March is...

How will YOU celebrate Women’s History?

- Check out the Boston Women’s History Trail [here].
- Who is on your $20 bill? What if it was a WOMAN? Learn more about the campaign and cast your vote [here].
- Check out more information and exhibits below:
  • National Women’s History Month Project
  • Smithsonian Institute – Women’s History Month
  • Library of Congress on Women’s History Month

Questions or comments? Email us at: gender@bc.edu
Visit our website: www.bc.edu/wgs
Friend us on Facebook: “Boston College Women’s and Gender Studies Program”
March 2015

**WOMEN TAKE THE REEL**

A film festival celebrating Women’s History Month

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<td><strong>THE SUPREME PRICE</strong> 6:30 PM Building 32, Room 123 MIT</td>
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<td>WADJDA 6 PM Room 2-150 Lesley University</td>
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<td><strong>REBEL</strong> 6:30 PM Barnum Hall 008 Tufts University</td>
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<td><strong>OUT IN THE NIGHT</strong> 7 PM Snell Library, Room 90 Northeastern University</td>
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<td>100% <strong>WOMAN</strong> 6:15 PM Snowden Auditorium UMass Boston</td>
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<td><strong>ROCKS IN MY POCKETS</strong> 7 PM Bright Family Screening Room Emerson</td>
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<td>THE GREY AREA 7 PM Lowry 002 Brandeis University</td>
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<td>GULABI GAN 6 PM Fulton Hall 511 Boston College</td>
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**Festival film screenings at Simmons College and Boston University to be scheduled. Visit www.mit.edu/gcws/ for more information.**

**All university screenings are *FREE***

Join us for a film festival, chock-full of films by women filmmakers. This rockin’ line-up includes accompanying Q&A sessions by faculty, film producers and directors.

For more information about films, presentations and locations visit:

[www.mit.edu(gcws/)](http://www.mit.edu/gcws/)

**SPONSORED BY:** MIT Program in Women’s and Gender Studies; the Graduate Consortium in Women’s Studies; Boston College Women’s and Gender Studies Program; Boston University Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program; Brandeis University Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program; Northeastern University Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program; Simmons College Department of Women’s and Gender Studies; Tufts University Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program; Lesley University; and Emerson College Department of Visual and Media Arts

**IN HONOR OF WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH**

Women's and Gender Studies
**DR. EMILY ROTHMAN, ScD**

**Boston College Women’s and Gender Studies Program**
Co-sponsored by R.E.A.C.T.

**How can stories of dating and sexual relationships have happy endings?:**
How pornography, alcohol, and relationship styles make a difference

**Monday, March 23rd**
6:30pm - 8:00pm
Stokes S195

Questions: gender@bc.edu

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**JANET JAMES AWARD**

Women’s and Gender Studies Seniors

Every Spring a graduating senior is granted an award for distinguished scholarship in Women’s and Gender Studies. To be considered for the Janet Wilson James Award, please submit your materials, listed on the Women’s and Gender Studies website, to gender@bc.edu. NOTE: You do not need to be a WGS minor to apply.

The Janet James Award carries a cash prize of $250 and a signed copy of a WGS book from one of our WGS faculty.

Deadline for Submissions: 5pm on Friday, April 17, 2015.
I’ve seen “The Vagina Monologues” many times, but this was the first time I’d heard “They Beat the Girl Out of My Boy,” a piece about transgender identities. I was struck by the lines that described the murder of a man in love with a transwoman: “They didn’t want him to fall in love with ambiguity. They were terrified he’d get lost.” Why this fear of gender ambiguity—of bodies not matching the behaviors that have been assigned to them by larger social codes? Why this need to punish people whose bodies can’t be read in the ways we’ve been taught to read them? I’ve taught a number of classes that center on these questions, and on the history of how gender ambiguity has been regarded and represented in European countries. In legal documents that record cases of intersexed people in the 16th and 17th centuries, individuals appear, for the most part, to have been allowed to choose whether they were male or female. But if they moved between sexes, if they played in the gray, they were subject to harsh punishment. As the 16th-century medical writer, Ambrose Paré, put it: “They are forbidden on pain of death to use any [sexual parts] but those they will have chosen.”

Over the next two centuries, there was a growing disavowal in the medical community of truly intersexed bodies—or hermaphrodites, as they were called. Instead, there was an insistence on locating a “true sex” to every body—either male or female. As biologist Ann Fausto-Sterling explains in her book *Sexing the Body,* “as biology emerged as an organized discipline during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it gradually acquired greater authority over the disposition of ambiguous bodies … At the same time, it redefined such bodies as pathological, as unhealthy conditions to be cured using increased medical knowledge.”

