Dear faculty and staff members,

Dear students,

The spring semester has come and gone in a flurry and we had some bad weather until the end of April. Fortunately, heavy snow storms and rains didn’t keep you from attending our lectures, performances, and symposia and participating in our outreach and advocacy programs.

With the help of a great number of co-sponsors, both on and off-campus, the Women’s and Gender Studies Program and Chellis House have been able to bring a host of speakers to campus. Women’s History Month was dedicated to two themes: Gay identity in graphic novels, with talks by Siobhan Somerville and cartoonist Alison Bechdel; and Latin American women in history and in today’s world, with lectures by Bernadette Beserra, Heloísa Galvão, Juan Maura, and a student talk by Kolbe Franklin.

We also organized and supported two symposia on campus. The AAUW-sponsored 3-day “Breaking the Barriers: Women in the Workforce Symposium” focused on the pay gap. I am happy to say that a group on campus is forming that will explore how we can help reduce this problem.

With the generous support of the Gensler Family Fund and various other sponsors on campus, we organized a 5-day series of events under the title “Sex & War”. While most discussions of wars have focused on the politics behind military action as well as the human costs, there has been little sustained debate on the role women, sexuality, and gender politics have played in the lead up to the war, in combat zones, and/or in their aftermath. We organized performance art, film screenings, and panel discussions. We received great feedback from several attendees who said that the symposium revealed gendered aspects of war that they had not been exposed to before.

The 2007 Alison Fraker Prize, which is given out for the best paper in Women’s and Gender Studies, was awarded to senior Mateal Lovaas. Other nominees included Astri von Arbin Ahlander, Kathryn Flagg, Noor Puthawala, Rayna Rognosky, Jennifer Leigh Williams, Komal Garewal, Erin Rokey, Prerna Seth, and Allison Shaffer. Kudos to all of them!

The “Sister-to-Sister” Program also grew by leaps and bounds this year. Not only have we doubled our attendance, but we also received support from the Middlebury Lyons and Rotary Clubs, Neat Repeats, the Middlebury Branch of AAUW, and American Flatbread. A big thank you to all of them.

New community outreach programs are in the works for the next school year. Currently, a group of students is forming bonds with young parents and children at 8 Elm Street, a first-years renters’ program in downtown Middlebury.

There’s a lot to look forward to in fall 2007!

Have a great summer break!
Karin Hanta
WAGS Faculty Achievements

Ikram Masmoudi (International Studies and Arabic Program) received an Ada Howe Kent Grant for 2007–08 in support of the development of a new course on Iraqi literature in translation for Fall 2008 or Spring 2009.

Martha Woodruff (Philosophy Dept.) published a book chapter in an edited volume: “Plato’s Different Device: Reconciling the One and the Many in the Philebus” in Philosophy in Dialogue (ed. Gary Scott, Northwestern UP, 2007). The article discusses why this dialogue (among others) interests feminist philosophers for its non-dichotomous ways of reconciling apparent opposites. In addition, Professor Woodruff will present another paper (also including feminist interpretations) at the International Plato Society, held this summer at Trinity College, Dublin.

Catherine Combelles (Biology Dept.) received a faculty grant from the Vermont Genetics Network for 2007 for a project entitled “The Profiling of Pro/Anti-Oxidants during Ovarian Folliculogenesis”. Using a clinically-relevant animal model, this proposal aims to improve basic understanding of factors that may influence the quality of oocytes. Professor Combelles will investigate the oxidative stress systems that prevail in all of the compartments making up the ovarian follicle, thereby defining the milieu within which an oocyte acquires its normal ability to support the complete development of a healthy embryo, fetus, and eventually adult. These findings seek to enhance our ability to detect and produce oocytes of optimal quality, thereby providing critical foundations for the improvement of female reproductive health.

Sujata Moorti (WAGS Program) published an article entitled “Imaginary Homes, Transplanted Traditions: The Transnational Optic and the Production of Tradition in Indian Television” in the UK-based Journal of Creative Communications.

Student Achievements

Two students with close ties to Chellis House and the Women’s and Gender Studies Program received this year’s Public Service Awards, which Middlebury College’s Alliance for Civic Engagement gives out each year:

Emily S. Theriault (’07) received the Bonnie McCardell Public Service Award. Emily is a founding member of the Chellis House-run “Sister-to-Sister Program” that connects middle school girls with Middlebury students to create a safe and supportive environment for young women in Addison County. Emily joined “Sister-to-Sister” in its first year in 2005 with her sister Caroline. She helped organize three one-day summits to empower girls from Middlebury, Vergennes, and Bristol middle schools. Together with her other team members, she ran monthly get-togethers with the girls. The Bonnie McCardell Public Service Award was created by the wife of Middlebury College President Emeritus, John McCardell. It is given to a student who exemplifies outreach in youth and family services, literacy, and the special needs experienced during a person’s critical middle and early high school years.

