

Gender, Race and School Shootings: Why Isn't This Conversation Happening?

By Alison Bailey

Like most of you I was shocked by the Columbine Massacre and the spate of school shootings that followed it, but for some reason the recent shootings at Nickel Mines, PA seem so much more horrifying to me. Maybe it's because I used to live outside of Lancaster, PA and had Amish neighbors. Maybe it's because I just can't imagine anyone having any reason to be violent toward Amish children. Maybe it's because the perpetrator was an older man with a history of sexual abuse. Maybe it's because this has happened again, and we are still not talking about gender, or about why angry white men and boys are shooting young boys and girls.

Charles Roberts, 32-year-old milkman, lays siege to a one-room school house in Nickel Mines, PA. He orders all of the boys and adults out of the building. He lines the girls up against the blackboard and shoots, killing five of them and wounding five more. They are between the ages of 6 and 13. Police suspect that Roberts intended to keep the girls captive so that he could sexually abuse them.

Think back through the history of school shootings if you can. Pearl, Mississippi: Luke Woodham kills his former girlfriend and her best friend. West Paducah, Kentucky: Michael Carneal kills a girl who rejected him and another who refused to date him. Jonesboro, Arkansas: Mitchell Johnson shoots his ex-girlfriend and two girls who refused his advances, and vows to kill all other girls who broke up with him. Eleven-year-old Andrew Golden shoots his ex-girlfriend. Fayetteville, Tennessee: Jacob Davis kills the boy currently dating his ex-girlfriend. Springfield, Oregon: Kipland Kinkel reports feeling agitated and disturbed after being rejected by the girl he loved. He shoots two boys

from his school and his parents. Littleton, Colorado: Eric Harris and Dylan Kiebold are teased about being gay, and complain about constant rejection from girls. Vincent Rodriguez of New York wants revenge on the boys who harassed his girlfriend. Why do these men turn to violence as a way of processing rejection, or as a way of protecting "their" girlfriends from other men's advances?

This series of school shootings has forced us into a national conversation about the causes of "school violence," or how to stop "kids killing kids." Yet public attention to these crimes repeatedly leaves out the roles sexism, homophobia, and racism play in these crimes. I don't have the answers, but I do think we need to ask some new questions. It's not just about "youth violence." It's about male violence. Too often this perspective is ignored in media representations of school shootings. Doesn't anyone else see this?

Maybe, as Jackson Katz and Sut Jhally, co-writer and director of the film "Tough Guise," have suggested, "what these shootings reveal is not a crisis in youth culture, but a crisis in masculinity." It's so much easier to look for individual pathologies than to look for systemic problems. True, many of the killers did have serious trauma and mental health issues. This may help to explain why they are violent, frustrated, and angry, but it does *not* explain why men and boys are doing the shooting, and why they are more prone to make young women and girls their targets. Think about it. If young women were arming themselves and shooting their peers we would be having a national conversation about violence and femininity. If the perpetrators were young men of color, you can be sure that the conversation would be steered toward issues of race. So why aren't we talking about race and gender in *these* cases? Why aren't we talking about white male violence?

Again, as Katz and Jhally observe, when the perpetrators are boys, we talk in a gender-neutral way about children

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Women's and Gender Studies Staff

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and call on experts to address the accessibility of guns, parenting skills, peer-group exclusion, and media violence. It's important that we discuss these factors; but if they are an integral part of the dominant American culture, then why don't girls, who are raised in the same culture, respond to rejection, harassment, grief, and lost love in the same violent way?

The gendered dimensions of violence can give us clues about how to respond to these crises. But we can't have these conversations unless we make race and gender visible and start talking about how they structure white adolescent male violence. In the mean time we can talk to young girls and boys about strategies for managing grief, loss, and anger. And, we can teach kids what healthy relationships look like. ☀

Sources:

Jackson Katz and Sut Jhally, "Crisis in Masculinity," *Boston Globe*, 2 May, 1999, E01.

Jessie Klein, "Teaching Her a Lesson: Media Misses Boys' Rage Relating to Girls in School Shootings." Sage Publications. Available: <http://cmc.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/1/1/90.pdf#search=%22Gender%20and%20School%20Shootings%22>.

Tough Guise. Directed by Sut Jhally. 57 min. Media Educational Foundation, 1999.

**School of Theatre to Stage Play by WGS Graduate:
Human Rights Activist to Visit Campus**

The School of Theatre will present the world premiere of Margaret E. Iha's play *Hopeless Spinning* on December 1-3 and 6-8. Several years ago, Iha earned her graduate degree in Politics and Government and a graduate certificate in Women's Studies at Illinois State University. Her new play is set in Rio de Janeiro, and tells the story of Sam, an American journalism student, and her desire to complete a photo essay on Rio's street kids.

