the Chair

Maria Bevacqua



Student papers are pouring in. Student emails, with questions about their papers and requests for advising, steadily fill the inbox. The textbook order for Spring semester is long overdue. The curriculum proposal deadline is tomorrow.

The page proofs are due to the publisher post haste. It must be November.

The life of a faculty member is an odd mixture of the predictable and the chaotic. We grow to learn and even appreciate the rhythm of the academic year, but the shape and form of that rhythm can vary tremendously. The beauty of it all is that sense of accomplishment and closure that comes with the end of the semester—the final papers, the commencement ceremony, the celebrations. Then a break that's shorter than you think because of those syllabi you have to write, the conference you're traveling to, and that book order you delayed too long, then it starts all over again.

We have an added dimension in Women's Studies that makes our semesters—and our lives—more chaotic, and more exciting: the activism factor. An activist sensibility is what brought most of us, faculty and students, to Women's Studies in the first place, and it permeates all that we do—in the classroom, in our research, and in the streets. So it was incredibly energizing to bring Dorothy Allison to Mankato as the fourth Carol Ortman Perkins lecturer. How refreshing it was to interact with a highly engaged feminist author who shares our values, and who

also struggles to balance work deadlines, travel, and home life with her cherished activist commitments. Everyone who came into contact with her—through the Reading Dorothy Allison workshop, her lecture, or face-to-face at the book signing reception—could not help but be captivated by her energy, sincerity, and sense of humor.

Activism is taking a number of new forms in our department this semester. Last year, we went through a challenging process of converting our undergraduate curriculum from mostly 3-credit courses to mostly 4-credit courses. We did so without adding an extra hour of classroom time to each course. Instead, students now spend the 4th hour in "lab." Our faculty have gotten very creative in the types of labs we're offering—from consciousness-raising groups to service learning to applied research to activism. All of this is in an effort to give students credit for the active learning projects we value and to take seriously our commitment to bridging theory and practice.

Another new effort in the department is our recent work with the University's Integrated Marketing Team to bring a feminist facelift to our published images—both in print and online. These updates will help us articulate the relevance of Women's Studies learning to our students and our community, and we hope to increase enrollments in our general education classes and in the major and graduate programs. Keep an eye out for our new look next semester!

And so, as we continue to flow between structure and chaos, we welcome a new cohort of graduate students (Katie Aase, Dave Buckley, Evangeline Simmons, Jessica Martínez, Erica Carnes) and a new faculty member Helen Crump, Pre-Doctoral Fellow and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota). We are grateful for the positive energy they bring to our department.

Table of Contents

Notes from the Chair	1	New Pre-Doctoral Fellow	4-5
Carol Ann Perkins Lectureship	2	Feminism in Action Pro Choice Rally	5
Women and Spirituality: Marge Piercy	2-3	Thirty Years of Being a Leader: The LGBT Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato	6
Women's Studies Contingent at South Central Minnesota Pridefest	3	Women's Studies Alumna Jude Nutter Wins Minnesota Book Award	6
Women's Studies, The Coffee Hag, Roots and Community	4	Pledge Form	7

Carol Perkins Lectureship - by Katie Aase

Dorothy Allison & Carol Perkins



Dorothy Allison was the speaker at the fourth annual Carol Ortman Perkins lecture on October 16, 2007. The Carol Ortman Perkins Lectureship was started in honor of the former Chair of the department. Dorothy Allison is an award-winning author of "Bastard Out of Carolina". Most recently, she won the 2007 Robert Penn Warren award for fiction.

Allison generously offered many unique opportunities for the community to interact with her. Early in the day, she facilitated a writing workshop. That evening, Allison shared with the campus community her life story and growth into feminism, which concluded with a reception.

Born out of wedlock to a single, teenage mother (who supported her family as a waitress), Allison fought to escape her family's way of life. As Allison states, "I did not want to become my aunts. I did not want to have eleven children, and beat them. I didn't want to be a waitress." She also related to the audience how her mother told her that she would go to college. Her mother would put her tips in a mason jar on her dresser, an attempt to save for Allison's future education. Unfortunately, the jar was frequently emptied when unexpected expenses would come up.

Despite Allison's hardships while growing up, she graduated from Florida Presbyterian College, the first in her family to do so. While at college, she related how she felt determined to be "respectable." This included her attempts to hide her class background from her friends and classmates.

