

Fall 2007

## Brazen (Fall 2007)

Hollins University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/brazen>

 Part of the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Brazen: Newsletter of the Gender & Women's Studies Department. Roanoke, Virginia, Hollins University. Fall 2007.

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the Gender & Women's Studies at Hollins Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Brazen - Gender & Women's Studies Department Newsletters by an authorized administrator of Hollins Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [vandalesa@hollins.edu](mailto:vandalesa@hollins.edu).

# Women's Studies Newsletter Fall 2007

Hollins University

Fall 2007

Volume 1, Issue 1

## Shocky Pilafian-Mildred Persinger Award in Women's Studies

We are pleased to announce the endowment of the Shocky Pilafian-Mildred Persinger Award in Women's Studies! Many thanks to our benefactor, Marni Pilafian J.D., whose daughter Alex Lee, graduated from Hollins in 2007 with a major in Women's Studies.

Ms. Pilafian made the endowment in honor of her mother, and Alex's grandmother, Shocky Pilafian. Shocky, now 84, was raised in the original 1920s Richmond, Virginia community of Armenian immigrants. She studied business, married, raised three children, and ran hotels in Miami from the 1950s onward. As a result of her own work experiences, she understands the challenges faced by women in business and has tried to help young women do well for themselves. She is delighted that women will be able to receive the Shocky Pilafian-Mildred Persinger Award from the Hollins Women's Studies Program, and hopes that the women who receive this award will work as advocates for human rights.

(Continued on page 3.)

## January in NYC: A Short Term Trip

During the month of January, Hollins students have the opportunity to take 4-week intensive seminar courses, complete internships and independent studies, and best of all take educational trips all over the world. In January 2007 the Women's Studies Department at Hollins University sponsored a trip to New York City titled "Women's Leadership and Social Change."

On this trip students had the opportunity to receive a guided feminism-inspired tour of the city led by co-authors Amy Richards and Jennifer Baumgardner. The dynamic duo are known for their books titled *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*, and *Grassroots: A Field Guide to Feminist Activism*, which the group read in preparation for their trip.

The ten students were given the opportunity to tour several museums, including the Met, the MoMA, and numerous others.

(Continued on page 4.)

### Special points of interest:

- WS Celebrates New Departmental Award
- Alumnae News
- Course Offerings: The Old, the New, and the First Year Seminars
- The Inside Scoop: Get to Know the WS Faculty
- Activism on Campus: Student Groups
- Spotlight on Social Justice with Ann Hopkins
- Save the Date: Events and Activities to Attend

## Kate Bornstein Coming to Hollins!

Hollins University's General Speakers Bureau, along with the Women's Studies Department, is thrilled to announce that Kate Bornstein, self-described "author, playwright, and performance artist," is coming to Hollins this September. Known for her books *Hello, Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks, and Other Outlaws* and *My Gender Workbook*, Kate's works tackle topics involving gender, sex, identity and more. While at Hollins, Kate will be speaking in the VAC Auditorium at 7:00 pm on Thursday September 20, 2007 with a "Q&A" and book-signing to follow. For more information on Kate, check out her website [www.katebornstein.com](http://www.katebornstein.com).



Photo and quotes courtesy of Kate Bornstein, [www.katebornstein.com](http://www.katebornstein.com)



## Familiar Faces, New Places: Women's Studies Welcomes Our New Directors



*Dr. LeeRay M. Costa, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies*

### *From the Women's Studies Directors...*

*Dr. Susan Thomas, Associate Professor of Political Science and Women's Studies*

We are pleased to introduce the first issue of the new Women's Studies Newsletter. We hope that you will find the newsletter to be an informative, provocative and useful guide to Women's Studies at Hollins and to a broad array of feminist and social justice issues locally, nationally, and globally. The Women's Studies newsletter, scheduled for publication once per semester, is meant to be a community project, and so we invite you to contribute ideas, articles, comments and more. Also, please note that we are seeking a name for the newsletter. Let your creative juices flow and send us your ideas.

The launch of our newsletter coincides with significant changes in the Women's Studies Program during the last few months. As many of you already know, our director of nearly a decade, Dr. Drucilla Barker, recently accepted a position as Director of Women's Studies at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. Dr. Barker has been the single most important advocate for Women's Studies at Hollins and we are saddened by her departure. However, we celebrate her success and congratulate her on her new position.

Dr. LeeRay M. Costa, who was recently promoted to Associate Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies, will take over as the new Director of the Women's Studies Program when she returns from her sabbatical in the fall of 2008. During the current academic year, 2007-2008, Dr. Susan Thomas, Associate Professor of Political Science and Women's Studies will serve as Acting Director of the Women's Studies Program. Both of us are eager to develop the Women's Studies Program in new directions and during the 2007 summer break we began to make plans for the future.