In conjunction with this production, Janet Wilson and Maria Schmeckle have arranged to bring in Yvonne Bezerra de Mello, an internationally recognized and acclaimed social activist who works with the street children of Brazil. The extreme poverty and violence that people experience in the *favelas* (slums) lead many children to run away and take their chances on the streets. These thousands of street children are perceived by the elite as repulsive, and, during the 1990s, the international press drew attention to the fact that they were being routinely gunned down. For details, see Calendar. ☀

She Rocks!

By Shushan Avagyan

The National Women's Music Festival, the oldest women's music festival in North America, was moved to ISU, bringing with it a 32-year-old tradition that gathers together women of various backgrounds for a four-day celebration of popular music. Originally started in 1974, the first NWMF was held on the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in response to the under-representation of women in the music industry.

This year's fest at ISU ran July 6-9, offering a jam-packed weekend of workshops, concerts, drama, dances, drum circles, films, and videos. I attended the SheRocks! night stages for avant-garde and new artists (the evening program featured second-waver favorites such as Tret Fure and Cheryl Wheeler).

I'd never been to a women's music fest and wasn't sure what to expect. Surely, I wouldn't dream that I would be standing next to Alix Olson, a vociferous folk poet, saying, "Hey, I really dig your spoken-word!" To those who haven't heard Olson's audacious, politically radical, and energetic performance, I can only say: Folks, you're missing out.

Another equally groundbreaking performance was staged by God-des and She, whose hardcore lyrics and rapping shook the walls. When more than half the audience gets up to leave, you *know* it's got to be revolutionary. As soon as we hear the beat and the rhythm of hip-hop, we might expect language and images that are offensive to most women (unless it's Lauren Hill or, say, Leela James). This assumption limits people from hearing and sharing something as innovative and radically feminist as God-des and She's music.

Folk-rocker Melineh Kurdian stressed how important it was for her, a newly emerging artist, to play at the NWMF: "The support that you get from fellow musicians and the audience is so empowering—nothing can ever come close to the experience—being around these brilliant, strong, and politically motivated women." ☀

NWMF is accepting artist submissions through October 31. For submission information, check out: <http://wiaonline.org/nwmf/>.

Student News

Joe Ryan Art Exhibit Graces Our Walls

By Becca Chase



Joe Ryan with his work "A Six Pack and a Nice Rack"

On Thursday, September 14, the Women's and Gender Studies Program opened the first in a series of four exhibits by student artists to be held during the 2006-7 year. The first exhibit, "Real Men Wear Makeup," showcases the work of Joe Ryan, a double

major in art education and painting. Transforming images of male mannequins by adding female accoutrements such as makeup, bras, and wigs, Ryan challenges gender norms by highlighting how easily a conventionally masculine image can be transformed into a more feminine one. He also uses images of drag queens.

At the opening, Ryan gave an artist's talk. The opening was well attended, and the talk was informative. His technique was to transfer black-and-white images of mannequin parts and drag queens onto canvas. Then he painted the images with hot pink and neon orange, creating a shocking contrast with the black and white backgrounds.

"Each painting displays a specific step in preparing for a drag performance, such as wearing various styles of makeup, wigs, bras, platform shoes, tights and dresses," says Ryan. "The wild colors bring out the unique women that these men are portraying."

The result is a visually striking and intellectually challenging exploration of gender stereotypes. "By juxtaposing feminine dress on the male body," Ryan explains, "the viewer is able to reflect on the notions of identity that reflect our societal standards."

The exhibit continues in the Women's and Gender Studies Program suite through October 19. ☀

FLAME: A New Feminist RSO on Campus

By Annaliisa Ahlman

Like a Phoenix rising, the ISU chapter of the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance has been reborn as FLAME, Feminist Led Activist Movement to Empower. It is allied with the founding chapter at the University of Idaho, which promotes political and social activism based on sex equality. The group started with a surge of excitement, as about 50 women and men, students and faculty packed the Rachel Cooper lounge. Since then committees have been formed, and meetings are being held biweekly. At the September 26 meeting Yadira Ruiz from YWCA's Stepping Stones led a discussion on what it means to live in a rape culture. Other events this year have included social events; and discussions on what it means to be a feminist, violence against women on campus, and FLAME's mission.

FLAME has an active fundraising campaign, including the sale of "This is What a Feminist Looks Like" t-shirts and Yankee Candles. The organization will also sponsor the 2007 production of *The Vagina Monologues* at ISU. To have your name added to a listserv for information on *The Vagina Monologues* committee, please email amahlma@ilstu.edu.