Allison also shared her resistance to feminism. She stated that she avoided consciousness-raising groups on campus, afraid

she would be recognized as a "baby dyke." Furthermore, Allison said she felt that she was "the only Baptist lesbian on the planet." It was by accident, therefore, that she arrived at her first consciousness-raising group. She had come expecting to attend a meeting for a magazine, but had gotten the day wrong. It was this fateful mistake that brought her to feminism. That afternoon another woman, with whom Allison was sure she had nothing in common, shared her story of the incest and sexual abuse that she suffered at the hands of her father. Allison had a similar childhood experience, and suddenly related to this woman. It was at this point that she realized her connection to the women's movement: "It did not need me, but I needed it."

Allison spoke with passion, at times humorously, and at other times full of pain. Her audience was riveted and gave her a standing ovation. After her talk, she met with individuals and signed copies of her books. She had a way of putting people at ease. It felt easy to sit across from her as she signed your book, making small talk and double-checking the spelling of your name.

Dorothy Allison is remarkable, not only as a writer, but as a person. She has done and overcome amazing things in her life. Despite her fame, she is down-to-earth with a wonderful sense of humor. Minnesota State University Mankato's campus was very fortunate to have the opportunity to hear her speak, thanks to the Carol Ortman Perkins Lectureship.

Women and Spirituality: Marge Piercy by Kim Burrow



Marge Piercy

This year's Women and Spirituality conference featured novelist and poet Marge Piercy on October 13-14. Piercy is the author of seventeen novels and seventeen books of poetry. She is known for her classic feminist sci-fi novel, "Woman on the Edge of Time". At a reception at Maria Bevacqua and Jessica Flatequal's house, Piercy talked about her love for her eight cats, which was evident when Maria and Jessica's cat refused to leave Piercy's side the entire evening. Piercy's memoir is aptly titled "Sleeping With Cats".

The next morning, Piercy spoke at the 26th annual Women and Spirituality conference. As a Jewish feminist,

Piercy brought a unique perspective to the conference. She emphasized the necessity of taking traditional religion and reconstructing it to include those who have been historically excluded, such as women and LGBT people. Piercy suggested, "We can reshape spiritual practices for our values."

To illustrate this point, Piercy shared her personal experience with reshaping her own spirituality. For example, after many years of distance from Judaism, she returned to it after her mother died. She began to value certain facets of Judaism relevant to her perspective on spirituality. Piercy eventually learned Hebrew and worked to reshape Judaism for herself so that it offered space for her experiences as a woman and her values as a feminist.

In addition to her emphasis on the lived experiences of spirituality, Piercy discussed the importance of texts and women authors' ability to write about hope. She talked about women writers' investment in the idea of feminist utopia, where there is community and unity among women. As Piercy suggested, women's interest in feminist utopia stems from our "need to create [a perfect women's community] out of hunger and desire," in which we "try to transcend the present."

For Piercy, not only was utopia central to women's visions, experiences, and ability to transcend, but so was the prayer poem. She emphasized prayer poetry as healing for women. Piercy incorporated much of her own prayer poetry in her keynote in a beautiful, artistic, and powerful way that engaged the spirituality of the audience.

She closed with the sentiment that what is needed to be free is the freedom to choose: how to live, what to do with our bodies, and in what ways we can love.

Women's Studies Contingent at South Central Minnesota Pridefest Kim Burrow



Kim Burrow

Pridefest officially started the evening of September 7 at Pub 500 with a Queeraoke night. Pridefest committee members collectively performed "I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar." The empowering and fun spirit that began with Queeraoke set the mood

for the subsequent Pridefest events.

The next morning, the first-ever Women's Studies contingent marched in the second Pridefest Parade in Mankato history, proudly carrying a sign announcing "Women's Studies: Working For Liberation Since 1970."

The parade kicked off a day full of Pridefest events. As a relatively new component of Pridefest, the parade drew a large audience and showcased a wide variety of queer affiliated and allied groups. Jessica Flatequal, co-chair of Pridefest, said "It's really amazing, especially as a Mankato native, to watch a hundred plus queers and allies march down Riverfront Drive armed with signs and rainbows. It gives me chills to see my community marching together and chanting together.... For the moment everything seems right, and fair, and just."

