

## Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program

Newsletter *Volume 10, Spring 2012*

704 Commonwealth Ave., Suite 101

Boston, MA 02215

[www.bu.edu/wgs](http://www.bu.edu/wgs)

[wgs@bu.edu](mailto:wgs@bu.edu)



### WGS first annual riverboat cruise on the Charles River

On a spectacularly beautiful afternoon, WGS students and faculty began the academic year with a boat cruise on the Charles River. Informal conversations took place, lemonade was sipped, and landmarks of interest from the perspective of women's, gender, & sexuality studies were pointed out. We look forward to making this an annual event for the program.





Zahra Noorbakhsh performs her one-woman show

## ALL ATHEISTS ARE MUSLIM



From Comedy Central's *Live at Gotham*

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, The Center for the Humanities,  
and African American Studies present

## ERIN JUDGE

Performing her standup act



Thursday  
Dec 1st  
5:30pm  
SAR 102  
635 Comm.Ave.

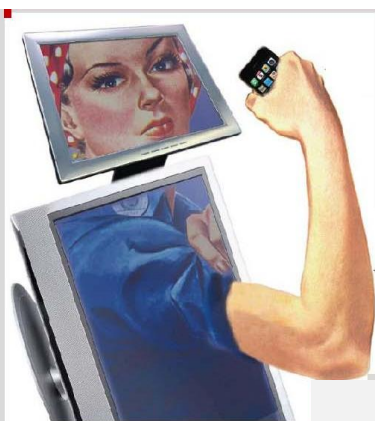
Erin's edgy comedy pokes fun at sexuality,  
politics, pop culture and anything else the  
universe throws at her

Check her out at [jokes.com](http://jokes.com)  
and join us

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This event is free and open to the public. Reception to follow at the  
WGS Sitting Room 704 Commonwealth Ave., Suite 102. For further  
info, email Prof. Gottfried WGS [gottfried@bu.edu](mailto:gottfried@bu.edu)

Erin Judge performed her hilarious feminist stand-up act, then responded thoughtfully to audience questions about the whole process of "doing comedy." Zahra Noorbakhsh's one-woman show, "All Atheists are Muslim," wowed everyone with its comic, yet loving evocation of her family and their reaction to her relationship with her non-Muslim lover. The performance was offered in conjunction with the lecture series / conference, "Muslim Women and the Challenge of Authority."



# MISS REPRESENTATION



After screening the acclaimed documentary *Miss Representation*, a panel of speakers including WGS faculty member Barbara Gottfried and COM professor John Carroll responded to questions from an audience of over 200, making for a most stimulating evening.



After a year and a half of planning we launched our new two-semester gateway course for the WGS minor: **WS 101/102 Gender & Sexuality: An Interdisciplinary Introduction**. We believe that the course breaks new ground nationally, particularly by integrating natural science approaches and faculty into the course.

## WS101 / WS102 GENDER AND SEXUALITY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INTRODUCTION

FALL 2011 MWF 9-10 AM  
SPRING 2012 MWF 12-1 PM

### FACULTY

DEBORAH BELLE (Psychology) debbelle@bu.edu

CHERYL KNOTT (Anthropology) knott@bu.edu

SUZANNE O'BRIEN (History) sgobrien@bu.edu

CARRIE PRESTON (English) cpresto@bu.edu

KEITH VINCENT (MLCL) kvincent@bu.edu

KAREN WARKENTIN (Biology) kwarken@bu.edu

### NATURE VS. NURTURE?

#### IS IT BIOLOGY OR SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION?

Discussions of gender and sexuality or the sources of masculinity and femininity often become polarized. In this class, we discard the either/or dichotomy to explore gender and sexuality from the perspectives of natural science, social science, and the humanities. We will ask how our biological bodies, social and cultural experiences, AND imaginative constructions effect our understanding of what it means to be men and women.

WS 101 focuses on the origins, diversity, and expression of gendered and sexed individuals. Topics include the evolutionary origin of sexes; evolution, development, and social construction of sex differences; sexual differences, similarities and diversity in bodies, brains, behavior, and artistic and intellectual expressions.

WS 102 considers communities and institutions. Topics include human reproductive biology; evolutionary, historical and cross-cultural analyses of patriarchy and sexual violence, families and parenting; the social construction of gender and sexual selection in humans; evolutionary medicine; and the relationship of academic research to social activism.

