

# FEMINIST GENDER & SEXUALITY STUDIES



## LETICIA ALVARADO DELIVERS 36TH ANNUAL DIANE WEISS '80 MEMORIAL LECTURE

BY BLYTHE GUECIA '23

On February 23rd, Leticia Alvarado was welcomed by the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department as the Weiss Lecturer for the 34th annual Diane Weiss Memorial Lecture Series. Alvarado is an associate professor of American Studies at Brown University and is the author of a recently published book titled *Object Studies: Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production*. Like her book, Alvarado's presentation was firmly grounded in conversations related to aesthetic, artistic production, affect, as well as the dynamics of race and gender within the world of art. Alvarado began her presentation by posing a series of questions. She encouraged her audience to consider the tension between an artist who holds a minoritarian identity working within majoritarian institutions. More specifically, Alvarado questioned how artists of color and their artworks become legible as either objects or subjects. Finally, she pondered the political implications of working and producing material as an artist of color.

In order to think through these questions of representation, objecthood, and subjecthood, Alvarado introduced current artist and activist Xandra Ibarra. Ibarra, who sometimes works under the alias of La Chica Boom, is based out of Oakland, California. Ibarra works in various mediums, but often her art takes the form of performance, video, and sculpture. During her presentation, Alvarado focused on a handful of Ibarra's artworks including one installation titled "Ashes of Five Feminist of Color Texts." This installation took the form of mounted book jackets of five "ubiquitously cited" feminist of color texts.

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The jacket covers were accompanied by corresponding mausoleum vases that held each book's ashes. This work prompted conversation related to the ways in which objects, more commonly those produced by women of color, become commodified and subsequently devalued or misrepresented. Moreover, this art installation supported Alvarado's inquiries surrounding the ways in which art and work becomes monetized and racialized while they are held by larger institutions like universities or museums. A second artwork of Ibarra's that Alvarado drew upon was "Inventory of Exhaustion." This selection of photographic work featured vacuum-sealed costumes from Ibarra's life. A few of the pieces included a microphone, cherry red heels, neon feathers, and a black and brown bug suit. When presenting this collection of work, Alvarado raised questions related to holding and hoarding objects and artworks; this line of thought would offer itself as the title of her lecture.

Alvarado considered how collecting and holding objects is related to power, class, and race. For example, Alvarado clarified that while the accumulation of objects for majoritarian subjects is a sign of status and wealth, the accumulation of objects by minoritarian subjects is considered dirty, excessive, and even hysterical; it is pathologized and denounced as "hoarding." Throughout the conversation, Alvarado emphasized that objects, specifically works of art, offer a way to enter into relations regarding race, gender, and sexuality. Ultimately, Alvarado underlined that when we explore these dynamics it reveals the racialized hierarchy of relations to objects.

During the second half of the lecture, Carolina Diaz, assistant Professor of Spanish, Latin American Studies, and FGSS, was welcomed to join Alvarado in conversation. Most of their conversation revolved around the affective power of objects, especially artworks. Diaz and Alvarado questioned how we fashion different effects in response to works of art. They were especially interested in exploring the power and possibility of negative effects. In thinking about subjecthood and objecthood, Diaz wondered whether self-erasure, loss, and grief could be at all useful in reimagining an alternative narrative between women of color and their artwork.

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## FGSS TERTULIA FEATURES FACULTY FROM FILM, THEATER, AND SOCIOLOGY

The 3rd FGSS Tertulia, an annual gathering of faculty from across the campus whose work intersects with feminist, gender and sexuality studies, was held on May 11th, 2023. Profs. Katie Brewer Ball (Theater, FGSS), Benjamin Haber (Sociology), and Sadia Quraeshi Shepard (Film) gave talks. Curator and independent scholar Daniel J. Sanders served as discussant.