One of the texts I teach is a memoir written by a nineteenth-century French intersex person, Herculine Barbin—or Camille, as she calls herself in the memoir. Raised until the age of 21 as a girl, Camille falls in love with one of the young women, Sara, with whom she works at a girls’ school. Driven partially by Catholic guilt (she confesses what she was doing sexually with Sara to different priests—one of whom advises her that she is indeed male), in part by the pressures of the medical professionals who examine her, in part by her desire to marry Sara, and in part by her hetero-normatively circumscribed belief that she could only give Sara “incomplete joys,” she puts herself through the process of being legally declared male. Within 8 years, she would kill herself. Herculine writes during this period of transition of her “double and bizarre existence,” and asks: “Can my isolation be more complete? Can my abandonment be more painful?”

What if she had been able to talk about her vagina (imperfect as it was according to the probing hands and eyes of the medical men who examined her) without shame and without limits? Would she have been able to live more happily in her own skin? What if she had been allowed to talk about having both a penis and a vagina? Or what, perhaps most unimaginable and subversive of all, she had been able to love and express her love with her body without using any gendered physiological labels at all?

40 years ago, the feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin wrote: “The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless (thought not sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love.” Herculine expresses this same dream early in her memoir, when she first starts sensing that her body is different from the other convent girls: “I returned their affection fully but in a way that was almost fearful. I was born to love. All the faculties of my soul impelled me to it.” Just last month, in a Time magazine article, Eve Ensler echoed these hopes: “We need to create a loving space for people with vaginas, and women without them, to address our oppressions, desires, and secrets and to simultaneously honor the fact that gender is not based on anatomy or genitalia.” It’s far too late for Herculine, and for the many individuals who have died for playing in or with the grey. But I’m hopeful that, as voices emerge and stories are told without fear, this dream will continue to motivate all of us to speak up and work for change.
~ Allison Adair, Professor of English ~

Though I had seen Ensler’s play before, this was my first experience with the BC production. And what a lively production it was! The students in the crowd brought as much energy to the exchange as did the first-rate cast, and the entire event buzzed with a sense of purpose and collaboration. The “Dialogues on the Monologues” later that week encouraged consideration of the play’s urgent revelations and requests, especially relative to our own academic, social, and personal experiences. My own remarks focused on how metaphor complicates our understanding of women and women’s bodies. We discussed the paradox of limitation and liberation in some of The Vagina Monologues’ metaphors (the Bermuda Triangle, a raw fish cut open, an English garden, a settee, a peach, etc.) and in related precedents from history, literature, and even medicine. We questioned the motivations behind metaphor as euphemism but noted how often in the play metaphor facilitates characters’ therapeutic disclosure and resulting realizations. These issues were given a usefully complex form in Professor Caroline Bicks’s discussion of Herculine Barbin, the 19th-century French intersex person who was “born to love.” Prof. Bicks noted some criticism of Ensler’s play, specifically concerns that the play might not do enough to offer voice or advocacy for the intersex and transgender communities. Participants debated whether the focus of the monologues is or should be on womanhood broadly defined, or on the vagina in particular, and what the implications of each would be for the play’s levels of inclusiveness. Professor John McDargh offered insightful anecdotes from his years teaching BC’s Spirituality and Sexuality course, including ways in which The Vagina Monologues gives voice to male students’ own feelings of dissociation from their bodies. Prof. McDargh highlighted a moving common denominator among the metaphors, Barbin’s story, and the perspectives of those in attendance: in each case, individuals have a need to be—and to feel—“significant and wanted.” That need seems to be at the core of Ensler’s play, and it is one of the reasons BC’s production continues to offer a valuable service to the university community.

~ John McDargh, Professor of Theology ~

My experience of this year’s The Vagina Monologues was evocative of my very first encounter with the production many years ago. It remains one of the most memorable theatre experiences of my adult life (right up there with Lily Tomlin and Jane Wagner’s Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe). Like that one-woman show, its moments of humor, shock, and poignancy deliver a message which, from my perspective as a theologian of religious experience, is quite profoundly spiritual and a touchstone for understanding what the Christian tradition may mean when it deploys the language of “Grace”. Rowan Williams, retired Archbishop of Canterbury, in his important essay on human sexuality “The Body’s Grace” writes, “Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted.” Numbers of the monologues memorably witness to the sense of shame and alienation from the goodness of the body and particularly female sexual embodiment that is antithetical to the vision of creation in Genesis. Think “The Flood” or, even more traumatically, the soul-wrenching interview of a female survivor of rape in Bosnia. But the play also testifies to the surprising healing and homecoming that happens when a woman feels her whole self “as significant, as wanted”. The monologue, “Because He Liked to Look At It,” is one such example. Another is the monologue, “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could,” which has often been a source of great scandal because it involves an inter-generational seduction. Archbishop Williams would have understood this without judgment. The very title of his essay is taken from a line in Paul Scott’s The Raj Quartets about a tacky “one night stand” that for all that was problematic about it nevertheless gifted the woman who was involved with a first time sense of entering “into her body’s grace”. It is the nature of God’s gift of the grace that overcomes our separation from our own “mystery, depth, and greatness” (Tillich), that it strikes in some of the most unlikely, shocking, and humanly improbable ways.