

# WOMEN'S STUDIES

Oct 1, 2015

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Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

375 Church Street North Adams MA 02147

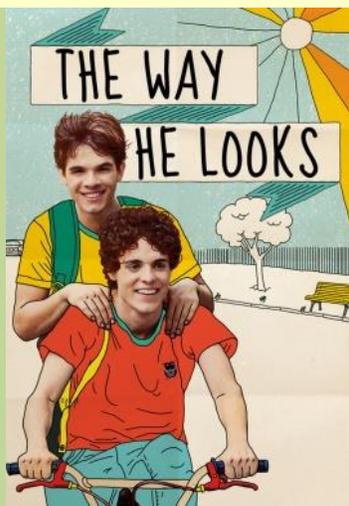
## MA Victory for Women's Rights!

**On April 1, 2015, the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights** went into effect, making Massachusetts the 4<sup>th</sup> state to provide legal guidelines for employers and workers in domestic service.

Domestic workers have typically been viewed as outside the traditional workforce, largely because most are women, many immigrants, doing the work historically done by housewives and servants. They are often isolated from the rest of the workforce and subjected to round-the-clock physically demanding labor, with little or no separation between work and personal time. Domestic workers are often taken advantage of by their employers and are in dire need of protection. The new law includes:

- A requirement for written contracts
- A requirement for notification of termination
- Provisions for maternity leave

## Upcoming Events ►



Queer Identities Film Series!  
**Monday Oct 5<sup>th</sup>, 6:30-8:30PM**  
Sullivan Lounge

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The leadership of domestic workers was key: they shared their stories and experiences, forged partnerships with employers, advocates and the legislature, and won a bill that brings us *One Step Closer, One State Closer* to full and real dignity for all domestic workers. The DWBR amends MA labor law to guarantee: 24 hours off per 7-day week; meal and rest breaks; limited vacation and sick days; parental leave; protection from discrimination, sexual harassment, illegal charges for food and lodging, and eviction without notice; notice of termination; and a means of enforcing these standards. *Domestic employers under the bill do not include state regulated staffing agencies and workers do not include casual babysitters.*

► **Wed Oct 7, 3-4PM – Discussion of Domestic Violence**  
Women's Center, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Campus Center

► **Wed Oct 14, 6-7:30PM –Spanish Table**  
Centennial Room Campus Center  
All are welcome every other week to practice Spanish!

► **Mon Oct 19, 6:30-8:30PM – Pariah**  
Sullivan Lounge  
Queer Identities Film Series

► **Nov. 6 7:30PM – DEQN Sue**  
Church Street Center  
Margaret Hart scholarship concert with rising pop star

Contact Karen Cardozo to contribute announcements or articles to future Newsletters!

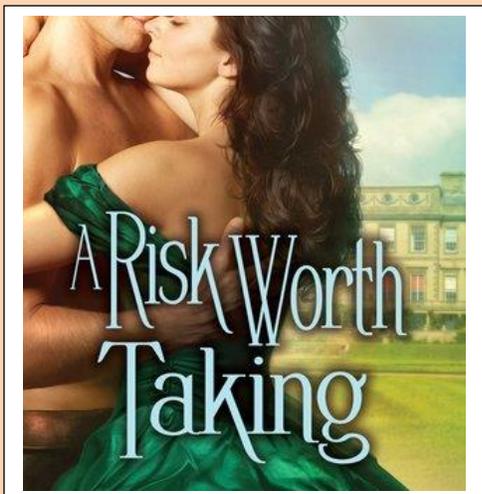
## Re-Reading Romance Novels

By Kelli Newby

If I said I read romance novels, would you think less of me? After all, they're heteronormative, gender-role-enforcing, bad-euphemism-using mommy porn. Right? Let me give you another view. This summer I attended the Romance Writers of America (RWA) conference. At the awards ceremony I saw women in togas and red carpet worthy floor-length gowns. Women wore giant Kentucky Derby Hats and sky-high heels. Others wore little black dresses and flats. There were a couple of flappers, too. Dress Barn and Versace mixed and mingled and everyone appeared comfortable. I realized that because the romance community is almost entirely women, there was no male gaze to cater to, so everyone had worn whatever made them feel awesome.

For writers and readers worldwide, romance isn't just about novels with sexy scenes and happily ever afters (HEAs). It's about a diverse and supportive community whose main message is "**we're not in competition with one another.**" As a scholar of fantasy, I often discuss fairy tales where the underlying message is "other women are the enemy." To hear an entire conference full of female storytellers disavowing that was wonderful.