Elizabeth A. Lyon (’07) received the Dana Morosini Reeve ’84 Memorial Public Service Award, for founding the student organization “Incarceration in Question,” which raises awareness on campus of social injustice in America’s prison system, and for volunteering with WomenSafe. In November 2006, Liz organized a symposium entitled “Double Standards of Justice in the United States,” which took a critical view of the death penalty and hosted various speakers whose advocate for people on death row. In honor of a life dedicated to caring for others and activism on their behalf, Middlebury College in 2006 introduced a new student leadership award named for alumna Dana Morosini Reeve, a member of the Middlebury class of 1984, who died in 2006.
Mateal Lovaas receives Fraker Prize

Every year, the Women’s and Gender Studies Program awards the Alison Fraker Prize for the best paper in the field of women’s and gender studies produced for any Middlebury College course during the preceding calendar year. This year, Mateal Lovaas (‘07) received the award for her paper “To the Moon and Back: Gender Construction in Children’s Literature,” which she wrote for Professor Michael Sheridan’s class “Language and Power.” Here is an excerpt:

Feminist and linguist Robin Lakoff once said, ‘Words become powerful because they can be used as tools: like a hammer or a gun, they don’t make changes by themselves, but through a human being’s use of them, skillful or clumsy.’ Children’s picture book authors often use their tools clumsily, hammering in gender biases through male-dominated covers, titles, main character positions, secondary character positions, and active character positions; through writing about females that are acted upon, that need the help of others to solve their problems, and that are ‘small,’ ‘frightened,’ ‘beautiful’; through reinforcing society’s hegemonic gender cages regarding characteristics, actions, careers, and emotions; and through continuing the associations of certain animals and objects with one specific gender. [She] outlined four ways to address these biases: censorship, reading against the grain, gender-neutral books, and gender equality books. While these approaches are not mutually exclusive (…) my own study and other children’s literature studies have shown that gender-neutral books often do not break down gender bias, and might even reinforce certain stereotypes as readers project what they know from their ‘black box’ onto certain phrases, actions, and characters.

“But it is not all a depressing haze of black boxes. There are also certain organic intellectuals that use their tools skillfully to subvert and re-conceptualize our current gender reality. While they sometimes use the same literary tools as the more classically stereotyped children’s books, (…) they ultimately do so to undermine or expand those frames, allowing Peg to be a successful fisherwoman and encouraging Little Nutbrown Hare to be emotionally expressive. Power should not be conceived of as a ‘goal’ that both genders need to ‘reach,’ but as a complex and fluid relationship that continually needs adjusting according to the linguistic and genderized realities we construct.

In an interview with author Bill Martin Jr., Patterson quotes Martin’s profound words on the relationship between language and power: ‘I once asked Bill what title he would give his own life story. He paused and said,

It would be something that suggests a quest and an effort to improve my relationship to others through language… It is with language that we create our lives. It is with language in the head that we enlarge the life space… We live our language.

“Empowerment, then, is about ‘enlarging the life space.’ Ultimately, while I do not advocate banning the classics, if we are to enlarge the life spaces of children, the classics need to be complemented with books that break down gender stereotypes and begin to re-conceptualize the complex relationship between language, gender, and power. Mem Fox writes about this type of re-conceptualization in her own work:

I feel a strong obligation to make it permissible for boys to dance and paint by writing about boys who dance and paint. I write the possibilities into their lives… my pirates cry; my babysitters are leather-wearing teenage boys with punk hair; my heroes in love don’t live happily ever after; and my male adventurers are led to success by stronger women, without being demeaned by the experience.

“I whole-heartedly agree. I want the picture books that children read to ‘write possibilities into their lives,’ not limit them. I want my three little sisters, Elise, Alden, and India, to know that Max could have been a girl, just like them. I want them to know that they can be wild and angry, and that I will still love them. (…) I also want them to know that they can be competitive farmers, business women, skateboarders and politicians. And I want Jamie to know that he can be both competitive and emotionally-expressive, or neither for that matter, and I will still think he is an amazing human being.