Readings will be diverse, including research reports and scholarly essays in natural and social sciences (biology, anthropology, archaeology, psychology, sociology), scholarly works in the humanities (literature, history, philosophy, religion), and creative works (novels, plays, poetry and films).

This Interdisciplinary Introduction is the gateway sequence for the minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Students taking both semesters will receive non-majors Divisional Studies credit for two courses, from two different divisions: NS (without lab), SS and H.

## Diane Balser, Activist



Diane Balser in  
her 30's

**WGS faculty member Diane Balser** was highlighted in the Spring, 2012 issue of Lilith magazine (Independent, Jewish, and frankly feminist) in an article by Susan Schnur on "How Being a Jew & Being a Feminist Collide, Co-evolve and Cohabit in 7 Women's Lives." Excerpts from Diane Balser's interview follow. And check out the great photograph!!

**My story begins in Washington Heights, New York**, in the 1940s, where being Jewish, female and political was the air I breathed. I knew that our grandmothers (and for some of us, our mothers) had been oppressed, but I also knew that they were powerful Jewish women, who in coming to America played major roles in saving our lives.

**After World War II**, America was jubilant, but the Jews in my neighborhood were grief-stricken; the War had given us the Holocaust. On the other hand, America gave us Bess Myerson, the first Jewish Miss America.

**My mother used to run around the house**, saying to my sister and me, "You could be Bess Myerson, too!" What she meant was that Bess came from a socialist, working-class Jewish background, and that she'd only entered a stupid beauty pageant to win money so she could go to Julliard. I was told that Bess used her platform to talk about racism and anti-Semitism, and that after her reign the pageant made a rule that Miss America couldn't talk politics.

**The first social justice movement** I remember was Ban the Bomb, which called for a "sane nuclear policy." Later, Bella Abzug, who grew up in the same world as me, co-founded Women Strike for Peace, a movement that launched her into Congress. In New York, tons of Jewish women were doing anti-nuclear work--our gender connected us to wanting peace--but I don't remember anyone discussing that we were

Jews almost annihilated in the Holocaust. We didn't connect the Holocaust to standing up against the potential mass destruction of the world. In my mind, it was hard to cry out, even in the U. S., "Look what happened to us!" so our forums became Ban the Bomb and the Civil Rights movement.

**In the 1960s I got involved** in the student anti-war and civil rights movements. I participated in sit-ins in Rochester, NY, and taught at a school for high school dropouts in the black community.

**Tensions began to arise between blacks and Jews**, between anti-Semitism and anti-racism, and the emerging Black Power movement directed whites to go "back to their own communities" and fight against racism there. I got a job working with the parents of white, working-class children who were being bused into black elementary school, but my project ran out of funds.

**The fight for real gender egalitarianism** in the secular and religious worlds has definitely not been won; there is inclusion, but not equality. We're only at the beginning of this battle. Sexism remains alive and well on our planet. In every country it shows itself uniquely and specifically. There is the devaluing and sometimes killing of young girls, the sexual trafficking of women, the feminization of poverty, and violence against women. There is sexism in religious fundamentalism, and worldwide structural inequalities in economic and political systems. In the U.S., as we know, women's reproductive autonomy is endangered.

**Still, honestly?, I think the time is right for another major wave of Jewish feminism** and, beyond that, for a powerful movement, across the globe, for women's authentic and enduring equality. Betty Friedan started N.O.W.; Jewish women can be active again in a gender-justice movement across continents.

**Dr. Balser's activist work was also highlighted in the new film Left on Pearl**, which chronicles the 1971 takeover of a Harvard building by a group of women demanding a women's center in Cambridge.



## Spring Symposia

### **Ruling Queens: Power, politics, and patronage in history and imagination**



Women across the globe still struggle today to secure leadership positions in organizations and institutions. Yet, stretching back to Antiquity, we can identify a select group of women who, primarily by dint of inheritance, were able to head their nations as ruling queens (or "female kings"). A panel of five scholars will examine this exceptional form of female power across a range of historical moments, geographical locations and cultural imaginations. Questions to be addressed include: How did ruling queens and their subjects reconcile the power of female sovereigns with the powerlessness of the generality of women? How did such sovereigns exercise their power, and to what ends? What legacies, if any, can be traced to these women's reigns?

