



My Totally Awesome Pregnancy by Chelsea Anne Marie Clarkson, '10

I graduated from Hollins in May of 2010 and nine months later I found out that I was pregnant. The nine months that passed after I left Virginia were much like a gestation period, during which I glowed in a sleepy, summery effervescence as everything about my life changed. The days were long and yellow. I had no bedroom to move back into, no place to unpack all of my belongings. I had no job and nowhere to be when I woke up in the morning. I no longer lived among women. In fact, I found myself surrounded by men: their skin red from long days of pouring concrete, laying sod, and catching fish in the Gulf of Mexico. My life at Hollins had been so busy, so full, and so complete. Now I was back in Florida without a room or a schedule to keep, returned to the sun and to the humidity and to the sweet company of working-class men.

I had a fierce craving for red meat in early February. Moreover, I was working as a preschool teacher and had found it uncharacteristically difficult for me to stay awake during naptime that week. It didn't immediately occur to me that I might be pregnant (odd considering that I'd had that worry every other month of my life since I started having sex). I finally peed on a stick and had myself a nice, big, life-affirming cry on the kitchen floor. I wasn't angry, disappointed, ashamed, uncertain or scared. I didn't believe that my life was over. I was just pregnant and crying.

My totally awesome pregnancy begins long before this moment, of course. It begins when I was 12 years old and had glasses and braces and fat in weird

places. I fell in love with a boy who, to my great surprise, loved me just as much. Our families gave us the space to explore our friendship, courtship, and first love. Eventually, we gave each other the space to explore our lives apart and I went away to have the time of my life at Hollins. It is this same man who came to Roanoke with the rest of my family to see my graduation and who smiled so big at the end of winter when I told him that we were going to have a baby.

The first thing that I noticed about being pregnant (and also the reason that I have chosen to entitle this piece "My Totally Awesome Pregnancy") is how quickly other mothers want to initiate primigravidas into their sorority of pregnancy discomfort, drama, and misery. Thankfully, not all mamas choose to take part in this custom, but for those who do, the goal is to share as many stories of pregnancy misery and/or birth trauma with the newly pregnant woman as possible. It is essential for them to do this in earshot of other misery enthusiasts, who can chime in with horrific tales of their own in an effort to one-up each other in the grocery store aisle. For these women, it is more important to belong to this cult of tragedy than to find out for themselves that pregnancy can be a rollicking good time and that more often than not, things go right. Unfortunately, the majority of books on the subject of pregnancy and birth perpetuate this

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Intersections: Black Female Slave Vivisection, Non-human Animal Experimentation, and the Foundation of Western Gynecology: An Interview with A. Breeze Harper.

by Susan L. Thomas, Director, Gender and Women's Studies

A. Breeze Harper is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of California-Davis (December 2011 graduation). She writes about intersections of critical food studies, critical race theory, non-human animal liberation, and black feminisms. She did her B.A. at Dartmouth College and her Masters at Harvard University. Her most recent book is *Sistah' Vegan: Food, Identity, Health, and Society: Black Female Vegans Speak* (Lantern Books, 2010). Look for her next book, *Socio-spatial Epistemologies and Racialized Consciousness: Critical Race and Black Feminist Analysis of Vegan Praxis in the USA*, soon.

Prof. Thomas: Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to speak with members of the Hollins Community. First, can you tell us about what you are currently interested in examining, as a scholar and an activist?

Prof. Harper: I'm very interested in black women's history, specifically the use of black women's bodies for medical experimentation, how this relates to animal liberation, and the need to reflect on the use of non-human animals in the West today.

Prof. Thomas: What prompted your interest in this area of scholarship?

Prof. Harper: I began thinking about a piece that Dr. Petra Kuppers [University of Michigan] wrote about black women in the mid 19th century who had been experimented on by a man named Dr. James Marion Sims who, in medical school, focused on gynecology in the West. If you read her essay, "Remembering Anarcha:

Objection in the Medical Archive," you will see that she writes about how Marion Sims experimented on many African American women's bodies. He experimented on them to benefit white middle class women who used his gynecology services. What he did was very disgusting, very cruel. He would actually experiment on these women, of course without their consent. When you're a slave you are property and don't have any say about what white people do to you.

Prof. Thomas: For what purpose

I think that everyone should do a deep genealogy of why they desire certain things if it causes harm to other beings.

was Sims experimenting on black women's bodies?

Prof. Harper: What Sims was trying to do was solve the problem of fistula amongst white women. A fistula is a tear in the bladder that happens during a long labor, sometimes from the improper use of forceps during labor. It tears the bladder, so women are constantly leaking urine. And he was using black women's bodies to solve this problem. He did this without anesthesia. And one woman he did it to over 30 times. He cut up women's vaginas, their wombs, without anesthesia. Can you imagine that? It's really disgusting. And he is the

'father of gynecology.'

Prof. Thomas: How then does the oppression of black women intersect with the oppression of non-human animals?