“We have on our hands the next generation of very hungry caterpillars, and I wish for them, as I wish for myself, a life free from the cages of gender. The forecast might be dismal, even cloudy with a chance of meatballs, but one book at time, we can begin to show this generation, as well as our own, that another world is possible, a world where when any adult asks a child ‘Guess how much I love you?’, they already know the answer — ‘to the moon and back of course.’

www.middlebury.eduacademicsumpmajorsws
WAGS/SOAN 0191 Introduction to Sociology of Gender
What is gender and what would a sociology of it look like? When did gender become a category of inquiry and more importantly why? We will look at how the meaning and performance of gender changed over time, from Classical Greece to Victorian England, to the contemporary U.S. We will also look at how gender changes depending on one’s position in social space, e.g. one’s race, class, sexuality, and nationality. Finally, we will consider how the need to look at gender is the result of a variety of discourses, from psychoanalysis to capitalism to movements of liberation such as feminism. 2 hrs. lect., 1 hr. disc. SOC CMP (L. Essig)

WAGS/THEA 0206 Contemporary Women Playwrights (CW)
The course will include readings and discussion of the work of a number of the most influential and interesting American, Canadian, and European playwrights of the 1970s to the present. Authors to be explored include: Maria Irene Fomes, Caryl Churchill, Suzan-Lori Parks, Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Judith Thompson, Naomi Wallace, Shelagh Stephenson, and others. The playwrights’ concerns range from the domestic to the apocalyptic, and their stylistic choices are equally wide ranging. In addition to the study of individual works, the course will also include an overview of the authors’ relationships to the culture and to the art form. 3 hrs. lect./4 hrs. lect. ART LIT (C. Faraone)

WAGS/GRMN 0226 To Veil or not to Veil: Germany and Islam (in English)
Women’s status in Islam is one of the most controversial and serious issues of our time. For those Muslim women who reside in a Judeo-Christian environment, their status is further obfuscated by tensions between contested constructions of gender. This course offers a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective on gender construction in Germany as relating to Islam. We will interrogate some of the assumptions made about the formation and representation of “femininity” within different cultural frameworks. Primary readings will include works by Özdamar, Senocak, Ören, Özakin, and Tekinay. This course is taught in English. 3 hrs. lect./disc. LIT SOC CMP (K. Murti)

WAGS/JAPN 0250 Gender in Japan
In this course we will examine changing ideas about gender and sexuality in Japan in the tenth through twentieth centuries, with special attention to the modern period. Sources will include literary texts, films, and social/historical studies. We will discuss topics, including women’s writing in classical Japan; the commercialization of sexuality in the eighteenth century; ideas of “homosexuality” in late-medieval and modern times; and women’s social roles and political struggles in the twentieth century. LIT AAL (L. White)

WAGS/HIST 0373 History of American Women
Did you ever wonder how the Industrial Revolution or the Civil War might be understood if you consider gender as part of American history? This course will examine women’s social, political, cultural, and economic position in American society. We will explore the shifting ideological basis for gender roles, as well as the effects of race, class, ethnicity, and region on women’s lives. Topics covered will include: women’s political role, women’s work, sexuality, access to education, the limits of “sisterhood” across racial and economic boundaries, and the opportunities women used to expand their sphere of influence. 2 hrs. lect. 1 hr. disc. HIST NOR CMP (A. Morsman)

WAGS 0400 Women and Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives
Open to students who have completed two introductory courses in women’s and gender studies, this seminar is designed to prepare majors in the women’s and gender studies program for senior work. It also serves as an advanced reading seminar for other students with course work in women’s and gender studies. The class will explore how the category of gender shapes academic scholarship across the disciplines and informs public debate over women’s issues. What themes, research goals, and problems unify the work of women’s and gender studies across the disciplines? How is the category of gender related to other categories of identity and/or social location? Topics may include legal and political reform, language, reason and emotion, sexuality, and visual representations of the body. (WAGS 0200) 3 hrs. lect. (S. Moorti)
WAGS/HIST 0416 Readings in Middle Eastern History: Women and Islam
In this course we will examine women’s lives in Islamic societies from the seventh century to the contemporary period, focusing on the Middle East and North Africa. Readings will explore a variety of topics including the changing role of women from pre-Islamic to Islamic societies; women in Islamic law and practice; gender roles in relation to colonialism, nationalism, and radical Islam; non-Muslim women in Islamic societies; and Western images of Muslim women. 3 hrs. sem. HIS AAL (F. Armanios)