One of our goals for the coming year is to communicate more effectively with our current students and to create a stronger sense of the Women's Studies community beyond the campus as we reach out to alumnae and people in the Roanoke/New River Valley. Toward this end we have initiated the WS Newsletter and created a new WS bulletin board on the third floor of Pleasants that will highlight the work of our WS majors and provide information about Gender and Women's Studies programs and events nationally. While our biannual WS Potluck Dinners off-campus at faculty members' homes will continue, we have also instituted a new WS Lunch-a-Month series where you are invited to meet, talk and eat with WS faculty (see page 3). We will continue to plan events including our annual International Women's Day celebration. This fall we are delighted to be co-sponsoring guest lectures by transgender activist and performance artist Kate Bornstein (see cover page), and Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole, former president of Spelman College and Bennett College (see page 4).

**"We are committed to keeping our courses theoretically current and reflective of new and emerging trends in the discipline."**

Although we have no major curricular changes planned for this year, we are committed to keeping our courses theoretically current and reflective of new and emerging trends in the discipline. This commitment will inform our request for a new hire in Women's Studies. Furthermore, Women's Studies is exploring ways to work more closely with the Batten Leadership Institute and to support the newly established Certificate in Leadership Studies. We are firmly committed to the empowerment of women and believe that the interdisciplinarity and intersectionality of women's studies and feminist theory will enhance the Hollins mission to educate women who will make a difference in the world.

## Shocky Pilafian-Mildred Persinger Award in Women's Studies

(Continued from page 1.)

The award is also named in honor of Mildred Persinger, who graduated from Hollins in 1939. Ms. Persinger has had an illustrious career as an advocate and activist for social justice, in particular in the areas of civil rights, women's rights and women's leadership internationally. She has worked with the national and international YWCA and has played a crucial role in organizing and attending the UN sponsored international conferences on women in 1975 (Mexico), 1980 (Copenhagen), 1985 (Nairobi), and 1995 (Beijing). At age 89, she continues to travel to the UN headquarters in New York City to advocate for women's rights. In 2006 Ms. Persinger was awarded the Hollins Medal for her significant contributions to women's empowerment.

The Shocky Pilafian-Mildred Persinger Award is given annually during Honors Convocation to recognize an outstanding Women's Studies major who exhibits excellence in academic achievement and who has made significant contributions to social activism both within the Hollins community and beyond. The award recipient will receive a gift of \$100 and a one-year subscription to a feminist periodical.

The award, previously named Award in Women's Studies, was given to Hilary Dubose in 2005, Victoria Crump in 2006, and Mallory Haar and Leslie Jarzabski in 2007.

Please join the Women's Studies Program in thanking Marni Pilafian for her generous contribution and for her enthusiastic and unwavering support of women's studies!

## Women's Studies Hosts A Lunch-a-Month

Interested in learning more about Women's Studies at Hollins but aren't sure about taking a class? Looking for people who talk about feminist issues in a real-world way? Join the Women's Studies faculty and students for lunch in the **Glass Dining Room** each month as we meet to share discussion and ideas. Hope to see you there!

Tuesday, September 18 at 12:30 pm

Monday, October 15 at 12:00 pm

Tuesday, November 13 at 12:30 pm



**Have an idea you want to see in the Women's  
Studies newsletter?**

**Send submissions to [cnorton@hollins.edu](mailto:cnorton@hollins.edu)**

**We are especially interested in book and music reviews,  
student activism on campus, and other feature pieces.**

## Course Offerings, Fall 2007: The Old, the New, and the First Year Seminars

### The Old

**WS 141** *Intro to Women's Studies* with Professor Costa T/R 8:50 am-10:20 am

**WS 211** *Multicultural Women Writers* with Professor Kaldas M/W 11:30 am-1:00 pm

**WS 220** *Life Histories/Self Narratives* with Professor Costa T/R 11:30 am-1:00 pm

**WS 370** *Feminist Theory* with Professor Boyle M/W 2:50 pm– 4:20 pm

### The New

**WS 105** *Political Movements* with Professor Thomas M/W 1:10 pm-2:40 pm

**WS 213** *Globalization and Poverty* with Professor Thomas M/W 11:30 am-1:00 pm

**WS 317** *Dress, Gender, and Social Identity* with Professor Nolan M/W 1:10 pm-2:40 pm

**WS 342** *Advanced Studies in Children's Literature* with Professor Abate M/W 11:30 am-1:00 pm

### The First Year Seminars

**CHEM/WS 197F** *Women of Discovery* with Professors Boatman and Diefenderfer

**DANC/WS 197F** *Art and Performance as a Way to Inhabit the World: The Unmade Project* with Professors Bullock and Burchfield

**ENG/WS 197F** *Women, Health, and Culture* with Professors Pfeiffer and Ruelle

# Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole to Visit Hollins University

Hollins University and the Women's Studies program are honored to co-sponsor a presentation by Dr. Johnnetta Cole, former President of Spelman College and Bennett College, who will speak in the campus theater on December 5, 2007.