Katie Brewer Ball's talk, "Science on the North Slope," was drawn from a larger project that addresses "the history of Arctic science, Alaskan imaginaries, settler colonialism, and art," as they described it, along with personal and oral histories from the Alaskan town of Utqiagvik. From 1956-1971, Prof. Brewer Ball's grandfather served as director of the nearby Naval Arctic Research Laboratory Barrow Arctic Research Center (BARC). Brewer Ball's auto-theoretical project weaves first-person reflections with attention to scientific research, climate change, and settler colonialism. Brewer Ball's first book, *The Only Way Out: The Racial & Sexual Performance of Escape*, is forthcoming from Duke University Press in 2024.

Assistant Professor of Sociology Benjamin Haber's talk "Gay Until Graduation: Digital Media and College Friendship," addressed the role of social media in shaping sexual identity, friendships and intimate relations. Haber regards digital social networks "as appropriating, amplifying and then profiting off the risks and rewards of 'college life.'" The talk was part of a broader project that began with Haber's dissertation research, in which Haber addresses digital media platforms, memes, digital advertising and other phenomena. Haber argues that social media encourages "risk-infused play" and experimentation around "representations of the self and others, with important implications for the crisis of loneliness and disconnection once outside the temporary material space of the university." Prof. Haber's research has been published in *Media, Culture & Society*, *Women & Performance*, *WSQ*, and elsewhere.

Sadia Quraeshi Shepard gave a talk on a filmmaker whose sole work, *WANDA* (1970), is now considered a feminist classic. In "The Many Faces of Barbara Loden: Gender, Aging and Performance in *Wanda*," Shepard reconsiders the film, a neo-realist portrait of a divorced woman living in precarity, as well as recent scholarship on filmmaker Barbara Loden, who is often conflated with her title character. At the Tertulia, Shepard screened her 8 minute audiovisual essay *Dear Barbara Loden: Reconsidering WANDA* (1970), which, in her words, "creates an imagined, speculative conversation with Barbara Loden and explores how methods of videographic criticism might provide opportunities to reinterpret Loden's work." Prof. Shepard is author of the memoir *The Girl from Foreign* and fiction appearing in *The New Yorker*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Story*, and documentary film producer of *The September Issue* (A&E Films) and *The Education of Mohammad Hussein* (HBO).



## FGSS FALL SYMPOSIUM ON PERFORMANCE, IDENTITY & POLITICS

BY BLYTHE GUECIA '23

On October 28th, an audience of fifty students, faculty and staff gathered for the annual FGSS Fall Symposium, centered on the theme Performance/ Identity/ Politics, which was co-sponsored by the Dance and African American Studies Departments and the Center for African American Studies. Two speakers, Mario LaMothe and Naomi Macalalalad Bragin '95, energetically presented their research, which revolved around the themes of community and identity as they intersect through dance and performance.

LaMothe, an Assistant Professor of Black Studies and Anthropology at University of Illinois, studies embodied pedagogies of Caribbean arts and questions of performance, identity politics, and social justice. His presentation, "Yanvalou for Haiti: an Affective Ethnography of Ayikodans' Anmwey Ayiti Manman," began with a video of dancers performing Yanvalou. LaMothe, himself a former dancer who studied at the renowned Alvin Ailey school of dance, moved his arms through the air as he narrated the dance sequences for his audience. Yanvalou, he explained, is a traditional Afro-Haitian dance that traces its origins to Benin, West Africa and incorporates a range of ethnic traditions and rhythms of the African diaspora. Though the dance has often been associated with Vodou rituals and ceremonies, LaMothe clarified that it is deeply embedded in the quotidian life of Haiti.