Prof. Harper: We all know, most of us in the West, if you're a critical thinker when it comes to knowing the history of suffering and oppression, that the case of these black women is not singular. Experimenting on beings, human beings and nonhuman beings, it's been a recurring problem. And I also think during this time there was a huge push to end non-human animal experimentation, vivisection. If you don't know what vivisection is, it's cutting up non-human animals while they're still alive for the alleged benefit of medicine. It's very cruel and very painful. In any case, I get a lot of questions from people asking me how's it possible that I merge black feminist theory and activism with the subject of caring for animals, animal ethics, animal liberation and veganism. I know that each person has her own opinion, which is invested in her interests and desires, and of course interests and desires are never apolitical. And I think that everyone should do a deep genealogy of why they desire certain things if it causes harm to other beings. In any case, one of my reasons for integrating black feminist theory and activism with studies around animal liberation and veganism is that I believe the same mentality that makes it okay to conduct cruel experiments on black women in Dr. Sims' 'care,' 'the father of gynecology,' is the same mentality that continues to allow non-human animals to go

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One Victory Doesn't Win the War

by Wendy Laumone, '12

There is finally some good news for women's reproductive health, or rather, a tiny safe harbor against the storm of anti-reproductive health—frankly, anti-women legislation—that has been passed this year. On August 1, 2011, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services decided that under Obama's Health Care Act, insurance companies will no longer be able to charge women for, among other things, all contraceptive methods, including the morning-after pill and contraceptive counseling, domestic violence screening and counseling, breastfeeding supplies such as pumps, annual wellness exams and HIV screening and counseling. HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said of the new law, "we are making it illegal to charge women more because of their gender."

This is news to cheer about, but let us not think for one minute that the conservatives' assault on women's rights is over. Consider just a few examples of the right wing's reaction to this decision. We turn first to FOX news, the most watched mainstream conservative media channel. On a segment aired on Aug. 2nd a FOX news contributor Sandy Rios spewed her outrage that government is now giving young women free contraception under the new health care law, asking, "Why would you encourage your daughters, your granddaughters, and whoever else comes behind you to have unrestricted, unlimited sex anytime anywhere?" She also has a bone to pick with the other services for women now paid for by the government, adding, "Now we're gonna cover birth control, breast pumps, counseling for abuse, are we gonna do pedicures and manicures as well?" FOX News contributors are not the only ones outraged. A House Republican from Iowa named Steve King took to the House floor to not only

denounce the plan, but the very idea of contraception:

"They've called it preventative medicine, preventative medicine. Well if you apply that preventative medicine universally, what you end up with is, you've prevented a generation. Preventing babies from being born is not medicine, that's not constructive to our culture and our civilization. If we let our birth rate get down below replacement rate we're a dying civilization. Right now, we're about 2.1 babies per woman."

Clearly the Right is not so thrilled about these developments. What exactly are they so upset about? Rios' first comments make it clear that the idea that any woman could now have more autonomy over her sexuality is the scariest part of all. Women having safe sex and choosing whether and when to have children? Our society can only be headed towards moral ruin! Rios' comments in fact go much further with her second remarks about manicures and pedicures. She is putting birth control, breast pumps, and counseling for abuse on the same level as mani-pedis: frivolous, unnecessary. In other words, she is comparing women's health to women's beauty treatments and finding that they have the same value: minimal. I think part of her argument, if I look past the first layer of ridiculousness, is meant to be that paying for this preventative health care is going to be very expensive considering how unimportant these things are. Before I get lost in a rant about the importance of preventative health care measures, let me link Rios' comments to King's. He doesn't seem to be worried about women having too much sex, but rather about them not having enough babies. He has clearly misunderstood, as Rios has, that contraception should by definition be valued by

[The] Ohio House of Representatives passed the "heartbeat bill" in June that bans abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detectable—as early as six weeks, essentially as soon as a woman realizes she is pregnant.

conservatives because preventing pregnancies via contraception by the same token prevents abortions, and of course saves the government millions of dollars in unintended pregnancy-related costs. How's that for deficit-reduction? But let's face it, like Rios, King is more worried that this new plan will give women more autonomy over their bodies. By going on about the end of civilization brought on by contraception, King is reducing women to passive agents whose only purpose is child-bearing. He doesn't want women to have access to contraception because he doesn't want women to be active participants in the choices they make about their bodies.

Looking at these responses, I am reminded of Jessica Valenti's book *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsessions with Virginity Is Hurting Young Women*. This book, published in 2009, examines what Valenti called the virginty movement across America and how this movement, the

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My Totally Awesome Pregnancy

by Chelsea Anne Maire Clarkson, '10

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sad behavior in our community by providing American women with a checklist of terrifying risks rather than clear information about what happens during normal pregnancy and birth; these disturbing 'possibilities' are often read by the expectant or experienced mother as probable outcomes. This is especially true for women who have a caregiver who is confirming their fears at every prenatal visit leading up to the birth event, be it with their words or their practices.

Tim and I went to Key West in June for our honeymoon. It was there that an elderly British woman said to me, "How are you feeling? I loved being pregnant. I sailed through every one of my pregnancies!" Her statement had a profound effect on me. One could sail through her pregnancy? And isn't that what I was doing, cruising all over the island on a colorful rented bike? Staying up late and dancing and eating rich Cuban food and rubbing my growing belly? From that moment on I let everyone know that I felt great whenever they asked me about my condition in a whiney or worried tone. And when women in their first trimester expressed how tired they were feeling, I told them that it wouldn't be long until they felt great, too. I didn't really know what I was talking about, but I hoped that my energy would be catching.