When Dr. Cole accepted the Presidency of Spelman College, she made history by being the first African-American woman to hold the position. Her accomplishments are not limited to her tenure at Spelman, for she has been an accomplished faculty member at several institutions of higher learning including the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Hunter College, the City University of New York, along with her position as Presidential Distinguished Professor Emerita at Emory University.

Most recently Dr. Cole has spent the past 5 years as President of Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. She is also recognized for founding the Johnnetta B. Cole Global Diversity & Inclusion Institute at Bennett College for Women, an institute that leads the way in exploring the growing complexity of diversity and inclusion.

For more information on the Institute, go to: <http://www.jbcinstitute.org/index.html>



*Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole, Past President of Spelman College, Former President of Bennett College for Women*

## January in NYC: A Short Term Trip, *continued from page 1.*



*Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, authors of Manifesta and Grassroots*

The group used the Guerilla Girls guide for viewing the art exhibits and were encouraged to question what qualifies "real art" as something worthy of display in museums.

Other highlights of this trip included the opportunity to have tea with Gloria Steinem, a tour of the UN, and seeing the Third Wave Foundation, an organization that provides assistance to young feminist activists through grant-making.

In January 2008 another group of students will have the opportunity to travel to NYC with Professor Julie Pfeiffer. An informational meeting will be held on October 3. More information on the upcoming trip will be available at that meeting.

## Our Newsletter Needs a Name!

The Women's Studies Department Newsletter needs a new name.

Think you're up to the task?

Send your ideas to  
[cnorton@hollins.edu](mailto:cnorton@hollins.edu)

or

[lcosta@hollins.edu](mailto:lcosta@hollins.edu)

Deadline: November 14, 2007

If your suggestion is selected, it will be featured on the cover of the Spring 2008 edition.



# Student Activism On Campus: The FMLA

The Hollins Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance (FMLA) is looking for strong and saucy, action-oriented feminists to join in and make social change this fall! As part of the Feminist Majority Foundation, FMLA promotes equality locally, statewide, nationally, and globally; supports LGBTQ rights; promotes non-violence and works to eliminate violence against women; and supports safe, legal, accessible contraception, abortion, and family planning.

Started last spring by Writtika Roy ('08), Courtney Chenette ('09), and Chelsea van der Mije ('10), FMLA has already been involved in Earth Day, The Lost Film Festival, and held a well attended film screening of Jennifer Baumgardener's "Speak Out: I Had An Abortion." This year the club has events, speakers, and field trips in the works including pay equity bake sales, crafts and consciousness raising, current president of the Feminist Majority Foundation Eleanor Smeal, feminist author Ingo Musico, the September 15 March on Washington for peace, and lots more. Working closely and collaboratively with the Women's Studies department and a multitude of campus clubs FMLA is looking forward to expanding its membership and encourages anyone interested to drop by one of our meetings which will be **9:00pm Monday nights in the RAT**.

If it sounds like what you believe in, what you want to get involved in, or what you want to learn more about - join the Facebook group, stop by FMLA's table at the club fair, or e-mail any of the founding members to find out more. Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance is looking forward to a great year of activism and we'd like to see you there!

**Meetings are Mondays  
at 9:00 pm in the RAT**

**Contact:**

Courtney Chenette  
cchenette@hollins.edu

Writtika Roy

wroy@hollins.edu

Chelsea van der Mije  
cvandermije@hollins.edu



## The Inside Scoop: Get to Know the WS Faculty

The Women's Studies Faculty as a group can sometimes seem a little overwhelming, even mildly intimidating with their fierce passion for their academic disciplines. As students, it is easy to stick the professors in a category we have no way to access. That is about to change. I am pleased to present to you *The Inside Scoop*. I posed several questions to the faculty members of WS hoping to reveal the side of our professors we don't usually get to see. I hope you enjoy their answers as much as I did.

Candace,

WS Newsletter Editor

Suggestions for the next Inside Scoop questions should be emailed to [cnorton@hollins.edu](mailto:cnorton@hollins.edu) before November 14, 2007.

### 1. When you were in college, what was your favorite band or musical performer?

**Professor Costa:** You gotta love the 1980s... Madonna (of course), Toni Childs, Depeche Mode, This Mortal Coil, Charlie Sexton, The Police

**Professor Rhodes:** Well, this was the '80s: REM, Throwing Muses, The Smiths, and my friends the Gigolo Aunts (hard to pick one--I was a DJ at my college radio station)

### 2. What book from your childhood most influenced you at the time?

**Professor Rhodes:** *From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E. L. Konigsburg (part of it takes place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where I aspired to work)

**Professor Thomas:** *Black Beauty*, the autobiography of the eponymous horse, was an early childhood favorite of this non-human animal lover and budding animal rights activist. The book contains several compassionate human characters who are willing to interfere when they see another person abusing a non-human animal.

