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## Serving the Public: Gender, Sexuality, and Race at the Margins <sup>1</sup>

Jill McCracken, University of South Florida St. Petersburg

· This article presents an interdisciplinary advanced honors course:  
· Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Marginalized Communities. Through this  
· course and its service-learning applications, students discovered that  
· discourses of gender, sexuality, and race are not simply theoretical—  
· ultimately, they impact people's lives. I include an explanation of the  
· curriculum and the service-learning applications in my design and  
· facilitation of the course, as well as samples of student work and a  
· partial "showcase" of the student's final community event. In addition  
· to describing one course in particular, this article aims to explore  
· service-learning in activist, educative, and research formats and the  
· implications for our students, our own research and knowledge, and  
· our communities.

"I knew I had to tell you I was a whore because I intended, from the very first trick I turned, to talk about it in public [...] Maybe, even now, my words make a difference to you. They make a difference to me. I have created a life I can speak about.

Love,

Carol"

*Carol Queen from "Dear Mom: A Letter about Whoring"*

"We live our lives enveloped in symbols. How we perceive, what we know, what we experience, and how we act are the results of our own symbol use and that of those around us [...] we engage in a process of thinking about symbols, discovering how they work, why they affect



us, and choosing to communicate in particular ways as a result of the options they present.”

*Sonja A. Foss in Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*

“This class has turned me into an activist.”

*April Maltz, student*

### **Service-Learning, Rhetorical Analysis, and Community Activism**

**T**he above quotation by Carol Queen comes from a reading I gave my students on the first day of our Honor’s Seminar: Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Marginalized Communities. “Dear Mom: A Letter about Whoring” is just that, a letter Carol Queen wrote to her mother after her mother’s death to explain her life as a whore, or sex worker. I chose this piece because I wanted to introduce the theoretical concepts of the class—rhetoric, gender, sexuality, and race, among others—in a way that was practical, lived, and also a bit shocking. This letter serves as the first chapter in Queen’s book *Real Live Nude Girl: Chronicles of Sex-Positive Culture* where, in her words,

I am showing you the sex-positive world I could only discover after having been ostracized by a pack of scared kids. Once I decided most of what my culture had told me about sex was wrong, I set out on a prolonged walk on the wild side, and by now I’ve walked into more secret places than I ever knew existed.

They are wild and spirit-filled gardens, indeed. (xviii)

Her book introduces the reader into these “wild and spirit-filled gardens;” one of which is working and identifying as a whore. Queen’s lived reality—as she portrays it—is one that is largely marginalized within all strata of U.S. culture. In response to the reading, as well



as throughout the course, I asked my students to rhetorically situate themselves amongst persons who are marginalized in order to better understand how these categories can be used to subordinate and oppress.

One of the most important goals of both my teaching and research is to apply academic knowledge to citizenship—or the communities in which we live. I strive, through the intellectual work of both my teaching and research, to involve and share the knowledge I and my students create with the local, interpersonal, civic, and/or international communities, as applicable. This article presents 1) a description of my work as a teacher, researcher, and activist as a context for this course; and 2) an explanation of the curriculum and the service-learning applications in my design and facilitation of the course. This explanation is interwoven with descriptions and a partial “showcase” of student work that offer examples of the discoveries students made that discourses of gender, sexuality, and race are not simply theoretical—ultimately, they impact people’s lives. In addition to describing one course in particular, this article aims to explore service-learning in activist, educative, and research formats and the implications for our students, our own research and knowledge, and our communities.

My choice to integrate teaching, research, and activism has service-learning at its foundation. As Melody Bowdon and J. Blake Scott explain: “At its core, service-learning is a hands-on approach that uses community service as a vehicle for teaching specific course-based skills and strategies” (1). Service-learning is a way students can take their theories to the street, so to speak, test them, and then design projects in which they are both personally invested and can then be shared with the community at large.

Central to this course are also rhetoric and rhetorical analysis, and I use Sonja A. Foss’s *Rhetorical Criticism* to introduce these concepts to students because she draws attention to symbols and then questions



how these symbols impact how meaning is made. As I included in the above introductory quotation, Foss states:

We live our lives enveloped in symbols. How we perceive, what we know, what we experience, and how we act are the results of our own symbol use and that of those around us [...] we engage in a process of thinking about symbols, discovering how they work, why they affect us, and choosing to communicate in particular ways as a result of the options they present. (3)

Rhetorical analysis is the examination and subsequent co-creation of these symbols for the purposes of communication.

The primary goal of this course is for students to apply rhetorical theory and analysis to the concepts of gender, sexuality, and race, as well as the value systems that accompany these categorizations. The students examined specific marginalized positions and communities in order to make their own arguments about discourse and these marginalized communities. All of their research culminated in projects that focus on the application of theory to specific marginalized communities. Throughout the course, I encouraged my students to think about how their research of an issue relates to the communities in which the project is situated (local, academic, university-wide, special interest, etc.) and how they can then share the knowledge they create with applicable communities.

My expression of service-learning also encourages the students to involve their communities directly in the research, if possible. This strategy guards against a student who may not know a lot about an issue rushing in to tell a community how things “should” be done. Rather, in the best case scenario, the research project should develop from the needs of the community and the community should be directly involved in the creation of the project. (I include examples of this process in the section titled Student Projects: “Bringing Sex, Gender,



and Race to the Globe.”) By incorporating service-learning, or the application of these theories to practical sites, into the curriculum, students can better understand the implications of marginalized statuses in the public sphere. Simultaneously, the presentation of their work within the community requires expertise in their own use of rhetoric, as the students must consider the strategies they use and the effectiveness of their communication with audiences beyond the class.