"Dykes on Bikes" proudly rode as a contingent of lesbian motorcycle enthusiasts. Chair of the Women's Studies Department and co-chair of Pridefest Maria Bevacqua, along with fellow co-chair Jessica Flatequal, rode in a convertible covered with rainbow flags. The First Congregational United Church of Christ had a float full of children waving flags. Even animals were in the parade, such as my dog Jasper, who pranced happily with a rainbow flag scarf.

As a member of the Women's Studies contingent, I felt we were keeping the spirit of feminist/queer activism alive, as the Women's Studies department has a long history of connecting with LGBT issues and providing LGBT positive curriculum.

The rest of the day included a festival in Sibley Park and an evening Pride Dance at the VFW. Highlights of the festival included a drag show featuring both drag king and drag queen performances. Local bands also played, including the popular Twin Cities all-women punk band Sick of Sarah. Sister Gin, an acoustic group featuring singer-guitarist and Women's Studies alumna Jenn Melby, closed the festival.

This year's festival introduced a new feature: the beer tent. As you may have guessed, this was a welcome addition for many festival participants. A huge crowd enjoyed the evening of dancing and fellowship in the name of LGBT Pride.

Women's Studies, The Coffee Hag, Roots and Community

by Christal Lustig

Christal Lustig



What does the Women's Studies department have to do with coffee? You might be surprised. The Coffee Hag (popularly known as "The Hag") has recently gone back to its feminist roots. I had the opportunity to interview one of the original owners of The Coffee Hag and Women's Studies alumna Lisa Coons, as well as the current owner and alumna, Jenn Melby. During these interviews, I learned that the history of The Hag is as rich and interdisciplinary as most Women's Studies curricula.

Lisa Coons began the Graduate Program in Women's Studies in the spring of 1990. Two years later, she and her partner, Patty Ruskey, became not only the first coffee house owners, but also the first feminist and lesbian-identified business owners in Mankato. Coons credits her opening of the Coffee Hag to her women's studies

background and the program's focus on activism. They opened the Hag with the intention of providing a late night alternative hang out spot for students and community members.

As Coons affirms, the Coffee Hag is a feminist establishment. "When we opened it, every decision we made was informed by feminism. The music [we] played was multicultural, the imagery [we] used, our anti-racism commitment. We had a variety of alternative newspapers to provide a slice of diversity in Mankato, which was less diverse back then. We were much less concerned with the bottom line and more concerned about the community."

Coons and Ruskey also chose to sell organic and fair trade products as soon as they were available in Mankato. When one of the companies that the Hag bought tea from was sold to Starbucks, they chose to stop carrying the tea. Coons states that this was a decision based on an understanding and critique of capitalism. The Hag was also smoke-free, which was anything but the norm in 1992. The health of customers and employees was imperative. Coons explains that the Hag was a "green business" before it had become a catch phrase. They recycled, even though that lost them money. Coons states, "For us from the get-go, it [the environmental issue] was important in the big picture. We wanted to do what was best for the community. That came from the Women's Studies program."

Jenn Melby, current owner of The Hag, began her undergraduate work in Women's Studies and Sociology in 1992. She left abruptly in 1995 because, as she describes, "life happens," and later returned and graduated in the spring of 2007. Melby also worked at The Hag while earning her Bachelor's degree. Melby asserts the Hag, the University Women's Studies Department, and the community were "always connected." One of Melby's main goals for The Hag is to "rebuild that connection to the feminist community again." Melby states her belief that "The Hag is about community and activism renews Coons' feminist vision for The Hag. We're open to everyone. We're there to support many different functions. It's a safe place to be."

Comparing Coons' and Melby's experiences as LGBT-identified business owners reveals ways in which Mankato has changed in the last fifteen years. As Coons confides, "Homophobia was much more evident in 1992. It prevented people from coming through the door, but as soon as they did, they fell in love with [The Hag]. We didn't want it to be an exclusive place. It evolved from a place where people looked at us with suspicion to where they felt comfortable. It became less a lesbian business and more a community asset."