### 3. What has been your most embarrassing experience giving a presentation to a group?

**Professor Costa:** At my first international presentation a person stood up and asked me a question that I couldn't even comprehend (I was really nervous). Moreover, it was not about anything I had just discussed. Someone else had to answer for me.

**Professor Rhodes:** The usual: fouled up Powerpoint presentation, nothing disas-trous

### 4. What is your favorite dessert and why?

**Professor Rhodes:** Hot fudge sundae: do I really need to explain?

**Professor Costa:** Although I love chocolate, I'd have to say bread pudding with vanilla cream sauce which I first ate in a fancy hotel in Thailand in the late 1990s.

# Hollins Happenings: News and Updates from

## *Alums...*

### **Natalie Bradshaw '03**

Natalie is attending Hampton University Nursing program and getting ready to transfer to ODU which is a much better program.

### **Carrie Hart '06**

Carrie works now in a non-profit organization, providing education to school-aged children on matters of interpersonal violence. The agency she works for is Project Horizon, Inc., which is located in Lexington, VA. Her specific role is Education & Outreach Coordinator, where she works primarily with elementary, middle, and high school counselors to provide lessons in subject matters ranging from Conflict Resolution to Child Abuse Prevention to Teen Dating Violence.

### **Rachel Fletcher '05**

Rachel is currently the Development Coordinator at Planned Parenthood of the Blue Ridge in Roanoke, VA. With her Women's Studies background, she particularly hopes to continue to work at non-profit organizations that benefit and lobby for women's rights. Working to raise money for these important services each day is in line with the feminist values that were nurtured during her time in the WS program at Hollins, and she wants to work to maintain strong ties between the development and advocacy departments at PPBR.

### **Kathryn Berg '05**

Since graduating, Kathryn has volunteered as an English Teacher in the Peace Corps, as an actress in a Planned Parenthood Vagina Monologues performance, and as an intern at Writers & Books not-for-profit literary center. She has also been a rabble-raising camp counselor, cashier, and server. Berg is currently developing and promoting her website, Berg's Queer Foot Porn, marketing workshops and customized parties to honor the feminine divine, and producing a small line of handcrafted magic wands. As a more steady means of income, she works at La-Tea-Da, a tea parlor where she encourages the women she serves to sit back, relax, and eat all of their dessert. A self-described nomad, in the past two years she has lived in Maine, Chicago, the Republic of Kiribati, and Rochester, New York, as well as paying brief visits to Fiji, Boulder, Colorado.

### **Annetay Henderson '05**

Annetay is working to complete her master's degree at Flinders and hopes to be finished by July, barring any natural disasters. She is currently working on her thesis which is on constructions of whiteness and how race is gendered in media coverage about a string of car robberies committed by Aboriginal kids. She has also been teaching an ESL course since her arrival in Adelaide and is thankful for her WS background and her training with Marcy Trianosky that enables her to break down traditional hierarchies in the classroom.

### **Tiffany Tseng '06**

Tiffany is currently teaching English to 7 to 12 year olds in Taiwan, where she recognizes how much her Women's Studies curriculum shaped her perception of the world. She is called upon to define her sex and gender often since she has such short hair, but she remains confident in herself thanks to the lessons she learned with the WS department.

### **Christina King**

Graduated with a law degree from Seattle University, spring 2007.

### **Meredith Harper '05**

Meredith has been in Miami, Florida since December 2005 after a semester at Simmons College. She has also started taking courses in dietetics at Florida International University. Meredith volunteers with Best Buddies, and uses her Women's Studies background to educate people in her daily life.

### **Katherine McDonald '06**

Katherine is currently living in Greece, outside Athens.

### **Emily Abeles '05**

Emily is currently teaching high school special education in Memphis City Schools through Teach For America.

### **Victoria Crump '06**

Victoria is attending graduate school at Hollins University and has recently begun working with In-Lighten, a Roanoke-based LGBTQ community-building initiative.

# Women's Studies Alumnae, Faculty, and Students

## Faculty...

**Dr. Michelle Abate**, *Assistant Professor of English*

Dr. Abate's article, "From Cold War Lesbian Pulp to Contemporary YA Novels: Vin Packer's *Spring Fire*, M. E. Kerr's *Deliver Us from Evie*, and Marijane Meaker's Fight against Fifties Homophobia" will be published in the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* in the fall (vol 32, no 3). Marijane Meaker came to campus last October and spoke about her career as a lesbian pulp novelist during the 1950s and as a current YA author. Dr. Abate's essay argues that Meaker is revisiting and revising her earlier pulp work in her 1994 YA novel, and she is doing so within the context of a 1990s-to-1950s retrospection that is campy and ironic, but also earnest.