The particular performance that LaMothe shared, Anmwey Haiti Manman by the Haitian dance troupe Ayikodans, was created as a response to the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010. The choreography was created with the intention of being witnessed and watched by Western audiences and was first performed in the U.S. in Miami. Spinning, bending, reaching, gathering, screaming, crying, and falling, the Ayikodans dancers do whole-body storytelling to address the environmental and political catastrophes Haiti has faced. LaMothe explained that the narrative crafted by the dance, which renders the body variously as fluid and full, pained and paralyzed, was created to destabilize the Western gaze on Haitian culture. As LaMothe's presentation revealed, the dance poses questions such as: how can performance help to (re)imagine the past, present, and future of Haitian lives? How can embodied narratives of upheaval, disaster, and mourning engender political attention, responses, and care?

Bragin, a Wesleyan alum who is now a professor of fine arts at the University of Washington, was second to present their work, which was titled “Dansendence.” The title underlines the importance of temporality and lineage as they are related to dance culture. Bragin argued that dance is never temporally static, rather it reaches both into the future and the past. For example, dancers and choreographers often seek to honor the dancers who came before them, their “dance kin,” who inspired and informed their work. Bragin emphasized the ways in which homage in the world of dance offers a queer and hopeful notion of kinship that is neither biological nor patriarchal.

Bragin described a history of street dance styles that grew from predominantly gay and Black spaces in the 1980s and 1990s. Moves such as “wacking” and “punking” grew out of the club scenes of New York and Los Angeles, which Bragin described as erotic, rebellious and powerful. Club and party culture cultivated intimate spaces where collective senses of touch and feeling could be created. Bragin also explained that the nature of global street dance, which stems from hip hop, is flexible and improvisational. Improvisation is a tool artists use to combat colonial, Western methods and narratives that dictate how the body should be held, sensed, and moved in time and space. (Bragin’s own presentation was, for the most part, improvised. She noted at the beginning of their talk that while they intended to follow an outline, they wished to relate to the audience naturally without any scripted barriers.) Bragin also addressed the evolution of hip hop from private, club spaces to public, street spaces, posing such questions as, what happens when performance is made public? What does it mean to express euphoria or mourning on a collective scale through cultural expression?

The Performance/Identity/Politics panel was warmly welcomed by an audience that filled the lecture hall in Judd Hall. Gabby Farina '23 (Art History and English) remarked, "Mario LaMothe's discussion of the relationship between audience and performers stuck with me. I was interested in his presentation of audiences as 'witnesses' and the visibility of performance as a way to destabilize the Western gaze and educate audiences on Haitian culture." In response to Bragin’s presentation, Clara Martin '24 (FGSS and English) commented, "I was struck by the way both speakers 'performed' their work, at times shifting into a different style, using their body and voice as though their lectures were choreographed, dancing their presentations in ways that compelled deep attention and listening. I especially loved how Naomi Macalalad Bragin described the mode and form of her talk as 'improvisation' and 'freestyle.'"



## REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM TEACH-IN

BY BLYTHE GUECIA '23

The Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department and Wesleyan Reproductive Advocacy & Legislation (WRAL) co-sponsored a Reproductive Freedom & Abortion Access Teach-In during the Fall semester. The event welcomed three speakers, Liz Gustafson, Livia Wallick '20, and Sita McGuire '24 to discuss the state of abortion access in Connecticut after the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* Supreme Court decision in June 2022. The speakers also addressed the current threats to reproductive care access for queer people, women of color and other marginalized groups.

The presentation began with Gustafson, State Director of Pro-Choice Connecticut and co-founder of Reproductive, Equity, Access, and Choice Fund of Connecticut (REACH), an organization that provides financial assistance to those seeking abortions in the state. Gustafson detailed the legislative history of abortion access in Connecticut, including the landmark case *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) in which the Supreme Court confirmed that the liberty and privacy of married couples to buy and use contraceptives without government intervention or restriction is protected by the U.S. Constitution. *Griswold v. Connecticut* would become the basis of the *Roe v. Wade* decision eight years later.