#### **Panelists:**

**Virginia Sapiro**,  
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences,  
Professor of Political Science

**Shahla Haeri**, Associate Professor of  
Anthropology

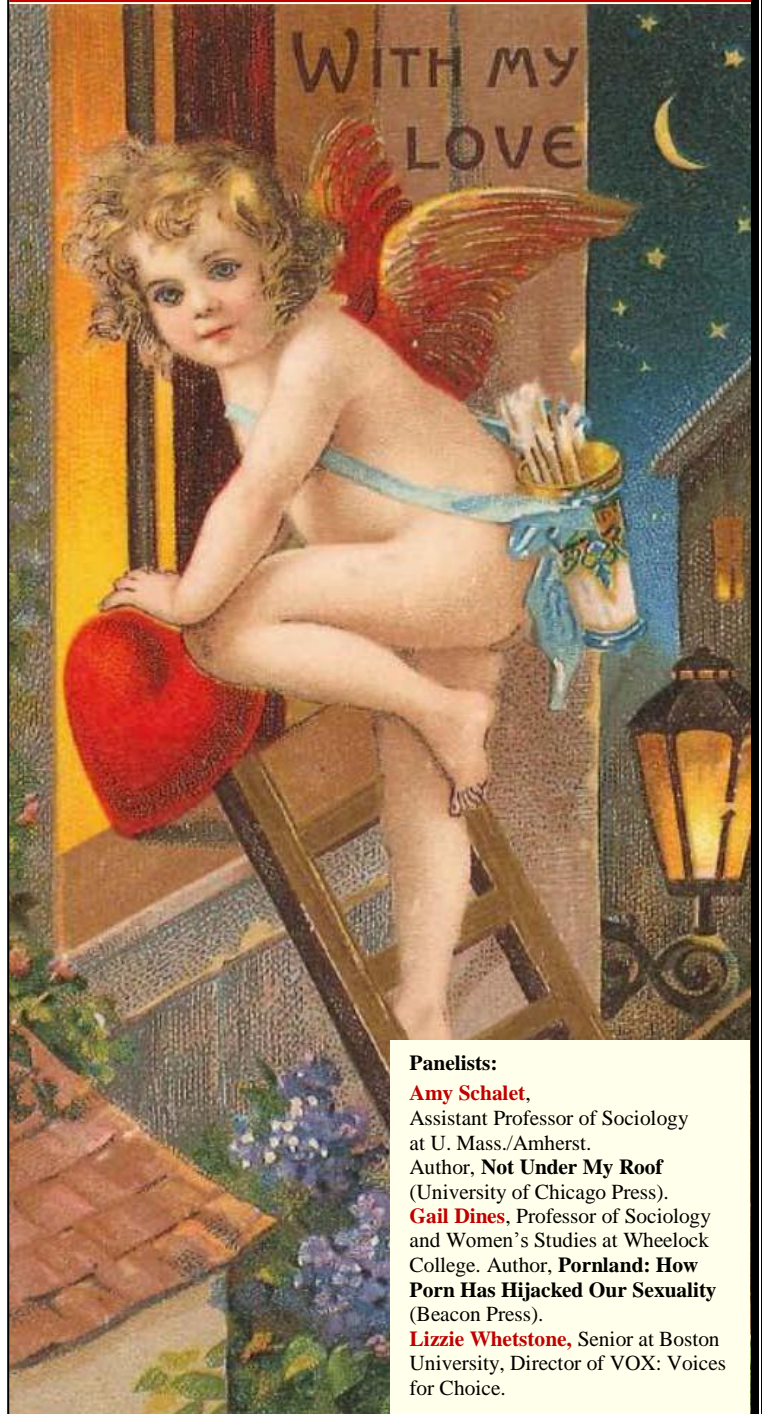
**James Winn**, Director, Center for the  
Humanities, Professor of English

**Linda Heywood**, Director, African  
American Studies, Professor of History

**Arianne Chernock**, Assistant  
Professor of History

### *Love, Lust, and the Body: Sexuality in Contemporary U.S. Culture*

*How are our sexual relationships and identities shaped by the cultures in which we find ourselves? "Love, lust, and the body" brings together 3 panelists to consider responses to this question.*



#### **Panelists:**

**Amy Schalet**,  
Assistant Professor of Sociology  
at U. Mass./Amherst.  
Author, **Not Under My Roof**  
(University of Chicago Press).