**Dr. Kim Rhodes**, *Associate Professor of Art (Chair)*

Dr. Rhodes presented a lecture at the St. Louis Art Museum in April titled, "Passionate Plays: Shakespeare and the Pre-Raphaelites." During Women's History Month she was a speaker at Shenandoah University on "Models, Muses, and Makers: Finding Feminism in Fiction" and "Ophelia, Visual Culture, and Victorian Body Politics."

**Dr. LeeRay Costa**, *Associate Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies*

Dr. Costa's article "Gender, Sexuality and Nationalism in a Northern Thai Non-governmental Organization," has been accepted for publication in the journal *Asian Studies Review*. She also organized the panel "Transforming the Leadership Program at a Women's Liberal Arts College: a Cross-Campus Collaborative" for the Conference "Women as Intercultural Leaders" held at the Center for Women's Intercultural Leadership, St. Mary's College. She presented a paper entitled "Leadership at Hollins: A Faculty Perspective" along with presentations by colleagues Katherine Walker (Batten Leadership Institute) and Kim Jones (Athletics). Dr. Costa has also recently released her book *Male Bodies, Women's Souls: Personal Narratives from Thailand's Transgendered Youth*, co-authored with Andrew Matzner, published by Haworth Press.

**Dr. Lori Joseph**, *Associate Professor of Communication Studies*

Dr. Joseph has just completed a short documentary film entitled *One Helluva Ride*. The film looks at what it means to be a woman rancher in Montana and is an outgrowth of her research interest in women who work in traditionally male occupations.

**Dr. Darla Schumm**, *Associate Professor of Religious Studies*

Dr. Schumm's co-authored article, "Chronic Illness & Disability: Paradigms of Suffering and Healing in Buddhism and Christianity," has been accepted for publication in the *Journal for Religion, Health, and Disability* (JRHD). JRHD is one of the leading peer reviewed journals in the field of religion and disability studies. The article will appear later this year.

**Dr. Susan Thomas**, *Associate Professor of Political Science and Women's Studies*

Dr. Thomas will publish her essay, "Women, Welfare, Reform and the Preservation of Myth," in *Structured Inequality in The United States: Discussions on the Continuing Significance of Race, Ethnicity and Gender*, Adalberto Aguirre and David Baker, eds. Prentice Hall, 2008. She has recently returned from a trip to Hartford, CT where she conducted interviews with lawmakers concerning the state's new Civil Union Law With Amendment Denying Marriage. In 2005 Connecticut became the first state in the nation to voluntarily pass legislation allowing same-sex couples to enter into civil unions.

## Students...

**Writtika Roy '08**

Writtika just completed her internships at the CDC Division of Reproductive Health and the Feminist Women's Health Center, in Atlanta. At the CDC she assisted with the update of WHO's Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraception and Selected Practice Recommendations. At the Feminist Women's Health Center she worked as a clinical intern who assisted the surgeon with abortions, often managed the instrument supply room, and took care of patients in the recovery room. She learned first hand why and how women make choices for themselves and how much difference compassionate healthcare makes in their lives.

**Courtney Chenette '09**

Courtney is one of the founding members of the Hollins chapter of the FMLA. She has spent her summer completing an internship with the Women's Injury Law Center where she worked with a variety of cases ranging from personal injury from auto accidents to sexual assault to adoption and assisted reproductive technology law.



# "Mom Jeans, MILFs and Dick in a Box: Teaching/Learning Women's Studies in the 2000s"

by Dr. LeeRay M. Costa

I can remember the day in Intro to Women's Studies when my students started talking about "Mom Jeans." The majority of the class got the reference, but I was at a total loss. With trepidation I asked, "What are 'Mom Jeans'?" wondering if they were good or bad and, more importantly, whether or not I wore them. My students - at first incredulous that I didn't know what they were talking about - patiently educated me, informing me that "Mom Jeans" are the high-waist jeans with pleats, that taper toward the ankles, and sometimes come in 1980s-acid wash denim. As I listened to the description I realized that "Mom Jeans" were definitely *not* considered hip or attractive by my students. I was initially relieved when they assured me that I did not wear them. But later in the day, after viewing the YouTube "Mom Jeans" clip sent to me by a student, I began to reflect more deeply on my own motherhood and fashion hang-ups and how I might creatively turn "Mom Jeans" into what we professors like to call a "teachable moment."

"With trepidation I asked, 'What are 'Mom Jeans'?' wondering if they were good or bad and, more importantly, whether or not I wore them."

It is this daily opportunity to learn about young women's lives that makes my job as a women's studies professor both exciting and challenging. While I came of age in the 1980s during the Reagan-Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas-*The Beauty Myth*-Madonna years, my students have grown into adults in a very different cultural milieu. Not only is "feminist" a dirty word for many young people,

but what often passes for female empowerment (think "Grrls Gone Wild" for example) looks very different. Furthermore, technology and entertainment play central roles in the lives of my students: YouTube, MySpace and other websites, cell phones and text-messaging as well as television and music. These realities mean that I not only have to stay on top of the latest trends in order to keep up with my students, but also that I have to meet students where they are, in terms that will aid me in making feminist theory not only understandable but also relevant and personal.