My totally awesome pregnancy has everything to do with the fact that I am a low-risk woman in good health and that I have the privilege of a supportive partner and family. I count my blessings every day. Interestingly, many of the women who share their unhappy pregnancy and birth mythologies with me are those who have similar privilege. I believe that the awareness of my privileges, largely

instilled in me by the Gender and Women's Studies program at Hollins, has enabled me to appreciate my situation and celebrate my pregnant body rather than complain about it. Like other women, I've experienced a variety of pregnancy discomforts. But as my midwives frequently remind me: pregnant women should be partners in their own care, educated and empowered enough to eat well, stay active, trust their intuition and do their own research. Ultimately, prenatal care is what happens

between clinical appointments. Thus, I have chosen to prepare myself in my own way for the hard work of labor. I attend weekly childbirth classes, use mantras and affirmations, do yoga, climb trees, go camping and fishing, clean my chicken coop, eat vibrant foods, and dance around my house to Jay Z. While I do get uncomfortable from time to time, I can relax in the knowledge that I am the expert of my own body.

Unfortunately, all of this bounding around, wearing summer dresses and enjoying pregnancy can put others in a really sour mood: "Oh, aren't you adorable? You don't even know what you are getting into, do you, sweetheart? Well, don't be too scared. You'll get your epidural and you'll feel just fine! You may even be lucky enough to have a cesarean and never feel a thing."

While I definitely find being



Her statement had a profound effect on me. One could sail through her pregnancy?

spoken to like a clueless pregnant doll mildly annoying, what is even more bewildering is finding out through the course of conversation how little most women know about the process of labor and birth. No wonder so many mothers feel disappointed by their birth outcomes and want so badly to build community around their bad experiences. It doesn't help that the image of normal birth has basically been eradicated in our culture. I am also beginning to suspect that all the women who have had amazing, transformative pregnancies and births find it easier to just keep it to themselves. Women are more likely to downplay their accomplishments in life and in

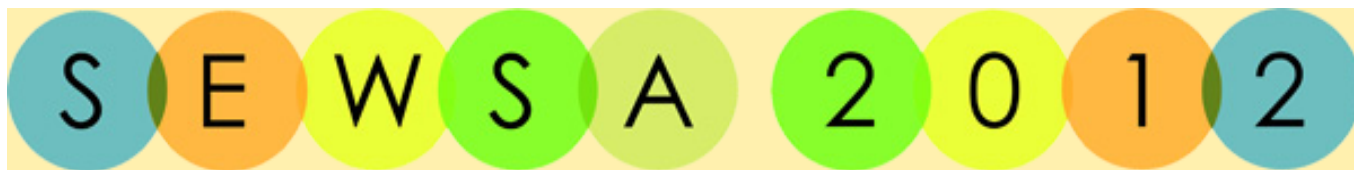
conversation, and I guess growing a human being and then pushing it out of your vagina is no exception. If I didn't work at a birth center—if I had not witnessed several incredible unmediated births since becoming pregnant-- I might not know any better either. As Laura Stavoe Harm wrote: "There is a secret in our culture and it's not that birth is painful. It's that women are strong."

That I am a pregnant and married Gender and Women's Studies major is very funny to some people. It is funny to them because their understanding of feminism is so tired and two-dimensional that marriage and motherhood can only exist in opposition to it. On the contrary, my totally awesome pregnancy has brought me right back to the heart of my feminism. My decision to birth at home with the assistance of licensed midwives, for example, reflects the trust I have in my own body. Indeed, every choice that a woman makes in regard to caring for herself and her child before and after she gives birth forces her to evaluate her own belief system, which in my case always brings

me right back to feminist theory. I for one would never circumcise a son nor would I give my daughter a name befitting of a cartoon poodle. A surprise pregnancy and low-paying job at the local birth center may not be every feminist's ideal post-graduate plan, but I won Sarasota County's Golden Nipple Award in a door-decorating contest promoting the normalcy of breastfeeding. Let me be more specific: they presented me with a plaque and a chalice full of golden foil-covered chocolate nips. It was an Oscar moment for me. And when I'm not eating golden nipples I write the blog and coordinate a weekly open house for the birth center. I get paid to be jolly and round and chat with other expecting women and their partners about out-of-hospital birth. I like to annoy my new husband Tim by explaining to him ad nauseam that my goal is to be like a pregnant Vince Vaughn and charm everyone on the Southwest coast of Florida into midwifery care.

Hollins magazine probably won't be running an article about my upcoming homebirth this year, but I feel equally as successful as the

promising alums that I read about in her pages. The real reason that I want to share my totally awesome pregnancy with other Hollins women is to let them know that it's perfectly acceptable, and in many cases totally feminist, to acknowledge that things are going well for you. I did not plan my pregnancy but I have had a fantastic time planning my birth. I feel good about advocating for the midwifery model of care every time I have a conversation with a stranger about my belly. Even cooler, when I grew a belly I unexpectedly gained entrée to a hidden community of fascinating and unconventional local mamas. Unable to find fulfilling relationships with women post-Hollins, I was suddenly being invited to homemade and home-grown foodswaps, radical knitting groups, coffeehouse La Leche League meetings, new moon goddess circles, and conscious parenting potlucks. I know now that feminism will find you no matter what you are up to. At 8 months pregnant I am still imagining what it means to be a feminist mother. So far I am having a wonderful time finding out.



Southeastern Women Studies Association 2012 Conference
Politics of Justice: New Visions of Culture and Society
Thursday, March 29 – Saturday, March 31
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Call for Paper Proposals: *Action Toward Transformation: Building Enduring Practices for Change in the Southeastern U.S.*
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<http://sewsa.nwsa.org/grants/institutional-mini-grants/>
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FACULTY NEWS

Susan Thomas, Director, Gender and Women's Studies, and Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies, and Political Science, was elected President of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies (ICAS). She was also promoted to Editor of the *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, an ICAS journal. The Institute for Critical Animal Studies (ICAS), founded in 2001, is the first interdisciplinary scholarly center in higher education dedicated to establishing and expanding the field of Critical Animal Studies (CAS).