However, across the U.S., many restrictions and barriers such as parental consent, waiting periods, counseling requirements, and funding obstacles, notably the Hyde Amendment (which prohibits the use of federal Medicaid funds to be used for abortion except when the life of the pregnant person is in danger), limited the ability of pregnant people to obtain abortions. *Roe v. Wade* was codified into Connecticut state law in 1990. Recently, the state has implemented protocols to protect residents from the false advertising of "crisis pregnancy clinics," has granted minors access to abortion without parental consent, and has granted clinicians, as opposed to only physicians, the right to perform certain kinds of abortions. However, many laws still exist that prohibit CT residents' access to abortion care. For example, abortions are banned in the state after 24 weeks of pregnancy.

**FEMINIST GENDER & SEXUALITY STUDIES**

**REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM AND ABORTION ACCESS TEACH-IN**

Thursday, October 20th  
12:00-1:00PM  
Judd Hall, room 116

**Livia Wallick '20**  
Livia Wallick is a REACH (Reproductive, Equity, Access and Choice) Fund board member who raises funds for abortion access in her community. Livia previously served as Secretary of the Board for the Tampa Bay Abortion Fund and led Tampa Bay Abortion Fund's annual Fundathon fundraiser. Livia holds a B.A. in College of Letters and Hispanic Literatures and Cultures from Wesleyan University.

**Liz Gustafson**  
Liz Gustafson is the State Director of Pro-Choice Connecticut. She is also the co-founder and Board Member of the REACH Fund of Connecticut, which raises funds for abortion access. A proud abortion storyteller, Liz holds a Masters in Social Work from the University of Connecticut and has also worked in the field of food justice advocacy.

**Sita McGuire '24**  
Sita McGuire class of '24 (Sociology, Af-Am minor) seeks to advocate for Indonesian women and other WOC. She is researching the impact of anti-Abortion legislation on communities of color on both a national and international level.

Co-sponsored by  
**Wesleyan Reproductive Advocacy & Legislation**

Gustafson closed her presentation by suggesting a handful of actions anyone could take in order to help protect abortion access in CT. These included writing testimonies to legislators, lobbying, combating abortion stigma by engaging in conversations (or even just saying the word abortion), and sharing personal experiences of abortion care. Gustafson prefaced her final piece of advice by announcing that she often shared her own abortion story in an “unapologetic” way.

Livia Wallick '20, a board member of REACH, elaborated on the work of the REACH Fund. While abortion access is protected in the state, Wallick emphasized that “legality does not equal access.” For most abortion patients, money is a primary barrier to care. The money raised by REACH can help fund the cost of transportation, childcare for children who may need to be left at home, temporary housing, pain relief medication, and other needs as well as out of pocket clinical expenses. Wallick shared that the ultimate vision of The Reach Fund is a “world in which access to abortion is free from financial and logistical barriers, stigma, and injustice.” Finally, Wallick noted that medication abortions, otherwise known as self-managed abortions or Plan C, are helping to expand access to abortion care. Wallick noted that in 2020, medication abortion accounted for 54% of US abortions. Plancpills.org is one of many organizations that provides information on how to access abortion pills in the United States. (At the time of this writing, legal challenges have been filed against the FDA's decades-old approval of the abortion medications, but medication abortion remains legal in some form in 36 states).



Sita McGuire '24 (Sociology, African American Studies minor) closed the conversation by reading aloud an essay relating to the overturning of Roe v. Wade from the vantage point of marginalized communities. Sita grew up in Indonesia, where she witnessed how socioeconomically disadvantaged communities responded to government restrictions on reproductive rights, supporting each other and fostering resilience. Sita observed that in the U.S., “white, upper-class, well-educated women – who have historically been the face of feminist movements regarding abortion access – were shocked [that Roe v. Wade could be overturned] while lower income Black and Brown and queer communities who were more accustomed to the failures of the United States government in ensuring equitable sexual and reproductive healthcare, were expecting it.” Ultimately, Sita highlighted how socioeconomic status and resources available to different groups shape different community responses to abortion restrictions. Sita is currently researching the impact of anti-abortion legislation on communities of color. She will continue to advocate for Indonesian women and other marginalized communities in hopes of supporting their fight for greater and more equitable sexual and reproductive healthcare.