So how did I make "Mom Jeans" do this kind of work? At our next class meeting we explored what made "Mom Jeans" an apt symbol for examining notions of motherhood, sexuality and desirability in contemporary US society. I asked, Why is it that motherhood is often associated with the desexualization of women and a lack of sexual agency? How might "Mom Jeans" as a fashion statement reveal something about class and race differences? And what was it about "Mom Jeans" that made them so darn funny (aside from skillful performances by Saturday Night Live comedians)? I loved these discussions not simply because they brought together foundational feminist theory and contemporary media examples, but because they were enjoyable and stimulated critical thinking.

But the "Mom Jeans" incident was simply a prelude to another encounter with my tech-loving Hollins students concerning the term MILFs. Don't know what MILFs are? Don't worry neither did I. In at least one of its incarnations, MILFs is a group found in various incarnations on the website Facebook as in "Hollins MILFs Unite" and VA Tech students' "I Just Want To Be a MILF When I Grow Up..." whose current project is "petitioning to make MILFing a major." MILF stands for the phrase "Moms I'd Like to F\*\*k," or in its more polite form "Mothers I'd Like to Find." MILFs can also be found in a wide variety of other electronic arenas including matchmaking, social, and porn websites. Contrary to the image imparted by "Mom Jeans," the term/group MILF blatantly suggests that mothers (i.e., women between the ages of 35 and 50) *can* be sexy and "hot," so hot that young men (and yes, the construct is very heterocentric) will want to have sex with them.

Admittedly, MILFs was a more difficult cultural reference for me to get excited about than "Mom Jeans" and I am still figuring out how to talk about in a class context. While I applaud the assertion of women's sexual agency and mothers' sexual agency in particular, I also fear that that same sexual agency is undermined by its dependence on the approval of very young heterosexual men, not to mention certain culturally and capitalist mandated notions of beauty and sexiness. And if you're not sure what I mean by that, check out some of the self-proclaimed MILF websites where what's "hot" not only looks highly crafted (think "America's Top Model" or "Extreme Makeover"), but also a lot like the ads for escorts/prostitutes/porn you see at the back of select publications.

## “Mom Jeans...” continued

However, as just one small component of a much larger “Hot Mama” movement in the media (see e.g., the website Hot Moms Club, and the reality show “The Hottest Mom in America”), MILFs do draw attention to what at least *some* young women and men (ages 16-30) are thinking and talking about. Reflecting on MILFs, I have wondered whether the concept suggests perhaps a fear of what motherhood, and by implication monogamous marriage and aging might bring. In a culture rampant with images of young, beautiful, highly sexualized bodies, it isn't hard to see why “conventional” motherhood, associated as it often is with desexualization and powerlessness, might be despised.

**“I loved these discussions not simply because they brought together foundational feminist theory and contemporary media examples, but because they were enjoyable and stimulated critical thinking.”**

But regardless of how I might feel personally about MILFs or even Mom Jeans for that matter, I do find these pop cultural references vital to teaching about gender and other axes of privilege and inequality, and I know that many of my colleagues do too. Feminist movement has always been shaped by the immediacies of personal experience, whether it be the oppression of being denied the vote, of being devalued as a wife, mother, and wage employee, or being discriminated against for the color of your skin. And for many of my students today, personal experience includes the ways they interact with and feel about images, ideas, and activities encountered via media and technology.

If feminism and other movements for social justice are to appeal to the next generation (what some refer to as the “third wave”) it will therefore have to be in terms that are culturally and personally relevant. That requires feminist scholars and teachers to be willing to learn from and engage with their students, and to let go of preconceived notions about what counts as an appropriate feminist issue or course topic. Can Mom Jeans and MILFs be legitimate topics of conversation? Absolutely. Might elusive cultural references or icons illuminate both established and emerging feminist theories? You bet. Might we foster more compelling, complicated, and yes, even humorous and enjoyable conversations about feminism by inviting students to teach us about their lifeworlds? I think so. Besides, isn't it great to think that I can find feminism in a “Dick in a Box?”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aren't familiar with the reference? Visit YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dmVU08zVpA>

## Save The Date!

### Women's Studies Department Noteworthy Events

**Thursday, September 20, 2007 7:00 pm**

Kate Bornstein Event, VAC Auditorium

**Saturday, September 29, 2007**

Women's Studies Department Potluck,  
Held at Dr. Thomas's home, details TBA

**Wednesday, October 3, 2007**

Women's Leadership and Social Change  
J-Term Informational Meeting, details TBA

**Saturday, October 6, 2007**

Bus trip to DC to see “WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution” at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Contact Kim Rhodes ([krhodes@hollins.edu](mailto:krhodes@hollins.edu)) for more information