WAGS/ENAM 0435 The Heroine as Hero: Gender and Narrative in the 19th and 20th Century Novel
In this course, we will examine a range of novels in English from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by authors both male and female that focus on the experience of a female protagonist. We will consider the ways in which these novels engage and transform the traditional narrative gestures that have constructed the idea of the “hero” as someone for whom the “heroine” is simply a romantic adjunct, depicting instead heroines who are female heroes-- the centers of their own stories. Novels to be read include: Austen, Emma; Bronte, Villette; Wharton, The House of Mirth; Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway; Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea; Ondaatje, Anil’s Ghost. 3 hrs. sem. (A. Byerly)

WAGS/INTL 0437 Internationalizing Culture: Beyond the Borders in Modern Art and Film
Through a focus on cinema, we will examine how the visual language of international modernism coexists or conflicts with national identity. Through a juxtaposition of movies produced in the West with those from the postcolonial nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America we will compare how regional histories have shaped the aesthetic expression of nationalism and internationalism. Simultaneously we will examine the aesthetics of the larger visual culture in which these movies are embedded – high art as well as popular street art. By locating movies within the backdrop of politics and economics, we will examine how geopolitics map onto the aesthetics of filmmaking. We will thus compare the aggressive internationalism of modernist artists and filmmakers, who posit abstraction as a universal system of communication, to the insistent lure of national identity. This course is equivalent to FMMC 0437 and WAGS 0437. (Approval Required) 3 hr sem/screenings ART CMP (S. Moorti, T. Perry)

New Mentoring Program: Little Bellas

By Sabra Davison

The “Little Bellas Program” is aimed at helping to foster an early love of bicycling and to build a foundation of skills that can be used for a lifetime of riding. The program does this by joining mentors and 8-12 year old girls, who are excited about riding mountain bikes. The program aims to create a community to empower women through cycling. Though this program is centered around creating female camaraderie on bikes, it is most importantly about having fun in a constructive and active environment.

My sister, Lea Davison, a Middlebury Graduate of 2005 and professional cyclist for Trek/VW and I started a mountain bike program for girls when we recognized the lack of active girls. There were fewer and fewer girls showing up to the start line of mountain bike races, while the boys’ start lines were overflowing with competitors. Racing mountain bikes has improved both Lea’s and my life immensely. It has taught us how to stay healthy and active, set goals and work for those goals, and persevere in a male dominated community. We wanted to share these experiences with other girls and to fill the void females may feel in participating in an individual male dominated sport by creating a team atmosphere.

The group will have a racing component to it, though that is not the primary focus of the group. The program is valuable because it seeks to address the lack of females participating in various cycling arenas by providing girls interested in the sport with adult mentors.

If you would like to participate in the “Little Bellas,” contact sdavison@middlebury.edu.
The Spring Semester in Review:
“Breaking Down The Barriers” Symposium

This spring, the American Association of University Women awarded a Campus Action Project (CAP) grant to a team led by Professor Ann Mari May (Economics Dept.) for a symposium project entitled “Breaking Down the Barriers: Women in the Workforce.” Other team members included students Abigail Blum, Tarsi Dunlop, Hallie Fox, and Emily Theriault, as well as co-advisors Sujata Moorti (Women’s and Gender Studies Program), Karin Hanta (Director of Chellis House), and Gail Smith (Physical Education Dept.).

The symposium took place between March 15 and 17 and included a variety of events. On March 15, Heidi Hartmann, the president of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research and McArthur Genius Grant recipient, gave the keynote address entitled “Memo to John Roberts: The Wage Gap is Real!”

On Friday, March 16, Dr. Fayneese Miller (Dean of the College of Education and Social Services, University of Vermont), Lauren Curatolo (analyst for Goldman Sachs), Wendy Love (executive director of the Vermont Commission on Women) spoke about working in non-traditional fields. Wendy Love continued with a talk on pay equity and low-income women in Vermont. Afterwards the movie “The Motherhood Manifesto” was screened. Saturday was devoted to a deliberative dialogue on “equal pay for equal work.” Professor Bertram Johnson from the Political Science Department also led a policy-writing workshop on “Making America Work for Working Women.”

The symposium brought a lot of issues to light on campus. Unfortunately, many students perceive the wage gap as a problem of the past, one that was solved in our parents’ generation. The reality is that progress was made, but then it began to stagnate; on average women currently earn 77% of what men make. The CAP conference introduced discussion within the college community of this pressing issue. Throughout the weekend, the events highlighted a number of things that we can do to enact change, notably teaching women how to negotiate salaries and opening dialogue with our own college administration regarding its policies towards working mothers and fathers. Women need to be proactive in initiating progress or else we will continue to earn less. The symposium allowed us to address these issues through discussion, advice from women who have led successful careers in non-traditional fields, and guidance in policy-writing to make changes through legislation. The symposium helped bridge materials from the classroom with the “real” world. It also provided a forum for students to meet with experts to find solutions to the problem of the wage gap.