LeeRay Costa, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Gender and Women's Studies, has an article titled "Eating Hawai'i : Local foods and place-making in Hawai'i Regional Cuisine" (co-written with Kathryn Besio) that will appear in the journal *Social and Cultural Geography* 12(8), 2011. Also, her essay "Grassroots Woman Leader" will appear in the (2011) book, *Figures of Southeast Asian Modernity*, Joshua Barker and Johan Lindquist, eds., published by the University of Hawai'i Press.

Jill Weber, Associate Professor of Communication Studies, is happy to report that she defended her dissertation in May and graduated in August!

Darla Schumm, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, has two edited books coming out this fall: *Disability and Religious Diversity: Crosscultural Narratives and Inter-religious Perspectives* and *Disability in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Sacred Texts, Historical Traditions, and Social Analysis*. They are published by Palgrave Macmillan and the release date is October 25.

New Faculty! SJ Creek, Visiting Professor of Sociology, is profiled on page 7 of this issue of Brazen; the profile includes descriptions of her courses.

ALUM NEWS

Rachel Fletcher '05 has worked as Development Associate at Planned Parenthood Health Systems for 4 1/2 years now. She is based in Roanoke but helps to coordinate fundraising and grantwriting work for health centers in Virginia and West Virginia. She is proud to be on the committee for the Susan G. Komen Virginia Blue Ridge Race for the Cure, which will be Saturday, April 14th in downtown Roanoke. Rachel is still slowly yet surely working on her trilogy of novels, which is a feminist reenvisioning of the Welsh medieval text *The Mabinogi*, and her poem "Hippopotamus in Blue" was published this summer in *Cliterature*, an online literary journal dedicated to women's sexuality.

Kathryn Berg '05 is earning an MA, MSW in Social work, Women's and Gender Studies, and Leadership and Development at Loyola University Chicago.

Hilary Dubose '05 is Program Manager for Catholic Relief Services in Port-au Prince, Haiti.

Carrie Hart '06 will be starting at the University of Maryland College Park in their Women's Studies PhD program this fall. She'll also be presenting a paper on queer pedagogy and documentary film at the NWSA Conference in November in Atlanta.

Mallory Haar '07 has begun a graduate program at the University of Southern Maine in Secondary English Education. She is also a teacher at Casco Bay High School.

ALUM NEWS

Cheslea Anne Marie Clarkson '10 lives in Southwest Florida with her husband and six chickens. She works as an advocate for the midwifery model of care at a local birth center and is interested in writing and reading about the intersections of feminism and motherhood.

Jennifer Walton '11 has taken a position as a Client Services Associate at 101.5, The Music Place, in Roanoke, VA.

Lauren Bakst '11 lives in Brooklyn, NY where she works for the arts and literary quarterly, *BOMB Magazine* as a Grant Writer in addition to writing about performance for their blog (BOMBlog.com). She also continues to make dances, one of which was recently presented in Philadelphia, PA as a part of *topos, topio*— a show featuring experimental dance artists-who-happen-to-be-women curated by Donna Faye Burchfield. Her choreographic work will also be presented this fall in NY at Dance New Amsterdam as a part of Raw Material.

New Faculty Profile: S.J. Creek, Visiting Professor

I joined the Department of Sociology at Hollins University this summer, upon the completion of my doctorate in Sociology and graduate certificate in Women's Studies at Southern Illinois University. In the fall, I am thrilled to be teaching *Sociology of Religion*, *Race/Class/Gender: A Reflexive Approach*, and *Introduction to Sociology: Perspectives and Methods*. My own research lies at the intersection of religion, social movements, sexuality and gender; as a sociologist, I'm particularly interested in how people's identities inform and are informed by religious movements. In my spare time, I sew, read, craft, write fiction, and cook. I am also a huge animal lover, and I have three terriers—Fionha, Rupert and Eleanor.

Courses:

Introduction to Sociology: Perspectives and Methods is an introduction to the field of sociology and its major concepts, theoretical perspectives, and methods of inquiry. Within the course we'll focus upon the study of human groups, organizations, and societies and their impact on human behavior. This is a writing intensive course and students will learn the nuts and bolts of writing a sociology paper.

Sociology of Religion will explore the importance of religion in social life and offer an overview of sociological theories and explanations of religion and spirituality. We will investigate: the complexities of defining religion; the cultural construction of religious myths, rituals, and symbols; the processes of religious socialization, conversion and apostasy; variations in religious organizational structure; the intersection of religion, race, sexuality and gender; and debates about the relationship between religion and oppression.

Race/Class/Gender: A Reflexive Approach will explore sociological perspectives and research concerning structural social inequality in the United States. Over the semester we will investigate the dynamics of power, privilege and oppression in the U.S., as well as attend to the intersectional and inseparable nature of white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism and economic inequality. This course will emphasize the importance of reflexive practices through writing and journaling.

Intersections: Black Female Slave Vivisection, Non-human Animal Experimentation, and the Foundation of Western Gynecology: An Interview with A. Breeze Harper.

By Susan L. Thomas, Director, Gender and Women's Studies

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through incredible hell, from factory farmed animals to nonhuman animals used for testing cosmetics on their eyes, to animals used for vivisection.