**Gail Dines**, Professor of Sociology  
and Women's Studies at Wheelock  
College. Author, **Pornland: How  
Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality**  
(Beacon Press).

**Lizzie Whetstone**, Senior at Boston  
University, Director of VOX: Voices  
for Choice.



We celebrated with several of our colleagues who published books this year.

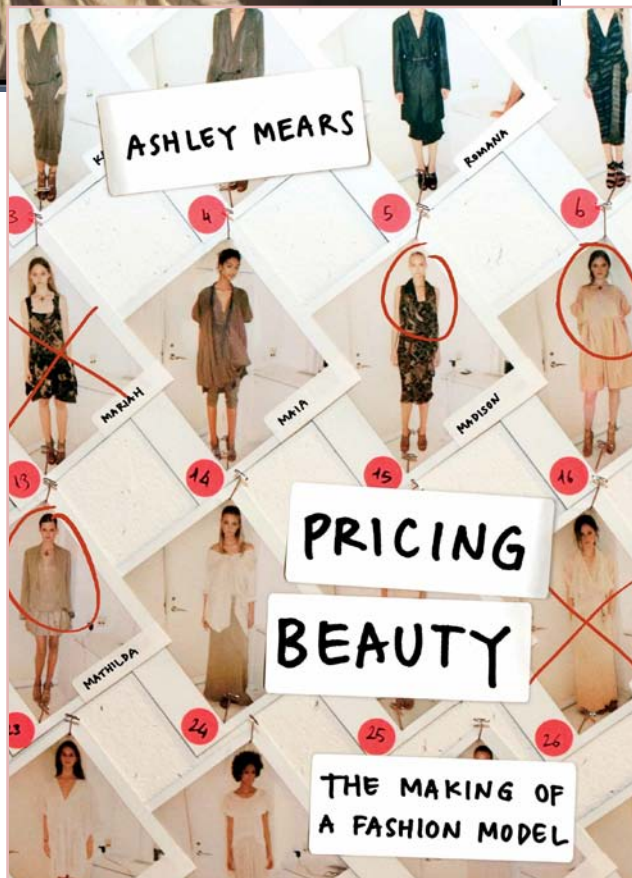
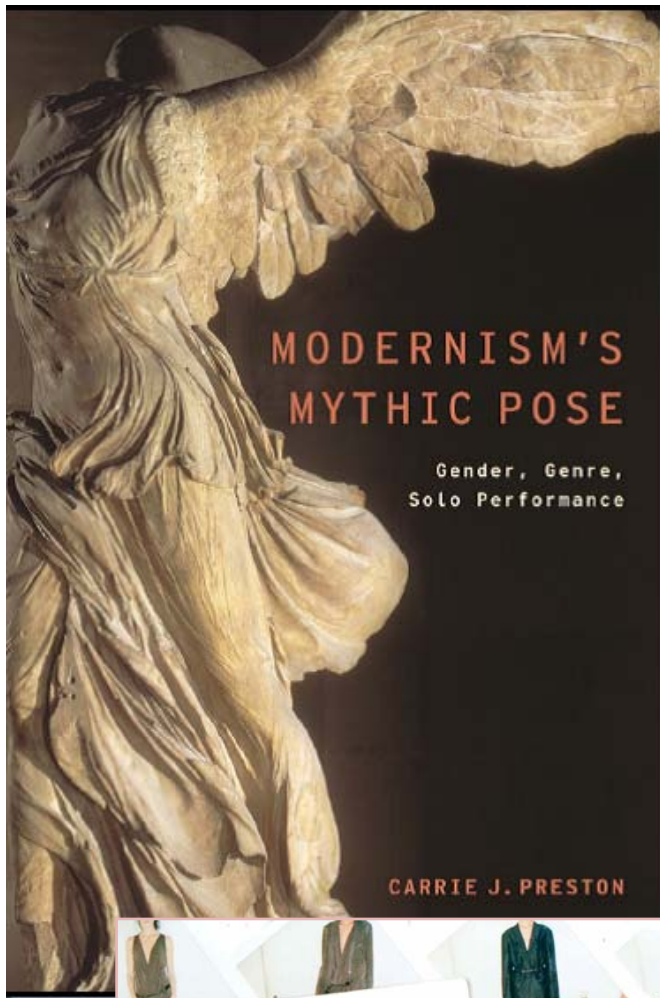


## Familial Forms



Politics and Genealogy  
in Seventeenth-Century English Literature

Erin Murphy



## Fall 2012 WGS Event



IE284-039 [RF] © www.visualphotos.com

### For better AND worse: The historical transformation of marriage

Was life really better when men and women didn't have to – and often weren't allowed to – juggle work and family? Coontz discusses women's experiences in the un-liberated 1960s and evaluates how far we have come since then.