**Wednesday, December 5, 2007 7:00 pm**

Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole Event, Theatre



### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

bell hooks

Anne Fausto-Sterling

Cynthia Enloe

Rosmarie Tong

### DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING PROPOSALS

IS

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2007**

For more information, check out the SEWSA  
website at:

<http://womensstudies.uncc.edu/SEWSA/index.html>

# Spotlight on Social Justice: Hollins Women Changing the World

## Ann Hopkins, Hollins University Class of 1965

Ann Hopkins has been selected as the first candidate for the “Spotlight on Social Justice” column due to her successful Supreme Court victory in the case Price Waterhouse v Hopkins. While in attendance at Hollins, and later at Indiana University, Ann studied mathematics and earned her master’s degree in the field. After a few years working in aerospace at IBM, she ultimately ended up working for Touche Ross & Co., a “Big Eight” national accounting firm, as a management consultant. Ann and her husband, also an employee of Touche Ross, were unable to apply for partner at their firm while they remained married, so Ann sought employment elsewhere. This led her to Price Waterhouse on the recommendation of a trusted co-worker.

While working for Price Waterhouse, Ann had the opportunity to provide an analysis for the U.S. Department of State, an account that ultimately benefitted the firm. On the tail of her success with the U.S. Department of State account, two of the partners in Ann’s office nominated her as a candidate for partner in the current nomination cycle. When Ann didn’t receive the position, she wasn’t the only one who was disappointed by the outcome. Ann was given the paperwork that accompanied the votes she received: the reasons given by the partners of Price Waterhouse for not promoting Ann Hopkins to partner were all instances of her not being a stereotypical female. She was given advice to dress, speak, and behave more femininely in order to have a chance at making partner in the next nomination cycle. When that next cycle was complete, Ann was informed that she would never be a partner at Price Waterhouse. Ann left Price Waterhouse & Co.

At her husband’s encouragement, Ann filed a sex discrimination claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. She alleged that Price Waterhouse discriminated against her when she was not promoted to partner based on gender stereotyping and that the firm had effectively forced her to leave and seek employment elsewhere.

After several rounds in multiple levels of the judiciary system, including the District Court for the District of Columbia, the Supreme Court, and the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, and many years spent facing appeals and remands, a conclusion was finally met: In early 1991, after 8 years in court, Price Waterhouse rehired Ann in the capacity of partner, paid her back pay for the 8 years since she left the firm, and paid all of her expenses associated with the trial process including court fees and lawyer fees.

The trial process was long and drawn out over the course of many years, but Ann persevered. She recognized the injustice, inequality, and discrimination that fueled the partners at Price Waterhouse to pass over her in the nomination process for partner and she took action against them. Ann Hopkins is a Hollins Woman who made a difference for women.

Interested in women’s equality in the work place? Check out what another HU alum, Anne Houle, is doing with the Wage Project: [www.wageproject.org/content/news/](http://www.wageproject.org/content/news/)

## Community Resources Available in the Greater Roanoke Valley

**SARA—Sexual Assault Response and Awareness**—The SARA Program is a sexual assault crisis center providing direct support and crisis intervention services to victims of sexual assault. The emergency hotline number is (540) 981-9352.

**Planned Parenthood of the Blue Ridge**—The Roanoke Health Center is located at 2207 Peters Creek Road, NW. Their Phone number is (540) 562-2370. More information can be found at <http://www.ppblueridge.org/home.html>.

**The Drop-In Center**—Located at 369 West Church Avenue in Downtown Roanoke, The Drop-In Center provides free, confidential HIV testing that does not require blood work. The site also hosts a Resource Center with books, videos, and free information on HIV and AIDS. The Drop-In Center can be reached at 540-982-2437 or at [dropncenter@aol.com](mailto:dropncenter@aol.com).

**In-Lighten Roanoke**—In-Lighten is a project to increase awareness of health and sexuality issues in the GLBT women’s community of the Roanoke Valley by providing social outlets. More information can be found at <http://www.councilofcommunityservices.org/drop/inlighten.html> and direct questions can be emailed to Emily at

[InLightenRke@aol.com](mailto:InLightenRke@aol.com).

## Women's Studies Internship Highlight by Courtney Chenette

Much like my first year at Hollins, my summer internship with the Women's Injury Law Center demonstrated to me that there is nothing like working with a team of tenacious, personable, driven women. A division of Cantor Arkema law firm in Richmond, Virginia, the Women's Injury Law Center's attorneys Colleen Quinn and Stephanie Grana litigate personal injury and malpractice claims with a focus on sensitivity and empowering their clients. Mentored by Attorney Quinn, I worked with personal injury cases from auto accidents to product and premises liability, to sexual assault. Additionally, her practice and my summer covered adoption and assisted reproductive technology (surrogacy, gestational carrier) law. The Women's Injury Law Center (WILC) showcases the synergy between female staff and clients in this uniquely supportive, pro-active environment.