Prof. Thomas: Yes, the nexus is clear.

Prof. Harper: I think to myself, what happened to these black women? There's no excuse for it, there's no rationalization for it and I'm sure during the time there were people who benefited from it, such as the white middle class women and the white male doctors who truly believed that these black women's bodies, that it's integral for them to be sacrificed for the greater cause. And isn't it funny that those people who always say that, who always talk about how this one being will have to be sacrificed for the greater cause of humanity, isn't it interesting that they're always in the power position, where they will never be that person or being.

Prof. Thomas: And of course, nothing much has changed with time.

Prof. Harper: If you skip forward you'll hear the same rationalizations for why hundreds of thousands of non-human animals are cut up and tortured for the alleged betterment of humanity, education, and medicine. And you'll hear people argue, well, it's for the betterment of humanity. The non-human animals, frogs, mice, cats, dogs, etc., just have to be sacrificed. And I ask myself, why? Now, at least in the West, most people would say that it's very wrong to perform vivisection on a human body. Back

in the day when people of color were not seen as beings who could suffer, it was okay to have the same mentality, to say, "It's okay. Black women don't feel, they don't have actual pain." And Dr. Sims actually said and believed along with a bunch of other people who created this concept of scientific racism, that people of African descent have a higher tolerance for pain and suffering than white people. Now, skip forward to today, and you hear the same exact rationalization when it comes to experimentation, abuse, and cruelty on non-human animals in labs used for medicine, cosmetics, education.

Prof. Thomas: Many people refuse to admit the intersectionalities.

Prof. Harper: I'm just really trying to understand why it's so difficult for me to actually say to people, people who are very much invested in the abuse and exploitation of non-human animals in the US, "Why is it so difficult for you to see history and how the same type of mentality, the same type of logic has been used on Native American people, African slaves, freed African Americans?" We all remember the Tuskegee experiments—scientists not medically treating African American human beings who had syphilis for decades but saying that they were. These were experiments conducted on people seen not as fit enough to be intellectually productive in society. And we can't forget the exploitation, cruelty, and torture of the millions of Jews, not just Jews but those who didn't agree with Nazi Germany, who were also tortured and experimented on and then placed

in gas chambers.

Unfortunately, many people in the world today benefited from the medical knowledge created from such cruel experimentation.

Prof. Thomas: I hear your frustration. I too wonder why people refuse to see the connections between various forms of oppression and exploitation.

Prof. Harper: When I talk to people about why I'm so interested in fusing black feminist theory with understanding human's relationships to non-human animals with the concept of veganism, I think the answer is clear: If you don't want someone to strap you down and cut you up, if you're disgusted by what was happening to black women during the antebellum period in America, where people like Dr. Sims strapped women down and cut up their vaginas repeatedly, without anesthesia and without any remorse, if you're disgusted by that, I just need to understand why you're not disgusted by the same things happening to nonhuman animals? Please put yourself in a place to really ask yourself, "Do I think that non-human animals really deserve to be treated this way, or do I say that because I have the power and privilege to dictate how non-human animals should be treated, so it can benefit my desire to eat them, because I like the taste, or to benefit my desire to wear a particular or popular cosmetic because it is supposed to make me look very beautiful."

I just need to understand. How is that one's right? How is it that so many human beings can be

disgusted at the thought of experimenting on a human being, not even experimenting, just torturing somebody or putting them in slavery, and not be disgusted by what is happening today to non-human animals, on your own campus [Hollins faculty still commit vivisection], on factory farms, and in labs around the world? I'd like to understand this defense.

Prof. Thomas: It's a self-serving defense, is it not?

Prof. Harper: Yes, of course. But one cannot fully understand how African American women have been oppressed without understanding how all oppressions fit into this huge matrix of oppression where all of these pieces are contingent upon each other and influence each other. When those with privilege want to create a world based on imperialism and capitalism, they must objectify, imperialize and colonize 'the other' as resources and commodities, so they can continue to benefit in that particular position of power. And it isn't just that particular white racial status quo. That's just an example. But when I ask many people to seriously consider the plight of non-human animals, they quickly dismiss the suffering of non-human animals when it comes to their consumption habits, they 'other' them, they dismiss their

suffering. They dismiss the fact that these non-human animals have pain and suffering and that they are not here for their desire or their entertainment. This is the worst form of self-servingness.

Prof. Thomas: And, of course, it's frustrating when oppressed groups, especially, are complicit with those oppressing them, for example, white women who are heterosexist and black women who are speciesist.

Prof. Harper: I'm always, always perplexed when I encounter non-white minorities who are very very against institutional racism, of being 'othered', who have had the visceral experience of being othered, of not having their pain and suffering taken seriously because of sexism, racism, colonialism—who must actually understand how non-human animals have been mistreated in the West—I'm always perplexed when I start talking to people of color and the mistreatment of non-human animals in the context of how the 'other' has been constructed within the perception of white male privileged property owners, to see the doors come up, the walls come up, when I ask them to think about how non-human animals feel as well, what they think of being 'othered,' of their pain and suffering at not being taken seriously.

Prof. Thomas: And what is going through your head?

Prof. Harper: What is going through their heads? I get very perplexed and wonder if they have answers. I would like to ask them, "How do you, if you are an omnivore, how do you rationalize to yourself that it's okay for certain beings to go through pain and suffering and for other beings not to? How is it that you are able to separate your oppression and their's, and how is it that you are able to convince yourself that you don't need to acknowledge the pain and suffering of non-human animals?" And this goes for many people who don't want to acknowledge the pain and suffering of human beings they've 'othered'.