Melby expresses similar sentiments, "For me, it's a little easier because Lisa and her partner made it a little bit easier. In the six years I worked at The Hag before, I learned how to be comfortable in my own skin. [Lisa and Patty] cleared the way for me. The community is a different place now, and while there are still negative things that happen, it's a lot less than it was fifteen years ago. I don't pretend—I'm very open. We are all teachers just by being who we are."



helen crump

New Pre-Doctoral Fellow - by Katie Aase

helen crump (who chooses not to capitalize her name because she states that she "is a work in progress") is the first Women's Studies department Pre-Doctoral Fellow. She is currently teaching WOST 110, Introduction to Women's Studies, a Cultural Diversity core course, and will be teaching it again in the spring along with WOST 251 Coming of Age: Gender and Culture.

helen is from Jackson, Mississippi and received her Bachelor's in English Education from Jackson State University. Originally, her career goals involved teaching high school English. During her undergraduate years, though, her focus shifted to the college

classroom. She decided that the post-secondary education environment would provide more flexibility and engagement with various subjects and literary texts.

She then went on to receive her Master of Arts in English with a Women's Studies graduate certificate. It was during her Master's work that she was drawn more towards pursuing Women's Studies, specifically women's narratives. Subsequently, she was accepted to the University of Minnesota's Feminist Studies Ph.D. program, where she is currently completing her dissertation.

She came to Minnesota State University through connections she had made at Minnesota State Colleges and University Women's Studies Conference. It was here that she met the Minnesota State University Mankato's Women's Studies Department faculty. At the end of the Spring 2007, Dr. Susan Freeman contacted her about a fellowship opportunity with Minnesota State University, Mankato. helen applied, looking forward to a new teaching and learning experience.

helen's doctoral thesis is a literary analysis of Black women's writings on gender identities within the African Diaspora. Her research includes analyzing the particular way in which authors engage in a dispersive narrative structure to theorize about Black women's identity. Her other research interests involve women of color fiction, place, migration, maternal, and quest narratives. In the future, she hopes to engage scholarship on black queer identities. helen is continuing to write her dissertation as she teaches courses for the Women's Studies department. She is a valuable asset to the department, with her unique perspective on Black women's experiences and empowerment.



Katie Bowman

Feminism in Action Pro-Choice Rally - by Katie Bowman

On the morning of September 8th, I walked from a faraway parking lot to my first class in Morris Hall, only to discover an irritating array of boisterous anti-choice activists waving obscene signs in my face. They consisted largely of middle-aged and older white men, who I later found out, represented the anti-choice group Missionaries to the Pre-Born.

As I passed one of them, waving his sign with a bloodied fetus magnified about fifty times its original size, the protester shoved some literature entitled "The American Holocaust Photo Display" at me. It included some "facts" about the evils of Planned Parenthood (with statistics from the 1960s) and some information referring to the "oppressed people-group" of fetuses. I was repulsed by the exaggerated imagery the Missionaries used, most of which was clearly indicative of third-trimester abortion—a rarity—and I was offended by their nearly all-male, all-white crew who felt it was appropriate to assault students, like me, on their way to class. I knew it was time for Feminism in Action to take to the streets.

Feminism in Action, a student group co-founded by Kim Burrow and me in Fall 2006, called a meeting the next Thursday to discuss some of the implications of the anti-choice activism that occurred. We also discussed implementing a plan of action to show the strength of the pro-choice majority on our campus. We talked about the problematic tactics used by Missionaries to the Pre-born, including their male-dominated focus; their lack of discussion about women's bodies; the in-your-face assaults on students; and their literature that not only utilized grotesque images, but also blatantly insulted Islam, LGBT people, and Jewish people, with their comparison of abortion to the Holocaust.

We decided that in order to have an effective and inclusive pro-choice event we would have to be more positive in our literature and signs. We did not want to be aggravators, but instead to demonstrate support for women's choices and show that we trust women with their bodies. We agreed it would be important to emphasize women's voices, rather than allow for men to be the primary organizers, leaders, and speakers. We were determined to hold an event that would be informed by our feminist values and our collective voices. Our goal was to offer an event that would ultimately be more affirming for students.