Behind the Pay Gap: AAUW Report

In a study entitled “Behind the Pay Gap,” the AAUW Educational Foundation established that just one year after college graduation, women earn only 80 percent of what their male counterparts earn. Ten years after graduation, women fall further behind, earning only 69 percent of what men earn. Even after controlling for hours, occupation, parenthood, and other factors known to affect earnings, the research indicates that one-quarter of the pay gap remains unexplained and is likely due to sex discrimination. Over time, the unexplained portion of the pay gap grows.

The research also shows that ten years after graduation, college-educated men working full time have more authority in the workplace than do their female counterparts. Men are more likely to be involved in hiring and firing, supervising others, and setting pay.

“By looking at earnings just one year out of college, you have as level a playing field as possible,” said AAUW Director of Research Catherine Hill. “These employees don’t have a lot of experience and, for the most part, don’t have care-giving obligations, so you’d expect there to be very little difference in the wages of men and women. But surprisingly, and unfortunately, we find that women already earn less — even when they have the same major and occupation as their male counterparts.”

The AAUW research also shows that this pay gap exists despite the fact that women outperform men in school — earning slightly higher GPAs than men in every college major, including science and mathematics.
“The persistence of the pay gap among young, college-educated, full-time workers suggests that educational achievement alone will not close the pay gap,” Hill said. “We need to make workplaces more family-friendly, reduce sex segregation in education and in the workplace, and combat discrimination that continues to hold women back in the workplace.”

“AUW has worked successfully to create educational opportunities for women and girls,” said Lisa Maatz, AAUW director of public policy and government relations. “It’s clear that barriers beyond schooling have prevented true pay equity, and AAUW continues to be a strong advocate for legislative efforts to address this discrimination.”

The report also includes other findings:

- Women who attended highly selective colleges earn less than men from either highly or moderately selective colleges and about the same as men from minimally selective colleges.
- Ten years after graduation, women are more likely than men to complete some graduate education.
- Men and women remain segregated by college major, with women making up 79 percent of education majors and men making up 82 percent of engineering majors. This segregation is found in the workplace as well, where women make up 74 percent of the education field and men make up 84 percent of the engineering and architecture fields.

On March 12, cartoonist Alison Bechdel gave a lecture on our campus. Since its inception in 1983, her comic strip “Dykes to Watch Out For” (DTWOF) has become a countercultural institution. The strip is syndicated in dozens of newspapers, translated into several languages and collected in a series of award-winning books. Utne magazine has listed DTWOF as “one of the greatest hits of the twentieth century.”

In 2006, Houghton Mifflin published Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir, Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic. The coming-of-age tale has been called a “mesmerizing feat of familial re-surrection” and a “rare, prime example of why graphic novels have taken over the conversation about American literature.”

Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home exemplifies the art form of the graphic novel. This memoir, skillfully crafted and designed, takes you deep inside the depths of the family structure and airs all of its dirty laundry. Bechdel keeps her black and white cartoon style, allowing us to form our own connections and fill in our own colors. Painfully honest, Bechdel weaves together her fascinating story about the relationship between a closeted father and nascent lesbian daughter, all while retaining her incredibly dark humor. This story’s allusive appeal demands more than your average comic strip. Once inside her story, you will never want to leave.

In the January/February 2007 issue of The Women’s Review of Books author Anne Elizabeth Moore writes about Bechdel:

“Bechdel should have been a household name some time ago. She has, after all, been creating—by herself—and syndicating—by herself—the alternative coming strip “Dykes to Watch Out For” for nearly a quarter of a century, and making a living at it. This is an unusual and difficult task. But the comics industry has always resisted the success of women. (...) The history of comics is that of the distilled desires of red-blooded American males, writ large and wearing tights.

“Even more than the success of women, the industry has resisted the success of queer women. (As creators. On the page it’s something else; everybody loves a bi-girl.) Banished to the pages of all-women anthologies and rarely offered publishing contracts or even encouragement, queer women cartoonists such as Ariel Schrag—or Bechdel—are simply not well-known in the industry. (...) So Bechdel was flying under the radar until, splat! the New York Times printed a rave review of her first full-length graphic novel. Mainstream critics seemed so wowed by the fact of pictures—in a book!—that they proved incapable of engaging with the narrative on a deep level. None was prepared to respond to the book in the context of Bechdel’s oeuvre. Instead they were distracted by the fact of comics, ‘Somehow adding the two [words and pictures] together conveys more than either could do alone,’ the Times gushed.”