Prof. Thomas: I'm sorry we are out of time. Can you tell me where students can reach you if they'd like to discuss their answers and questions with you?

Prof. Harper: My Sistah' Vegan blog at:
<http://sistahvegan.wordpress.com/>

Prof. Thomas: Thank you so much, again, for shedding light on this important issue.

Prof. Harper: You are most welcome.

National Women's Studies Association Conference 2011

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transformations

Sheraton Hotel,
Atlanta, Georgia

Check out <http://www.nwsa.org/conference/index.php> for more information.

Karen Finley Makes Love To New York by Lauren Bakst, '11

“You are going to die when you’re going to die,” says Karen Finley in that unmistakable slightly over enunciated, low pitched voice of hers, chin tilted down and mouth pressed up against the microphone. Dressed in a short black wig and a gold sparkling mini dress, her stare penetrates into the audience at the West Bank Cafe on 42nd street as we slowly sip our drinks. It was only a few moments ago that we were laughing at the parade of Liza Minnelli look-a-likes stumbling across the small stage, but now our attention has been commanded and we’re listening.

This is *Make Love*, Karen Finley’s cabaret show, first created just under ten years ago in response to the attacks on September 11th. Returning to the stage for the tenth year anniversary of that day, *Make Love* is a tragicomic homage to this place and the people in it, a psychoanalytic inquiry into the collective grief of post 9/11 New York staged under the guise of a cabaret spectacle. Finley is joined to the stage by drag performer Chris Tanner—aka Liza #2, pianist Lance Cruce—another Liza no doubt, and a whole entourage of Lizas, all keeping each other company and performing necessary tasks at Finley’s request. During one of Finley’s monologues—a retelling of an anxiety inducing post 9/11 flying experience, she beckons to her fellow Lizas, “Probe me, probe me,” in a reenactment of that walk through airport security we all know so well. “Osama’s in that ass!” Finley screams out as the Lizas grope frantically at her bent over body. While the performers all appear to be Liza on the surface, this is by no means a full on impersonation—Karen Finley is undoubtedly Karen Finley dressed as Liza Minnelli performing Karen Finley. What this superficial approximation of the image of Minnelli seems to suggest is that at the end of the day,



Karen Finley, Lance Cruce, and Chris Tanner in *Make Love*. Photo by Max Ruby. © R. Lasko

we’ve all—New Yorkers that is—got a little bit of Liza in us, and we shouldn’t be so afraid to show it.

With a quick shift of her voice that rides the poetic roller coaster of her text, she sears through the layers of veneers she has constructed and taps into a space that can only be called humanity.

Karen Finley is not afraid to delve into the vulnerability and the fear that is so deeply embedded in the events of September 11th and the memorialization of them. With a quick shift of her voice that rides

the poetic roller coaster of her text, she sears through the layers of veneers she has constructed and taps into a space that can only be called humanity. It is in these moments that *Make Love* is at its most poignant. Ten years have passed and what can we say? Finley describes her thought process of attempting to understand something more about that tragedy that happened on that day. Was there something she could tell us? Write a witty Obama song perhaps? But there wasn’t and there isn’t. In that moment, Finley created a space where we could all accept our confusion around the entanglement of ourselves with this place and this trauma and what it all might mean right now. And for that, I am grateful.

Girls! Girls! Girls! by Tiffany Robinette, '10

Little girls can be awfully mean. Psychologists call this 'gendered emotion' and the social cruelty of girls 'relational aggression'. While researching girl culture, I noticed a rise of media attention focused on the mean girl phenomenon. After the recent suicide of Phoebe Prince following systematic bullying by her peers, American media culture reacted strongly when faced with the cutthroat culture of young girls. We are faced by hard-to-watch television programs like *Toddlers & Tiaras* depicting overzealous parents spray-tanning their four year old daughters so they look good in a bikini during pageant season. The combination of absurd expectations of femininity with competitive environments creates emotionally fragile mean girl heavyweights. These little twisted SuperGirls are cropping up everywhere, from television to elementary school.

Little girls are a cash crop for the corporations that offer products, style, and toys to the tiny consumers. Girlhood is commercialized, and girl identity is created by business. Mattel, the world's leading toymaker wildly profits from child consumers, raking in 684.9 million in 2010. As a corporation, Mattel has a history of sending mixed messages to girls through their products. They simultaneously sell the ever-controversial Barbie and the gentrified wholesome American Girl Dolls. Mattel sells girlhood to generation after generation, packaging old ideas to new girls. Consumption and girlhood are undeniably linked, and the result is a growing focus on the formation of girl identity based in objects rather than personal development.

Many of the messages that are linked to the girl lifestyle through corporations are overtly sexualizing. Sexual messages trickling



Thylane Blondeau, a ten year old model, poses for French Vogue. Image taken from thegloss.com

down to girl culture from teen culture are hardly new, but the response of girls towards the pressures of looking and acting like a teen have grown more dire. Lauren Greenfield, in her documentary *Thin*, addresses the worrisome reactions young growing girls show regarding their weight and the emphasis of very young girls being skinny. The introduction of dieting to young girls is not unique to our newest generation of girls! I recently noticed a 1950's paper doll wardrobe at our local antique mall that included a paper cut out of a diet book to match a summer outfit. Recently on *Toddlers & Tiaras* a pageant mother dressed her three-year-old Paisley in a Julia Robert's prostitute outfit from the movie *Pretty Woman*. Media outrage is slamming the show for allowing children to be overtly sexualized; however, ironically, the outfit is far less revealing than the show's standard fare.