On October 9, we put on our matching Feminism in Action t-shirts, which read, "My mind, my body, my choice," packed up about thirty signs with various pro-choice and pro-woman slogans on them, along with a load of NARAL literature (Pro-Choice America), and marched out to the campus mall to rally for choice. We rallied from 11:00 am until 2:00 pm. Supporters came and went, and we enjoyed the company of about twenty feminist comrades as we handed out condoms to passersby and shouted exciting words of pro-choice encouragement to each other and to students. Oddly, we met with almost zero controversy; perhaps it was apathy, or perhaps it was our non-threatening organizational strategy that kept dissenters from feeling inclined to confront us. In any case, the experience proved to be a positive one, and confirmed our conviction that pro-choice is the majority!

Thirty Years of Being a Leader: LGBT Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato

by Dave Buckley

Dave Buckley



I remember finally working up the courage to take that first step into the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Center (LGBTC) a couple years ago. That first Team MSQ (Minnesota State Queers) meeting was full of vibrant, motivated, and passionate people trying to create change on campus. I was all but speechless at all of these people who were not only open about being queer, but happy and proud.

It was an amazing experience that forever changed the way I lived my life. I started hanging flyers and going to meetings and eventually ended up working for Jessica Flatequal, the center's Director. This is how I ended up being in the middle of the thirtieth anniversary celebration during the 2006-2007 school year.

The big anniversary started with great news for the LGBTC and Minnesota State University, Mankato. The University had been named

one of the top one hundred LGBT friendly schools according to "The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students". Of course this achievement was not a short progress. It started with Jim Chalgren back in 1977 and has continued on through many leaders, activists, and students, before finally obtaining a full time LGBTC coordinator, Jessica Flatequal, in 2004.

The 30th anniversary was celebrated at a dinner on April 17, 2007, which the LGBTC hosted for the leaders and allies of the LGBTC over the years. Jessica Giordani and Sidney Smith, Women's Studies alums and former LGBTC graduate assistants, spoke about their experiences as queer leaders on campus. Attendees also viewed a short documentary that celebrated the activism and achievements of the LGBTC. The film included queers and queer allies wishing the center a "Happy Birthday." The film was uplifting and passionate; it brought many people to tears. You can view the video at www.mnsu.edu/lgbtc

The year continued on with amazing events like Coming Out Week, World AIDS Day, and Eliminate Hate Week. The big finale was having comedian Margaret Cho perform to a packed house.

This year, the thirty-first anniversary, has marked further change and growth. The LGBTC has moved out of the Student Leadership Development and Service Learning (SLD&SL) office and has become an office of its own. I am excited to find out at how the LGBTC will continue its mission of education and activism in the next thirty years.

Women's Studies Alumna Jude Nutter Wins Minnesota Book Award

by Katie Aase

Jude Nutter, a graduate from the Women's Studies master's program, just released a new book of poetry, "The Curator of Silence". "The Curator of Silence" won the Ernest Sandeen Prize from the University of Notre Dame as well as the 2007 Minnesota Book Award for Poetry.

"The Curator of Silence" is an engaging book of poetry. Nutter tends towards long poems with un-metered stanzas that create a unique and lyrical flow of words. She has a knack for vivid mental imagery without engaging in over-flowery language.

Nutter has also authored "Pictures of an Afterlife" as well as contributed to several anthologies. She is currently working as a Loft Master Track advisor at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. Nutter expressed that she lives by Raymond Carver's maxim, "Use it up, don't save anything for later."

Nutter is currently working on a third collection of poetry titled "I Wish I Had a Heart Like Yours, Walt Whitman". Look for her at the Loft in downtown Minneapolis and keep your eyes open for her next book. The entire Women's Studies Department congratulates Jude on her impressive accomplishments.

Pledge Form

Please consider making a donation to Women's Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato

Women's Studies needs your support! We have numerous fundraising efforts underway, and with your help we can meet our goals. One effort is to raise funds for Women's Studies students to attend the National Women's Studies Association conference in Cincinnati, Ohio this June. Another effort is to support the Carol Ortman Perkins Lectureship, which invites lecturers to campus based on their contributions to feminist scholarship and their ability to think creatively about

connections between theory and practice. Finally, you can support the department's general foundation account, which helps us fund other student travel and purchase educational DVDs and other instructional supports. You can be part of this effort by using the pledge form below. Any amount is appreciated with any of these efforts. You can help Women's Studies fulfill out mission of promoting interdisciplinary feminist teaching, learning and research. Thank you!

Pledge Form

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