<http://www.workingdvas.com/>

**Stephanie Coontz** is the author of **Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage** and other important books on the family. Her books have been translated into 12 languages. She teaches history and family studies at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, and is Director of Research and Public Education for the Council on Contemporary Families. She has appeared on **The Colbert Report**, Oprah Winfrey, 20/20, NPR, and more.

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<http://californiaschildren.typepad.com>

**Monday,  
October 15  
10am**

Hillel House  
213 Bay State Road

#### WGS Contact List

**Deborah Belle, Director**  
617 358 2370

[debelle@bu.edu](mailto:debelle@bu.edu)

Carla Pack-Bailey,  
Program Coordinator  
617 358-2370

[cpbcbp1@bu.edu](mailto:cpbcbp1@bu.edu)

Diane Balser  
617 358-2372  
[dibalser@bu.edu](mailto:dibalser@bu.edu)

Arianne Chernock  
617 353-8315  
[chernock@bu.edu](mailto:chernock@bu.edu)

Gina Cogan  
617 358-3647  
[gcogan@bu.edu](mailto:gcogan@bu.edu)

Catherine Connell  
617 358-0647  
[cati@bu.edu](mailto:cati@bu.edu)

Barbara Gottfried  
617 358-0610  
[gotfried@bu.edu](mailto:gotfried@bu.edu)

Cheryl D Knott  
617 353-7723  
[knott@bu.edu](mailto:knott@bu.edu)

Jennifer Wright Knust  
617 358-4222  
[jknust@bu.edu](mailto:jknust@bu.edu)

Brenda Gael McSweeney  
617 358-2374  
[bgm@bu.edu](mailto:bgm@bu.edu)

Ashley E Mears  
617 358-0637  
[mears@bu.edu](mailto:mears@bu.edu)

Roberta Micallef  
617 353-6208  
[micallef@bu.edu](mailto:micallef@bu.edu)

Erin Murphy  
617 358-2557  
[ermurphy@bu.edu](mailto:ermurphy@bu.edu)

Suzanne O'Brien  
617 353-8309  
[sgobrien@bu.edu](mailto:sgobrien@bu.edu)

Carrie Preston  
617 353-2506  
[cjpresto@bu.edu](mailto:cjpresto@bu.edu)

Deborah Swedberg  
617 353-2505  
[debswed@bu.edu](mailto:debswed@bu.edu)

Jamie Sabino  
617 358-2370  
[jasabino@bu.edu](mailto:jasabino@bu.edu)

J. Keith Vincent  
617 353-6393  
[kvincent@bu.edu](mailto:kvincent@bu.edu)

Karen Warkentin  
617 358-2385  
[kwarken@bu.edu](mailto:kwarken@bu.edu)

**WGS Office**  
617 358-2370  
[wgs@bu.edu](mailto:wgs@bu.edu)



# BU Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Newsletter

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## The Sarah Joanne Davis Awardees



**Alessandra 'Sasha' Goodfriend** (L) for her work in organizing and in documenting the Take Back the Night March. This was an event simultaneously healing and empowering and effective as political action. It brought together a community and it changed the world.

**Smriti Kattel** (R) for her paper "Sex Trafficking in Nepal: Myth and Discourse." Those who wish to do good in the world need analyses like Smriti's to guide action.

## WGS Leadership Awardee



**Arian Katz** shepherded the Women's Resource Center into its new and vibrant incarnation as the Center for Gender, Sexuality, and Activism. She spearheaded the effort to convince BU administrators they could not do without a rape crisis center.

## End of the Year Party & Award Presentations

Students, family members, and faculty all joined this terrific celebration. We recognized many accomplishments. Jubilation reigned!



Assistant Professor of English **Carrie Preston** was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor.



**Shantel Mendez** (Above L) received Honorable Mention for the Cultural Commentary she wrote for Prof. Gottfried's WS 340 class: Women, Race, and Gender in Media.

**WGS Director Deborah Belle** (Above R) was delighted when she was presented with beautiful flowers and thanked for her leadership efforts.