Others have noticed this refreshingly supportive and positive environment. Sociologists Joanna Gregson and Jennifer Lois, who study the romance community, noted in a *Smart Bitches/Dear Author* podcast that keynote speeches at romance conferences are different than most: instead of *here is my formula for success and now let's all go back to our lonely writing lives*, the tenor of RWA speeches is characterized by vulnerability: *here are the mistakes I made—I hope you can learn from them. Writing is hard, but we believe in you. You can do it!*



Questions about the WMST Minor? Contact Karen Cardozo

The focus on community isn't just lip service. One morning I chatted on the escalator with an older woman who saw from my badge that I was a first time conference attendee. She sweetly asked how things were going, and, when I asked about her, stayed focused on making sure I felt welcomed and comfortable. Later that night, I discovered she was a three time RWA Hall of Fame Member with over a hundred books to her name, and many NYT bestsellers. A friend of mine had a similar encounter, only she recognized the writer and invited her to coffee. They chatted for an hour. Being a big deal was less important than being welcoming.

The Romance community is proudly feminist. Romance novels have changed a lot since the "bodice rippers" of the 1970's (which often featured older men forcing themselves on younger women only to have the woman realize she likes being "ravished.") In contemporary romance, heroines have agency; they usually have jobs and friends they won't compromise for love. Consent is central to sex scenes. While there's still a lot of heteronormativity, there's also a growing market of LGBTQ romance; e.g. Riptide Publishing is an LGBTQ house and gay male romances are very popular.

The writers are proudly feminist as well. At the conference, women had frank conversations about sex with no slut shaming. I encountered zero Mommy War discussions. At least four of the awards ceremony acceptance speeches told anecdotes of the kids eating a lot of pizza or cereal when Mommy was on deadline. The crowd clapped and laughed in camaraderie. Husbands were thanked for taking care of house and kids so Mommy could work. There may be alpha men fulfilling gender stereotypes in the books, but off the page the romance community prizes equal partnerships and less rigid gender roles.

Yes, there are problematic aspects of romance novels—a lack of cultural diversity, a focus on traditional gender roles and heterosexuality—but things are evolving, especially with self-publishing revealing markets traditional publishers had been ignoring (a 2014 Pew Research report found the most likely person to be reading a book is an educated black woman). But take a moment, swallow your judgment, and take a closer look at what's going on in romance. You just might fall in love.

Citations: "51. An Interview with Drs. Joanna Gregson and Jen Lois on the Gendered Community of Romance." Smart Bitches Trashy Books.com 24 July 2013.

"RWA 2105 RITA & Golden Heart Awards Ceremony." Romance Writers. YouTube.com. 7 August 2015.

Further Reading: Gregson, Joanna and Jen Lois. "Sneer and Leers: Romance Writers and Gendered Sexual Stigma." *Gender & Society*. August 2015 vol. 29 no. 4 459-483

Higgins, Kristen. "Never Read A Romance? Grow Up." Publishersweekly.com. 14 August 2015.

Kamble, Jayashree. *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology*. Palgrave, 2014.

[www.popularromanceproject.org](http://www.popularromanceproject.org)

## Undergraduate Research

By Jenna O'Connor

This past summer, I was given the amazing opportunity by Dr. Ingrid Castro to present my research at the American Sociological Association's (ASA) Honors Program in Chicago. Unsure of what to expect, I flurried myself with research on not only the ASA's but also most of the sociologists and anthropologists presenting at the conference! I was not only nervous about travelling to a city I've never been in, but having to present my own research to other students as well as esteemed sociologists.

When the paper I wrote was accepted into this program, I suffered from imposter syndrome; a feeling that would only grow in the brief time between my arrival in Chicago, and my roundtable presentation. I mainly used qualitative methodologies for my paper in a field that is rapidly popularizing quantitative methodologies (every other student in the honors program had conducted extensive quantitative research for their papers). I was intimidated. But Dr. Castro reminded me that qualitative methodologies and close analyses of literature and film are an important part of sociology, and that I was in Chicago for a reason. Here is the abstract of my paper, *The Objectification and Evolution of Women in Bram Stoker's Dracula and Abel Ferrara's The Addiction*:

Exploring the realm of vampirism through film and literary works alike, a comparison of the roles of female vampires allows us to see and critically analyze the progression—or illusion of progression—of women's oppression within the roles of vampirism, as well as in our society. Through Bram Stoker's classic novel *Dracula*, and Abel Ferrara's contemporary film *The Addiction*, we see not only the representation of women over nearly a century, but the pivotal differences lying between gothic and horror genres.