Are you interested in the wage gap subject?
Contact Karin Hanta, khanta@middlebury.edu or 443-5937 to join our discussion group!
The Spring Semester in Review:
The Sex & War Symposium

From April 24 to 29, the WAGS Program hosted “The Sex & War Symposium”. Sponsored by the Gensler Family Fund, the Office of Institutional Diversity, the Academic Enrichment Fund, the Departments of History, Geography, and American Studies - Spiegel Family Fund, the Rohatyn Center for International Affairs, and the Scott Center for Spiritual and Religious Life, the symposium focused on the role women, sexuality, and gender politics have played in the lead up to wars, combat zones, and in their aftermath.

The symposium started with a performance piece entitled “Women and War” by Deborah Lubar, former chair of the theater department at Smith College. In three moving monologues, Lubar gave voice to women from Bosnia, Palestine, and Germany, who survived, actively resisted, and also supported war.

On Thursday, April 25, international students Mahmoud Abdou from Palestine/Gaza Strip, Chinyere Amadi from Zambia, Zohra Safi and Bilal Sarwary from Afghanistan, and Htar Htar Yu from Myanmar participated in a panel “Coming of Age during War.” With the exception of Chinyere Amadi, all the other students had grown up in a conflict zone. All of them agreed that the most destructive effect of war is the hatred it engenders in children. “It might take a decade or two for the international community to help us to rebuild our infrastructure, but it will take generations to build the minds of the people, to build their behaviors,” sophomore Zohra Safi said. The experience also highlighted the unique ways in which war affects women.

In a panel entitled “Surviving War” in the morning of April 27, speakers Eileen Meier (Georgetown University), Indira Kajosevic (Fielding Graduate Institute), and Rogaia Abusharaf (Brown University) discussed how rape has been used as a tool of war in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and Darfur. In addition to being violated, women are often ostracized by their communities. Feminist organizations have set up local groups that help women deal with these atrocities. The panelists also highlighted the legal reforms that have occurred at the international level to prosecute war-time rape.

In a panel entitled “Making War,” speaker Sanjukta Ghosh (Castleton State College) unraveled the power of the image of burqa-clad women as a rallying cry for both American feminists who wanted to free their “brown sisters” and war-profiteers who wanted to steal what they thought should rightly be their oil.

Dr. Ghosh explained that the Burqa-clad Woman is the modern odalisque, the invented oppressed brown foil to the imagined Liberated White Woman. In the Western imagination, the burqa is never a choice, a political statement, a fashionable item, but only
WomenSafe works toward the elimination of physical, sexual and emotional violence against women and their children through direct service, education and social change.

Each year WomenSafe provides over 5,400 units of service in Addison County and Rochester, VT. To do this, WomenSafe relies greatly on its wonderful volunteers, which it needs more of. WomenSafe will be holding its annual Volunteer Training beginning September 24th and we are looking for at least 25 new people to volunteer. The 32 hour training will prepare community members to: provide direct service over the 24-hour hotline, at court hearings and in the WomenSafe office; work in our Supervised Visitation Program; coordinate public awareness and community outreach events; provide childcare and perform administrative assistance tasks.

For more information and an application call WomenSafe at 388-9180 or look on the web www.womensafe.net

Sister-to-Sister Team Presents Quilt to WomenSafe

On May 3, the Sister-to-Sister team presented a home-made quilt to Willow Wheelock, representative of WomenSafe. Middle school girls and college student mentors had made the quilt during the “Sister-to-Sister Summit” on November 19 and in ensuing sessions. Lonnie Fisher, member of the Middlebury branch of AAUW, put the quilt together. A truly collaborative effort! A big thank you to everybody!
Q: Professor Morsman, can you please tell us about your academic background?

A: I got my BA from Wake Forest University and my MA and PhD from the University of Virginia. I wrote my dissertation (entitled, “The Big House After Slavery: Virginia’s Plantation Elite and their Postbellum Domestic Experiment”) on how white men and women within Virginia’s plantation households handled Confederate defeat, emancipation, and the transition to a free-labor society. I am completing an expanded version of my dissertation as a book, which will be published by the University of Virginia Press.

Q: How do women’s and gender studies inform your research?