For more information on fundraising, events, or upcoming meetings, contact FLAME at isuflame@yahoo.com. A website is currently under construction, but more information about what the organization stands for can be found at <http://stuorgs.uidaho.edu/~flame/Basics.html>. ☀

Dorothy E. Lee Award Presented at Women's Mentoring Network Conference



Diane Peterson was awarded the third annual Dorothy E. Lee Scholarship for nontraditional students. She received the scholarship at the Women's Mentoring Network Conference, held September 30. After spending three years at Heartland Community College, Diane has transferred to ISU to pursue a B.A. in English. She is pictured at left with her family, who also attended the conference. Congratulations, Diane! ☀

Faculty Accomplishments

Alison Bailey presented “Purity and Ignorance in Charles Mills’ *The Racial Contract*” at the 23rd Annual Conference of the North American Society for Social Philosophy, University of Victoria, BC.

Gina Bessa published “Medicalization, Reproductive Agency, and the Culture of Sterilization in Brazil” in *Medical Anthropology: Cross Cultural Studies in Health and Illness* 25 (2006): 221-263, and “Ethnophysiology and Contraceptive Use among Low-income Women in Brazil” in *Health Care for Women International* 27 no. 5 (2005): 428-452.

Sherrilyn Billger was a principal investigator on an interdisciplinary team that received a large grant from the USDA’s National Research Initiative to study the causes and consequences of rural school closures in Illinois from 1970 through the present.

Thomas J. Gershick published “The Body, Disability, and Sexuality” in *Handbook of the New Sexuality Studies*, edited by Steven Siedman, Nancy Fisher, and Chet Meeks (Taylor and Francis, 2006).

Cynthia Kukla had two paintings in an exhibit at the Rockford Art Museum from May 19-July 23, 2006. She also had a painting in Watercolor USA 2006, an annual national survey of water media paintings held annually at the Springfield Art Museum in Springfield, Missouri from June 9-August 6, 2006.

Victoria Harris presented “Embodied Wor(l)d of Adrienne Rich” for the Poetry and Politics Conference in Scotland on July 14, 2006.

Maura Toro-Morn was appointed Director of the Latin American and Latino Studies Program.

Michelle Vought presented “Madame/Monsieur” on September 30 at the Campus Religious Center and October 6 at ISU’s Kemp Recital Hall.

Kirsten Hotelling Zona published “Jorie Graham and American Poetry” in *Contemporary Literature* 46, no.4 (2005): 667-87. Her poem “Riptide” was published in the *Southwest Review* and won the 2005 Elizabeth Matchett Stover Memorial Award.

Welcome, Newcomers!

New WGS minors

Krupa Dave, Politics and Government
Erin Davidshofer, Anthropology
Andrea Radliff, Psychology

New Graduate Certificate Students

Julie Maschoff, Curriculum and Instruction
Yaerim Song, English Literature

New Affiliated Faculty

Oforiwaa Aduonum, Music
Gardenia Harris, Social Work
Melissa Johnson, Art
James Pancrazio, Languages, Literature, and Cultures
John R. Poole, Theatre
Ali Riaz, Politics and Government
Richard Sullivan, Sociology
Michelle Vought, Music
Janet Wilson, Theatre
Kirsten Zona, English



Ricia Chansky (left) and Nancy Tolson (right) at the 2006 Women's and Gender Studies Meet and Greet



Women's Mentoring Network Luncheon

Women's and Gender Studies Calendar

Oct 11: Dr. Wanda Pillow, "Searching for Sacajawea: Whitened Reproductions and Endarkened Representations." Free Pizza! STV 401, Noon.

Oct 11: GLBT Kick-Off Celebration, Circus Room, BSC, 6 p.m.

Oct 16: "The Influence of Religion, Moral Values, and 'Gay Marriage' Votes on the 2004 Presidential Election," by Dr. James V. Koch. Old Main Room, BSC, 7 p.m.

Oct 18: Take Back the Night March. Prairie Room, BSC, 7 p.m.

Oct 20-23: *The Illustrated Woman*, a play by Nancy Keifer:

Oct 20: Centennial West, 7:30 p.m.

Oct 21: Centennial West, 2 p.m.

Oct 22: YWCA, 7:30 p.m.

Oct 23: Centennial West, 2 p.m.

Oct 23: Safe Zone Training Session, SSB 375, Noon-2:00 p.m.

Oct 24: *Same Sex American*, movie and facilitated discussion with Dr. Becca Chase, Circus Room, BSC, 7:00 p.m.