Through character details of the female vampire, we can see evident clues of various eras' views on women involving gender roles, sexual politics, and socioeconomic status.

After my presentation, I was able to listen to my peers' research as well. We were all able to openly critique and discuss our methods and outcomes further; the questions and critiques I received only made my argument even stronger, and I was immediately addicted to this type of close and intense discussion.

After my presentation and defense was over—I was able to enjoy and focus on other aspects of the program, while simultaneously falling head-over-heels in love with Chicago. This experience and opportunity has given me so much insight into the field of sociology, as well as a validated sense of belonging in this field. Through the program, we had graduate school briefings, keynote speakers, meet and greets with established sociologists and graduate school admissions councils, and “networking” parties. We got to meet the current president of the ASA, and go on an architecture cruise on the river that cuts through the city. It was all so enriching and exceeded my expectations exponentially. I swear, I have never been to a city that I love more than Chicago.

(continued on p. 4)

## Teaching and Learning

Professor Bolivar debuts a new course in Spring 2016: **SPAN 390: An Introduction to U.S. Latin@ Literature and Film** will offer an overview of U.S. Latin@ literature and film from the 1960s to the present. Students will explore textual and visual representations of the migratory experience of the largest Latino communities in the U.S: Chicano, Boricuas, Dominicans, and Cuban Americans. Drawing from border theory and Latin American cultural studies, the course examines identities as a series of hyphenated articulations: trans-ethnic, trans-racial, trans-gender and trans-national.

Professor Jones-Sneed's WMST 395 course, **Women, Race, and Class** will be collaborating with Professor Melanie Mowinski on a **Black Lives Matter** theme for the 2016 PRESS calendar. The students in the class started off the semester with a bang reading Roxanne Gay's *Bad Feminist*. Each student will be working with Tom Alexander and Campus Conversations on Race (CCOR) along with other MCLA cultural organizations to come up with themes, quotes and phrases for the calendar. We are excited about this collaboration and the chance that it will give us to explore the intersectionality of feminism.

## FACULTY NEWS

**Mariana Bolivar** (Modern Languages) presented on "Masculine Women in Venezuela's Intrahistoric Novel and Film" at the 97<sup>th</sup> American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese Conference in Denver, CO on July 17-20, 2015.

**Karen Cardozo** presented on September 25<sup>th</sup> at a plenary panel for 300 attendees of the Cross-Sector Partnership conference at UMASS Amherst –aimed at encouraging PhDs to consider teaching at teaching-intensive institutions like MCLA.

This fall we welcome **Amber Engelson** –a faculty member in ENGL/COMM specializing in Rhetoric and Writing with additional expertise in gender studies. She will teach a "special topics" class called **Writing Women** (Spring 2016), which discusses both women who write *and* how women are written in popular culture. The course will be a blend of literature, cultural studies and feminist archival research— a.k.a. FUN! Amber is also working with other faculty on a Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. Welcome, Amber!



**Ingrid Castro** attended the American Sociological Association conference in August where she was an orientation mentor for the ASA's Minority Fellowship Program (which gives monetary support to racial minority PhD candidates in Sociology... Ingrid is a former fellow). She also was a panelist on a workshop "Navigating IRB Approval for Studies of Vulnerable Populations: The Case of Children and Youth" and a discussant for the roundtable session "Race, Class, and Immigration."

*Undergrad Research cont'd from page 3*

Although I was intensely nervous before the ASA meeting, the whole experience was beyond worth it. Getting involved with research in your field of interest can really open so many doors for you, which is why I highly recommend getting involved with your department to learn more about what opportunities could potentially be awaiting you (including MCLA's annual undergraduate research conference in April!).

–Jenna O'Connor

### Women's Center Wednesdays

Snacks and Discussion on a Theme each week  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Amsler Campus Center!

- 10/7 Domestic Violence - Freeman Center
- 10/14 Breast Cancer & Cancer Awareness
- 10/21 Tapestry Health
- 10/28 Discussion of Halloween Costumes
- 11/4 Work, Life, Family Balance
- 11/18 Personal Safety - Sargent LaFave
- 12/2 Women and Politics with Professors Cardozo and Taylor
- 12/9 End of Semester Stress Busters

### QUEER IDENTITIES FILM SERIES CONTINUES ...

November 2nd  
*Tomboy*

November 16th  
*Before Night Falls*

November 30th  
*Saving Face*

**Mondays, 6:30-8:30**  
**Sullivan Lounge**