Girls that do not fit into the strict edicts of girl culture are easily identified and marginalized by their peers. These outsiders are bullied, ignored, gossiped about, or forgotten. These habits of interactions within female social networks do not go away with time and age either. The three

Consumption and girlhood are undeniably linked, and the result is a growing focus on the formation of girl identity based in objects rather than personal development.

categories of girls caught in unhealthy interactions can be noted as victim, bystander and bully. While it is easy to feel immediate connection and empathy for the victim, it must be noted that bullying is perpetuated by cyclical behaviors. Most women have experienced being all three, at times within a single interaction. Aggression and dominance have been erroneously assumed to be specifically masculine labeled behaviors. We are now facing generations of girls and women who have been inundated by an aggressive feminine culture and who are not given the emotional or social tools to counteract relational aggression.

One Victory Doesn't Win the War by Wendy Laumone, '12

Continued from pg. 3

purpose of which is to make sure women remain chaste until marriage, is really part of a huge backlash against women— an effort to turn back the clocks and return to more traditional gender roles where women are passive. If we look at Rios and King's comments within the context of Valenti's book, isn't that exactly what they are saying, that women shouldn't have any agency in their sexuality because they will either use it to become "wanton harlots with an insatiable sexual appetite" quoted from Stephen Colbert Report examining Rios' comments. He adds sarcastically, "You know women, they are always on the edge of nymphomaniacal orgiastic abandon") in Rios' interpretation, or they will stop having babies and end the American race, according to King? In fact, Rios goes as far as to sexualize young girls when she talks about granddaughters. This is very typical of the virginity movement; Valenti explains: "By focusing on the virginity of young women and girls, the movement is doing exactly what it purports to abhor-objectifying women and reducing them to their sexuality" (Valenti 62).

Two years after the publication of *The Purity Myth*, what does our country look like right now for women's rights? When it comes to reproductive health, the political landscape is devastating. In a May 27 article in the *New York Times* entitled "The Reincarnation of Pro-Life," Emily Bazelon counts at least 64 new anti-abortion laws passed in GOP-controlled state legislatures with more than 30 passed in April alone. From excluding abortion from insurance coverage, to regulating abortion clinics like hospitals, the anti-abortion movement is attacking women from all angles.

The movement is becoming even more extreme; the Ohio House of Representatives passed the "heartbeat bill" in June that bans abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detectable— as early as six weeks, essentially as soon as a woman realizes she is pregnant. More and more laws are also being passed restricting abortion with no exception for rape or incest victims. What is even worse is that these laws are being passed with the intention that they be challenged by the courts, one of the only ways anti-choice activists have been able to fight back, essentially forcing a potential repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, considering that within the Supreme Court there is now a 5-4 political divide with conservatives in the majority.

Not only are the Conservatives becoming more extreme, but it is clear to me that they are purposely passing laws that they know are so extreme that they will be challenged in court very quickly, thereby creating an opening for the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* as the cases climb the judicial court ladder from one lower court to the next higher court. But it isn't just abortion rights that are slowly being chipped away, it is women's access to preventative health care, such as mammograms and HIV testing, through state as well as national government efforts to defund Planned Parenthood, even when their services do not include abortion.

The Right Wing is increasingly showing its true colors as having no interest in giving women any access to health care that gives them options about their bodies, even when it comes to early breast cancer detection, as we have seen from their efforts to defund

non-abortion-related Planned Parenthood services. Although women have won this fight, the fight to get birth control and other women-related health expenses covered by insurance companies, it is only one victory, one which could easily be thwarted by conservative efforts like their successful efforts to chip away at *Roe v. Wade*. We should not lose sight of the bigger fight— the war on women currently being waged by conservatives on all fronts.

For more information on this legislation and its impact, visit:

<http://www.hrsa.gov/womensguidelines/>

and

<http://www.healthcare.gov/news/factsheets/womenspreventio n08012011a.html>

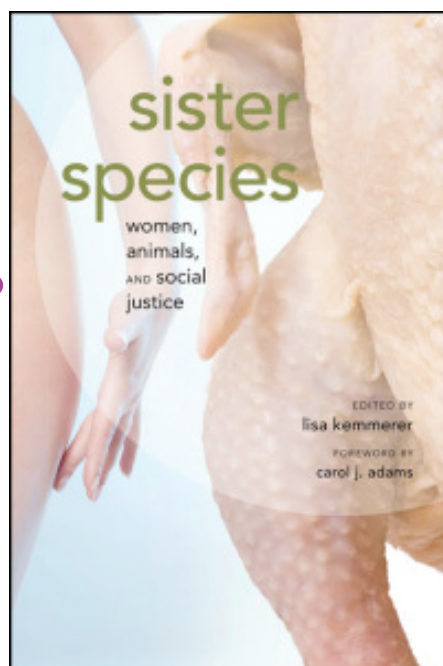
Book Review: *Sister Species: Women, Animals, and Social Justice*, ed. Lisa Kemmerer (University of Illinois, 2011)