Where the unpaid work women are depended upon to produce is egregiously overlooked in all economic measures in our society, in the personal injury cases I worked on it was a consistent concern of clients. While this reproductive labor goes undervalued and unpaid, recognizing the value of "women's work" and the implications of its absence was necessary for the WILC staff and attorneys to meet the needs of women. Legally assigning a monetary value to caring labor through personal injury claims is a stride in the right direction for valuing women's essential contributions in the home.

**"By bringing my women's studies background, experience as a sexual assault peer counselor, and activist enthusiasm to my internship I was able to influence individual people's lives while contributing to the ever-changing greater perception of the law."**

In reengineering a culture that aims to end sexual assault, apathy for the wellbeing of others is not an option. Civil suits for sexual assault have the potential to encourage those with the responsibility to build safe, respectful, and egalitarian business interactions to consciously do so. First recognized by the Virginia State Court in 1988, negligent hiring or selection suits can be filed against employers and businesses for putting individuals with prior records of abuse in positions that give access to committing these crimes again. Assigning legal liability to landlords, innkeepers, hospitals, and other institutions for giving convicted offenders and recognized criminals unfettered access to the daily living space of others has multiple implications. While this liability encourages the general public's recognition that sexual offenders violate those they are acquainted with and do not just "hop out of bushes" it also makes those who may otherwise ignore verbal and physical sexual assault in the work place cognizance of the criminal and civil liability at stake.

The intuitive compassion Attorney Quinn directs to her personal injury clients is also given to her adoption and surrogacy cases. The experience I gained in adoption gave me insight into the experiences of single birth-mothers to be, same sex couples looking to adopt, and the legal systems that so narrowly define family. The Women's Injury Law Center is an important institution for furthering the legal recognition of women's issues and expanding legal definitions to encompass real experiences of both men and women. By bringing my women's studies background, experience as a sexual assault peer counselor, and activist enthusiasm to my internship I was able to influence individual people's lives while contributing to the ever-changing greater perception of the law. I look forward to working with the Women's Injury Law Center in the future where "thinking globally and acting locally" is a daily occurrence.

For more information on the Women's Injury Law Center:  
<http://www.cantorarkema.com/womens-injury-law-center.asp>

## Notes from the Editor

Wow, this has been an intense project that I have loved working on over the last month. I hope that you all have enjoyed reading through this newsletter as much as I enjoyed compiling all of the different pieces, and that you were able to pick up some new information along the way. I can't wait to see the submissions for the Spring 2008 edition! This project has been an opportunity for me to share information about Women's Studies with fellow enthusiasts, and those new to the field, alike. My thanks to everyone who contributed; I hope you enjoyed this enough to participate again.

Thanks,

Candace Norton

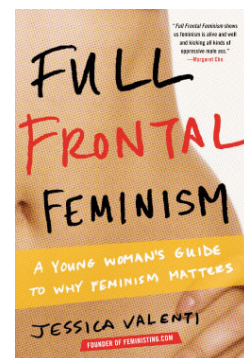
Women's Studies Newsletter Editor 2007-2008

## Good Reads: Books to Try

### **Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman's Guide to Why Feminism Matters**

by Jessica Valenti

Think feminism isn't cool? Or that feminism is for your mom's generation? Think again. This is a book with a sassy approach that puts feminism in your grasp.



For more information go to <http://fullfrontalfeminism.com/>



## Hollins University

LeeRay Costa, director  
(540) 362-6254

[lcosta@hollins.edu](mailto:lcosta@hollins.edu)

Hollins University  
P. O. Box 9592  
Roanoke, VA 24020

Susan Thomas, interim director  
2007-08  
(540) 362-7492

[stthomas@hollins.edu](mailto:stthomas@hollins.edu)

Candace Norton, Editor  
Fall 2007-Spring 2008  
[cnorton@hollins.edu](mailto:cnorton@hollins.edu)

*Women's studies is an interdisciplinary program that examines how systems of oppression/resistance and privilege operate. It is designed to provide students with an understanding of the importance of gender as a category of analysis, and its intersections with race/ethnicity, class, age, sexual identity, and (dis)ability.*

*The women's studies faculty are dedicated to creating an environment that fosters critical thinking, supports student activism, and emphasizes faculty/student and peer mentoring. Students are encouraged to question conventional wisdom and to participate actively in their education.*

*Women's studies has been an active department since 1998.*

*For more information check out the department website at:  
<http://www.hollins.edu/undergrad/womenstudies/wom.htm>*

*If you would like to receive electronic or print copies of the Women's Studies Newsletter, send your contact information and delivery preference to [cnorton@hollins.edu](mailto:cnorton@hollins.edu).*