Oct 25: Dr. Subho Bas, Syracuse University, "Unsettled Himalayas: People's Movements and the Collapse of Monarchical Order in Nepal." Free Pizza! STV 401, Noon.

Oct 28: The Walk of Hope: Domestic Violence Walk Experience. Downtown Bloomington, 5 p.m. (309) 827-2009.

Nov 8: Dr. Nigel Gibson, Emerson College, "New Shackdweller Movements Challenge Post-Apartheid South Africa." STV 401, Noon.

Nov 15: James Pancrazio, "The Case of the Enriqueta Faber: Writing the History of a Transvestite" Free Pizza! STV 401, Noon.

Nov 15: Healthy You, Healthy Earth Wellness and Environmental Fair. Brown Ballroom, BSC, 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Nov 29-Dec 1: Presentations about Brazilian street children by human rights activist Yvonne Bezzaro de Mello:

Nov 27: *Warrior of Light*, documentary about and Q&A with Bezzaro de Mello. Normal Theatre, 7:00 p.m.

Nov 29: Colloquium & reception. Location TBA, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

Honors Colloquium. SCH 242, 4:00-5:30 p.m.

Nov 30: College of Education Open Forum. DEG 551, 4:00-5:00 p.m.

Dec 1: Colloquium with playwright Margaret E. Iha. Center for the Performing Arts Theatre, 1:00-2:00 p.m.

Dec 1-3 and 6-8: *Hopeless Spinning*, Margaret Iha's play about Rio de Janeiro street children. Westhoff Theater, 7:30 p.m. Dec 3, 2 p.m. matinee.

PRIDE Meetings, SSB 375, 7 p.m.

Oct 11: National Coming Out Day

Oct 18: Safe Zone Training

Oct 25: Ally Night

Nov 1: Sex Toy Night

Nov 8: Guerrilla

Nov 10: Dance

Nov 15: Coming Out

Nov 29: Yoga/Health and Wellness

Spring 2007 Seminar

WGS 391: Between Literature and Politics: Native Women on Decolonization
Ann Haugo, Ph.D.

This interdisciplinary seminar explores recent writing—creative and scholarly—by Native women of the U.S. and Canada, in order to build an understanding of decolonization and related political concerns as they affect Native women. In each unit, we will study recent scholarship and/or commentary about a particular topic, as well as works of literature that address it. Scholarly texts include: *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, by Andrea Smith; *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*, by Devon Mihesuah; and *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America*, edited by Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird. Other readings will include *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*; Spiderwoman Theatre's *Winnetou's Snake Oil Show from Wigwam City*, and Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*.

Gender Matters
Illinois State University
Women's and Gender Studies Program
Rachel Cooper 2nd Floor
Campus Box 4260
Normal, IL 61790-4260

Spring 2007 Course Offerings:

Undergraduate Required Courses

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|---------|--|------------------------------|
| WGS 120 | Women, Gender and Society | TR 9:35-10:50 TR 11-12:15 |
| ENG 160 | Women in Literature | TR 2-3:15 |
| HIS 262 | History of Women in the United States Since 1865 | TR 2-3:15 |

Undergraduate Elective Courses

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| ENG 160 | Women in Literature | TR 2-3:15 |
| COM/ENG /LAN 128 | Gender in the Humanities | MWF 9-9:50 TR 9:35-10:50 MWF 11-11:50 MWF 2-2:50 TR 3:35-4:50 |
| ENG 261 | Women's Literature in a Global Context | TR 9:35-10:50 TR 11-12:15 MW 3-4:15 |
| HIS 330 | The Family in History | T 6-8:50 |
| PSY/SOC 123 | Human Sexuality | MWF 2-2:50 |

Graduate Required Courses

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| WGS 490 | Feminist Theories and Methodological Issues | M 5:30-8:20 |
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Graduate Elective Courses

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| ENG 460 | Feminist Literary Theories | W 5:30-8:20 |
| FCS 305 | Families in Later Life | T 5:30-8:20 |
| FCS 333 | Family and Consumer Public Policy | W 5:30-8:20 |
| FCS 412 | Families and the Workplace | M 5:30-8:20 |
| PSY 305* | Psychology of Women | T 5:30-8:20 |
| SOC 311 | Issues in Gerontology | T 5:30-8:20 |
| SOC 366* | Contemporary Social Movements | M 5:30-8:20 |
| WGS 391* | Between Literature and Politics: Native Women on Decolonization | TR 11-12:15 |

*Also counts as undergraduate elective

Visit our new website at <http://www.womensandgenderstudies.ilstu.edu>