by Susan Thomas

A feminist approach to animal activism? The idea is not new. The nineteenth century feminist animal activist Dr. Anna Kingsford agitated for women's rights while simultaneously promoting a feminist approach to the treatment of non-human animals. Still, it has only been within the last two decades that feminist theorists have begun to widely focus on the interconnections between the domination/oppression/hatred of women (misogyny) and the domination/oppression/hatred of non-human animals (misothery). Carol Adams's groundbreaking work, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), emphasized the connection between the oppression of women and of non-human animals under patriarchal domination. Susanna Kappeler's work links the status of women and the status of nonhuman animals as objects whose role is to subjectify men. Karen Davis's *More than a Meal* (2001) shows how both wild and domestic turkeys are subject to human sexual violence. More recently, Maneesha Deckha in "The Saliency of Species Difference for Feminist Theory" (2006) successfully deconstructs naturalized binaries such as human/animal, which are routinely used to legitimize non-human animal abuse. Many other feminist writers have posited a need to replace Western dualistic thinking which sees the world in terms of unchanging polarities—"us and them," "man and woman," "culture and nature," "reason and emotion," "mind and body," "superior and inferior", with a holistic vision of reality in which everything is integrally interconnected, and thus part of a larger "whole." This holism perceives nature as comprising individual beings who are part of a dynamic web of

interconnections. No one species or one individual is of greater or lesser value than another. All forms of oppression are linked.

Anyone seeking deeper understanding of the interconnections between speciesism, sexism, racism, and heterosexism, and why feminists must challenge these intersecting forms of oppression,



should pick up a copy of Lisa Kemmerer's highly readable *Sister Species: Women, Animals, and Social Justice* (University of Illinois Press, 2011). This anthology brings together fourteen activists who have personally explored links of oppression between humans and non-human animals, including such exploitative practices as compulsory motherhood, rape racks, slavery, vivisection, and the separation of mothers from infants. Kemmerer demonstrates that these are feminist issues, whether they occur in human cultures, on factory farms, or in college classrooms.

I think it's safe to say that some feminists won't like this book, because they prefer to pass exploitation on to other exploited individuals, those whom they perceive as being yet lower on the hierarchical ladder. Kemmerer writes that those "feminists who prefer to ignore that nonhuman animals who are exploited for their reproductive abilities are oppressed females closely resemble men who prefer to ignore that women are human. Women who prefer not to recognize a cow as an objectified female also resemble early feminists who focus exclusively on white, middle-class women." Feminists who engage in this kind of denial, Kemmerer realizes, engage in a "profound betrayal of feminism's deepest commitments." If we are to avoid such pitfalls, in light of the intersectionality of oppressions, feminists must specifically address the oppression of nonhuman animals with whom we share the planet. In failing to do so, feminists adopt the sort of exclusionary theorizing that they ostensibly reject.

Inconvenient truths? Yes. And if it weren't for women like those contributing to this anthology, the voices of those least able to fight for themselves would only be heard in slaughterhouses and laboratories. This book will change your way of thinking about animals who don't happen to be human. Read it.

Save the Date

Rally, Virginia Coalition to Protect Women's Health
October 15, 1-3 PM in Richmond, VA (Monroe Park)

Take Back the Night, with CASA
(Coalition Against Sexual Assault)
October 19, 8:30 PM on the steps of the Coker Building

Stitch n' Bitch with Dr. Jill Weber, hosted by FMLA
(Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance)
October 24, 9 PM in the Rat (basement of Moody)

"A Gift for the Village" Documentary
October 26, 7 PM in the VAC Auditorium

Feminism Panel, hosted by FMLA
October 28, 3:30 PM in the VAC Auditorium

Reading by Professor Pauline Kaldas
November 3, 4:45 PM in the Green Drawing Room

Fall Dance Gathering
November 3-4, 8 PM in the Theatre

"What's On Your Plate?" Documentary
November 6, 2 PM in the Jackson Screening Room

National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Conference
November 10-13 in Atlanta, GA

"A Woman of Independent Means" Theatre Production
November 15-18, 7:30 PM in the Theatre

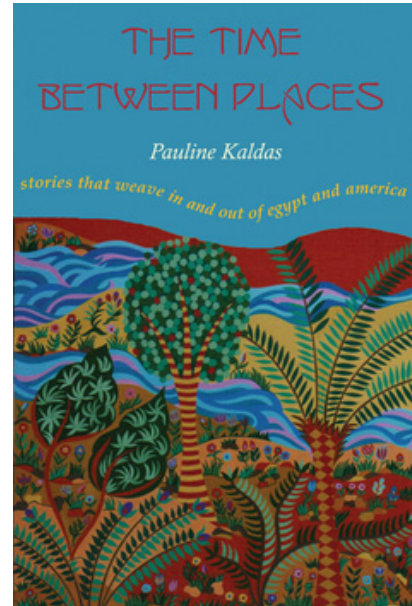
Writer's Harvest Reading:
Admission \$5 for students and \$10 for general admission.
100% of proceeds to be donated directly to Feeding America Southwest Virginia.
November 17, 8 PM in the VAC Auditorium

15th Annual Drag King Show, hosted by OUTloud
December 3, 8:30 PM in Moody

"The Sweetest Sound" Documentary
December 4, 2 PM in the Jackson Screening Room

Opening of Exhibition "Bayous and Ghosts: Work by Margaret Evangeline and Hunt Slonem"
January 12, 10 AM in the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum

Southeastern Women's Studies Association (SEWSA) Conference
March 29-31 at George Mason University



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Gender & 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 Gender & 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. Gender & Women's Studies has been an active department since 1998.

For more information visit the department website at:
<http://www.hollins.edu/academics/womenstudies/>



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