A: Ever since I entered graduate school, I have been interested in women’s history. As I got more involved in my dissertation research, however, I found myself increasingly intrigued by other gender issues, especially the evolving conceptions of manhood in history. The Virginia planters whom I showcase in my book really struggled with their own identity as men when they lost their slave property and when they could no longer provide for their families in the manner to which they had become accustomed. While they suffered privately with this sense that they were not manly enough for the reality of postwar life, they also engaged in more public discussions (in churches, agricultural organizations, and political parties) about changing gender roles. They did not always embrace change easily, but their loss of status after the Civil War at least prompted greater reflection and discussion of gender identity.

Q: What are your current research interests?

A: Once I make the final revisions to my book manuscript, I plan to research Northerners’ changing conceptions of gender and race in the wake of the Civil War. One way into that topic is to examine the writings of Northern women and men who participated in efforts to reconstruct the South and aid newly-emancipated African Americans.

Q: What will you focus on in your course on American women’s history?

A: I have not been able to teach my course on American women’s history for several years, so I am eager to get back to it and to overhaul it before the fall semester. I still think, though, that I will keep my focus on the long nineteenth century. When it comes to women’s issues, students tend to know more about the mid-to-late twentieth century, so I want to expose them to the complexities of American women’s experience in earlier years. And I’ll make a special effort to incorporate a greater of diversity of women’s perspectives.

Q: You are a mother of two small children. How do you balance career and family life?

A: How do I balance career and family life? That’s a good question, because there are plenty of moments when I feel completely out of balance! But really, I have the best of circumstances. I have a dream job in a great place with a dreamy domestic situation. My husband Jenry stays home with the kids. He cooks; he does laundry, he provides so much fun for my toddler and infant, AND he can talk shop with me at the end of the day. We met in the history graduate program at UVA, so we have many common interests, but we moved to Vermont because I got this job at Middlebury, and when we decided to have children, he argued that it only made sense for him to take primary care of our children and household, while I went to work. There certainly are days when I hate to leave my Joe and Abby, but my husband makes being a working mother a ton easier.

Interview with Karin Hanta
Homophobia is alive and well at Middlebury. It always is – students are harassed, “gay” is used as a pejorative as in “the war in Iraq is so gay”, and the words dyke and fag are carved into desks and doors around campus. The most recent spate of nasty graffiti directed at someone in an administrative position finally had the campus asking “Why here, at Middlebury, is there homophobia?” This seems like the wrong question. The problem is hardly unique to Middlebury. Homophobia is everywhere. The deeper question is: Why does normative heterosexuality constantly assert itself through public acts of homophobia? This is a question I always ask my Sociology of Heterosexuality students and it is one that is often greeted with silence. I read the silence as pain. This question is too painful to answer because the answer implicates all of us who experience privilege—whether sexual, racial, national, or gender—as part of an agenda of hatred and violence. The point to the question is that all forms of privilege act out in aggressive and violent ways to shore up that privilege, to police its borders, to make sure no threats enter its sacred center. Normative masculinity beats the shit out of girlie boys, white privilege creates systems—such as the judiciary—that ensure its primacy, and sexual privilege writes nasty little notes on desks and walls to protect itself. But this doesn’t really get to the why? Why does normative power have to behave so nastily toward those looking in from the outside? Why are racism, homophobia, and nationalism the necessary counterparts to whiteness, heterosexuality, and being an American? And can we ever truly counter the hatred as long as we are invested in these privileged identities, as long as we preface our support by saying, “I’m not gay, but...”; “I’m not Black, but...”;? This seems like a far more troubling question and one that perhaps we should all consider before responding to the graffiti as something written by “those” people (e.g. athletes, Republicans, conservative Christian, name your scapegoat). Who wrote the graffiti and why? You and I and everyone else who lives within the safety of being “normal” are responsible for the nasty graffiti that appeared in Ross last month because we like being on the inside and we don’t want to be on the outside looking in with the rest of “those” people. Given the norm’s response to the margins, the best response to homophobia in the culture and the graffiti on campus is to say we are all dykes and fags here. Without the need to shore up the safety of heteronormativity, there will be no need for the constant and repetitive display of homophobia that is now such an everyday part of our life at Middlebury and in the world at large.