## FOOD, FEMINISM & REVOLUTION

BY BLYTHE GUECIA '23

Wesleyan alumni Alexandra Ketchum '12 and Emily Larned '00 collaborated on a presentation to students and faculty during the Spring '23 semester that covered their shared interests in food justice, feminism, and feminist media. Their work as academics and artists intersected through Bloodroot, a feminist restaurant in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Bloodroot, founded in 1977 by Selma Miriam and Noel Furie, is a vegetarian feminist restaurant run by a collective of women.

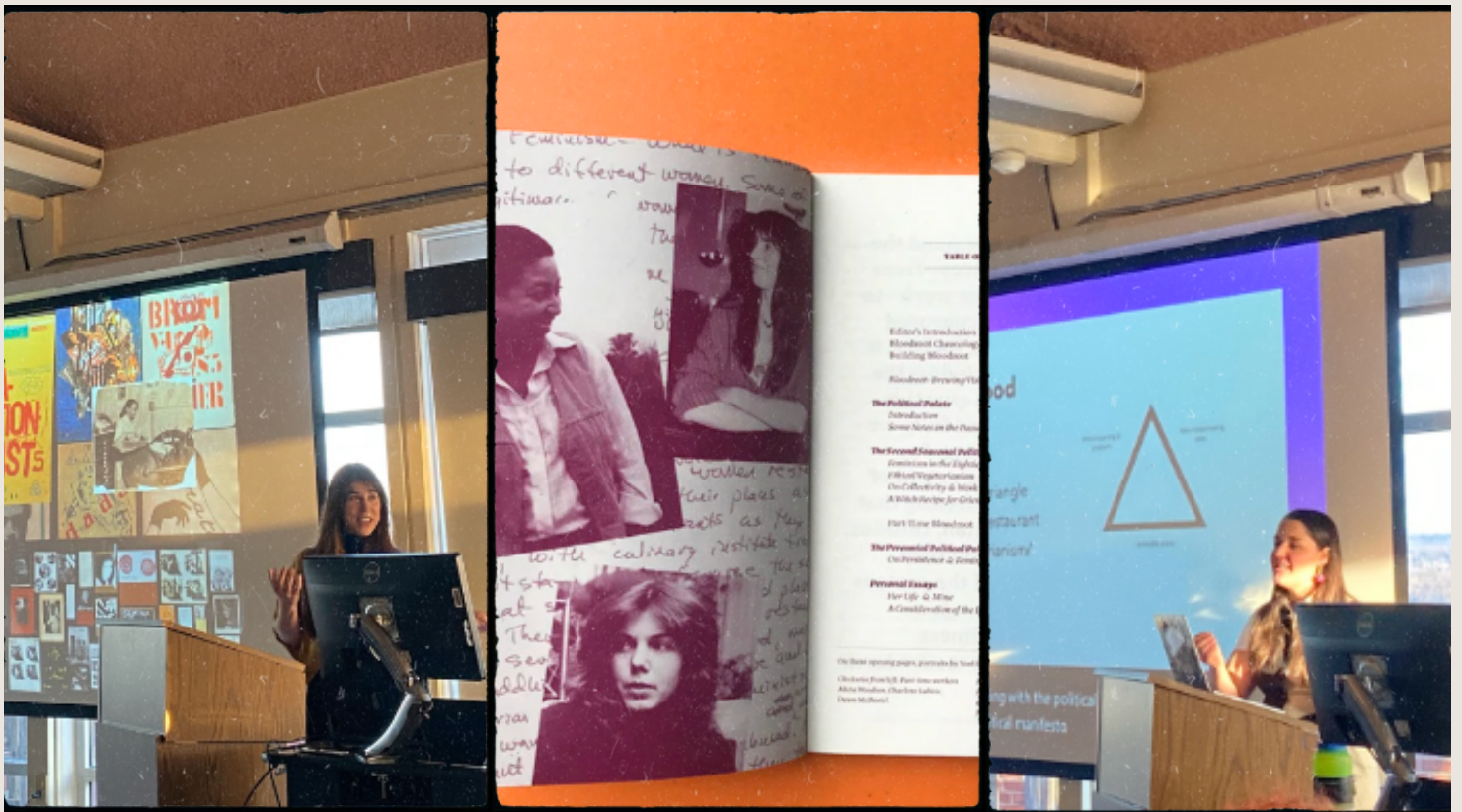
Ketchum, a Faculty Lecturer at the Institute for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at McGill University, studies food, environmental, technological, and gender history. Ketchum's work began at Wesleyan University, where she started mapping feminist restaurants in the United States and Canada. During this research, she found Bloodroot, a vegetarian and feminist restaurant less than an hour south of Wesleyan. Ketchum was originally interested in exploring the physical environment of the home, specifically the kitchen, and how these places are gendered. Ketchum was also interested in how food and food preparation are gendered. From there, Ketchum began finding lesbian and feminist restaurants. During her presentation at Wesleyan, she paused to offer her audience a definition: "What [was it that] creators meant when they called their restaurants 'Feminist'?" First, Ketchum explained that restaurants are often more permanent spaces – often leased or owned – than coffee houses.

Feminist restaurants identify as concerned with social justice and aim to use ethically sourced projects, use fairly compensated labor, and have accessible prices. Often feminist restaurants are vegetarian or vegan and use seasonal products in their recipes. Most feminist restaurants are dedicated to creating community for women and queer folks. Often, they are run by women or collective groups. Feminist restaurants became especially popular between 1970 and 1990. Over the course of two decades, hundreds of feminist restaurants opened across the United States. Today, few feminist restaurants remain; Bloodroot in Bridgeport, Connecticut is one of them. Today, in keeping with transformations in social movements, such restaurants have become more "queer" focused as opposed to only "lesbian" or "women" oriented. Part of Ketchum's work as a master's student involved creating an extensive directory of feminist restaurants across America and Canada. On her website called The Feminist Restaurant Project, Ketchum has created multiple maps that pinpoint the feminist restaurants, cafés, and coffeehouses. In addition to her Feminist Restaurant Project, Ketchum has published two books: *Ingredients for Revolution: A History of American Feminist Restaurants, Cafes, and Coffeehouses* (2022) and *Engage in Public Scholarship!: A Guidebook on Feminist and Accessible Communication* (2022).



Emily Larned graduated from Wesleyan as a Studio Art major with a concentration in printmaking. Today, Larned is Assistant Professor of Graphic Design and of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Connecticut. Larned is interested in how messages are made through media and art and how bookmaking can be a collective act. Larned specializes in zine making, a practice she began in high school. A zine is a small collection of self-published work that usually includes both text and images. When zines originated, they were a non-commercial form of artwork and communication.. In addition to zines, Larned crafts handmade books, one of which is called *Our daily lives have to be satisfaction in themselves: 40 years of Bloodroot*. This monochrome-bound book traces the history of Bloodroot and addresses the relationships of feminism, food and collective work. Larned worked closely with Bloodroot founders Noel and Selma to document their life's work.

The conversation between the two Wes alums culminated in a thoughtful discussion with the audience on how to create meaning, collectivity, and community through art and research following the pandemic, which strengthened our society's dependence upon virtual platforms and communication.



## Giving away banned books on #freedomtolearn National Day of Action

FGSS, in conjunction with the Shapiro Center, hosted two banned books giveaways as part of the Freedom to Learn National Day of Action. On May 3, 2023, FGSS and Shapiro Center gave away almost 70 banned books to students, staff and faculty. The books included George M. Johnson's queer of color memoir-manifesto *All Boys Aren't Blue*, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, *Just Mercy: a Story of Justice and Redemption*, and titles by Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and Zora Neale Hurston. FGSS also gave away copies of the graphic memoir *Gender Queer*, at the top of the list of most banned books in the U.S. for the past several years.