by Laurie Essig

Over the course of a month, Middlebury unfortunately had several acts of homophobia occur on campus. The most prevalent case of homophobia occurred days before Spring Break in which a staff member was labeled a “dyke” and additionally was characterized within inappropriate drawings. The language was also misogynistic in nature. The administration was extremely upset by the incident and a number of plans began on how to battle homophobia at Middlebury. The first plan of action was a meeting planned by the Ross Commons heads, Katy and Steve Abbott. This meeting was at first only meant for Ross residents, but it quickly expanded to be campus wide after a huge poster campaign advertising the meeting blanketed the campus. The meeting was well attended by students and a number of staff and administrators also appeared. Efforts were easily attributed to Dean of Institutional Diversity, Shirley Ramirez, who spoke at the meeting and facilitated the use of index cards in order for students to have input on change at the college. President Liebowitz, with the help of MOQA leadership, had a town-meeting the following week that was meant to attract students, faculty, and staff. Student attendance was down, however, and the meeting was mostly faculty and staff. People who attended were asked to write their thoughts on huge pieces of papers that were on the walls. Later, the ideas and thoughts written there would become part of a lasting exhibit in the library meant to bring the issue of homophobia to the face of the campus. Unfortunately, in even in the wake of all the progress and the meetings, additional acts of homophobia scarred the campus: the most public being graffiti on a student’s door in Starr Hall. Due to unfettered support from the administration, a perpetrator behind some of the most recent acts of homophobia was caught and disciplined. Regardless of this supposed victory, the administration still remains steadfast in battling homophobia at Middlebury and providing lasting aid to the queer community on campus.

by Ryan Tauriainen ’09
On April 18, 2007 the Supreme Court handed down a decision on Gonzalez v. Carhart, a chilling first ever federal ban on an abortion method without an exception for women’s health.

Already in 2003, President Bush signed the Federal Abortion Ban into law. This ban, which outlaws some of the safest abortions as early as 12 to 15 weeks with no provision to protect a woman’s health, was immediately challenged by Planned Parenthood and struck down by six separate courts, all of which agreed that it unconstitutionally failed to protect women’s health. The Bush administration pursued the ban to the Supreme Court where it was heard on November 8, 2006. On April 18, the Supreme Court upheld this ban, outlawing a safe, common abortion method even when a woman’s health is in jeopardy.

This stunning decision firmly places politicians and the Supreme Court into the middle of private health care decisions.

Cheryl Hanna, a professor at Vermont Law School in South Royalton, participated last year in a campus panel discussion on the New Supreme Court that WAGS organized. She recently commented on the decision on Vermont Public Radio:

What my students at Vermont Law School want most is to be taught the hard and fast rules of the law. They want to be able to predict the outcome of cases. They crave right and wrong answers.

Yet, when it comes to predicting how future cases might be decided, increasingly the only answer I can give them is, “it depends who’s on the Court.”

Take last week’s decision in Gonzalez v. Carhart and Planned Parenthood, in which, by a 5 - 4 margin, the Court upheld a federal ban on a certain late term abortion procedure.

The decision reversed fifteen years of the Court’s previous insistence that any restrictions on a woman’s right to terminate her pregnancy must contain a health exception.

And, despite the Court’s recent insistence on state’s rights, for the first time in our nation’s history it gave Congress the power to regulate a medical procedure.

The only explanation for the ruling is that with Sandra Day O’Connor’s resignation, there are five Justices, all male, and all Catholic, who want to see a woman’s right to privacy either curtailed or eliminated altogether. The Court’s only woman justice and her three male colleagues who want to preserve those rights no longer have the votes.

Whether you agree or disagree with the ruling, we all ought to be concerned about what this decision means for the Court itself.

Earlier this year, Chief Justice John Roberts said that his goal was to issue more unanimous decisions. He noted the dangers of split rulings, with Justice Kennedy now always the swing vote. These decisions give the appearance that the Court is nothing more than a mini-Congress, fighting over the politics of the day, rather than an institution above the partisan fray.

If nine of the supposedly greatest legal minds in the Country can’t articulate clear legal principles, guided by deeper human values, and then reach consensus on issues which so deeply divide, what chance do the rest of us have?

The decision, to me, is further evidence of a crisis of leadership on the Court from the Chief Justice, who despite his intentions, doesn’t seem able to bring much cohesion to the Court. And then there are those justices who have no problem imposing their own moral views rather than adhering to established legal principles and precedent.

Absent a significant change in the Court’s composition, we’re likely to see more areas of the law thrown into chaos and the Court’s reputation further eroded.

In the meantime, my law students will have to accept that in Constitutional Law, there are rarely right or wrong answers. Rather, it’s all about the power of convincing five. Sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose. It’s hard to really capture that on an exam, so it’s no wonder they’re nervous. We all should be.