The #freedomtolearn National Day of Action was created by the National Women's Studies Association, the African American Policy Forum, civil rights organizations and other groups to collectively resist actions against free speech and education related to racial justice and gender and sexual freedom. Lawmakers around the country have defunded libraries, rejected AP African American Studies courses, banned thousands of books, and threatened to fire teachers and professors for teaching about systemic racism and queer/ LGBTQIA+ issues. (See the NWSA's Open Letter on Fighting "Anti-Woke" Censorship of Intersectionality and Black Feminism.) FGSS joined the National Day of Action to protest the nationwide attacks on education, including the teaching of Critical Race Theory and queer theory, to challenge the banning of books in our public libraries, and to stand up for democracy, which requires voting access, freedom of speech and access to the truth.

# ALUMNI NEWS

## Jessica Brandon Class of 2020

Jessica Brandon '20 is a sex educator, abortion doula, and childcare provider in Brooklyn, NY. She has been involved with Advocates for Youth for the past two years, both as a member of their Abortion Out Loud cohort and the Youth Abortion Support Collective. Jessica partnered with AFY staff and six other AOL members to develop a seven-week Abortion Support Training for students and young people, the first of its kind to focus on youth-led abortion access and support efforts. This is her second year contributing to the training series as a developer and facilitator. Jessica is also a counselor at Exhale, a post-abortion emotional support textline. She is so grateful to be carrying on her learning from the Wesleyan Doula Project, ASHA, and the FGSS department!

## Ella Dawson Class of 2014

Ella Dawson '14 sold her novel *The Reunion* to Dutton Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House. It is a coming-of-age tale about a bisexual woman returning to her alma mater for her five-year reunion, and it explores themes of biphobia, abusive relationships, mental health, and second chances. While not working on her fiction, Ella continues to write about gender issues at [patreon.com/brosandprose](https://patreon.com/brosandprose).

## Lynn Chen Class of 1998

Lynn Chen (she/her/hers '98) will return to campus during WesFest on Friday, April 14th, to show her directorial debut "I Will Make You Mine." She wrote, directed, produced and starred in this feature film, which debuted at South by Southwest in 2020. The film is currently streaming on VOD with a 100% Rotten Tomato Rating.

## Paulina Jones-Torregrosa Class of 2015

LPaulina Jones-Torregrosa '15 is pursuing a PhD in English at Northwestern University, where she is also a Cluster Fellow in Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her dissertation explores how U.S. Black and Latinx feminists criticize U.S. interventions in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. She was recently named a WW Dissertation Fellow in Women's Studies.

## Rebecca J Rubenstein Class of 2021

Rebecca J Rubenstein '21 has decided after two years of working in agricultural land access for New Americans, to enter Emory University's Interdisciplinary Hispanic Studies PhD program this fall. She is excited to join a program that, much like Wes' FGSS department, values bridging disciplines and perspectives. She intends to concentrate in Emory's Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department.

# AWARDS

## CAROL B. OHMANN AWARD

AWARDED FOR EXCELLENCE IN FEMINIST, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY STUDIES

BLYTHE GUECIA '23 (BEST THESIS)

ZAHRA ASHE-SIMMER '23 (BEST ESSAY)

## THE CHRISTINA CROSBY PRIZE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE FEMINISM

TO RECOGNIZE AN FGSS MAJOR WHO EXEMPLIFIES OUR BELOVED COLLEAGUE  
CHRISTINA CROSBY'S DEDICATION TO THEORY FORGED BY ACTION AND  
COMMITMENT TO INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVISM

CLARA MARTIN '24

*Class of 2023*