### **Setting the Stage**

As an assistant professor in the Department of Languages, Literature, and Writing at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, I define myself as an educator, researcher, and activist. These identities create intersections from which all of my teaching, research, and activism occur. And in order for my research and teaching to be purposeful, it must also contribute to the shared experience of the various communities in which I live. Likewise, in order to be a responsible and effective researcher and teacher, I must be integrated and engaged in the communities in which I am researching. Ultimately, the goal of my research, teaching, and activism is to create knowledge that leads to communities that are active in working toward finding their own solutions, better living conditions for those who exist at the margins of society, social justice, and equality. This goal requires an approach to research that is not for research’s sake alone, but ultimately with and for the communities I research.

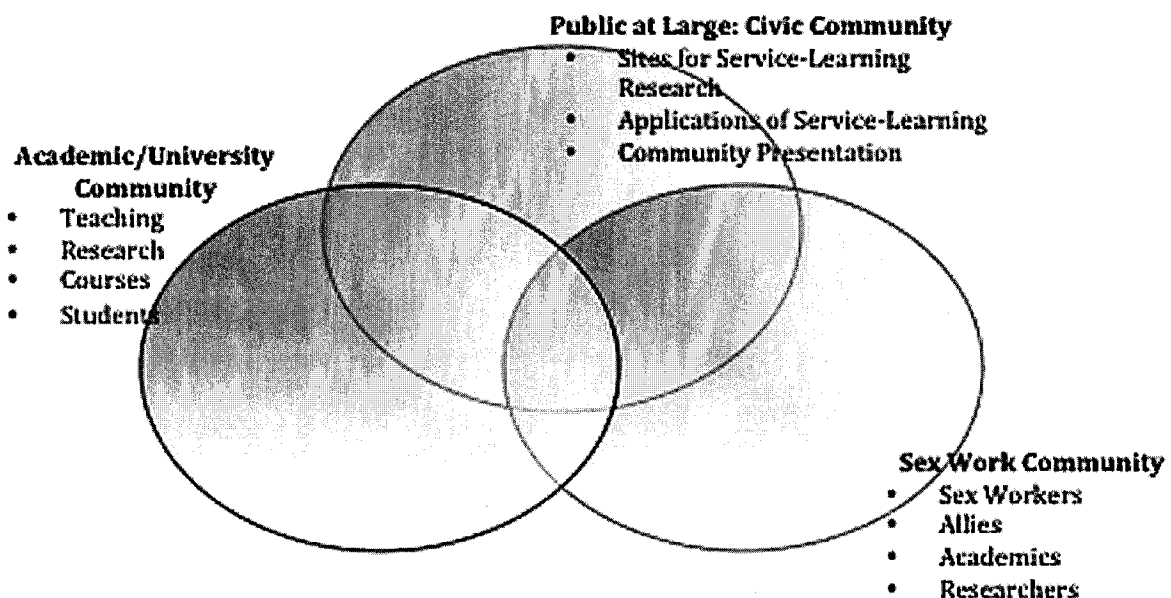
My research focuses on the rhetoric of marginalized communities, in particular, that of sex work/trafficking and public policy. It centers on the language surrounding what is commonly referred to as “prostitution” or street sex work, that is, people who exchange sex for money, drugs, or other gain. In addition to focusing on sexuality, race, and gender, through this research site I also analyze values, morals, poverty, and policy. Based on an ethnographic case study, I am currently analyzing representations of street sex workers and their effects on sex workers and society. This analysis reveals the power of



everyday language and its influence on the material conditions of street sex workers' lives ("Discourse on the Margins").

This partial biography of my academic life begins to mark my own position as an educator and researcher. Because I want to be responsible to the communities that I research, I am active on national and international sex-industry listservs and serve on the boards of sex worker rights organizations. My involvement in these sex-worker led spaces provides a significant source of knowledge, support, and in its own sense, *community*, in part because researching the sex industry is also marginalized. When I have questions about the sex worker community, my research, or my teaching of these subjects, I can and do go to these listservs and ask questions. I am also called upon by these communities to participate as an educator, researcher, critical thinker, and writer. I am privileged to be an active member in these organizations, and I am proud to be involved in the work that they do.

### **Community Intersections: Civic, Sex Work, and Academic**



**Diagram 1: Community Intersections: Civic, Sex Work, and Academic**



The academic and activist parts of my life, as well as this course, combine at least three “communities,” although there are more than three and they cannot be differentiated so easily. As a point of reference, I created the “Community Intersections: Civic, Sex Work, and Academic” diagram to help the reader understand how I use this word *community*, to which communities I am referring, as well as how they overlap and divide in my engagements with teaching, research, and activism.

### **The Course**

The course description reads:

This course asks students to rhetorically analyze how mainstream and marginalized communities are constructed by focusing on theories and practical applications of gender(s), sexualit(ies), and race(s)/ethnicity(ies). In addition to focusing on historical and contemporary theories related to rhetorical analysis, genders, sexualities, race/ethnicities, and marginalized populations, students will research, analyze, and present practical applications of lived circumstances of these intersections. Students will develop their own theories and terminologies in relationship to assigned texts and reflect on potential practices that arise from those theories. (See Appendix A for more information related to the course description and student learning outcomes.)

When I began planning this course, I struggled with separating the issues into categories of gender, sex, and race because they are so closely intertwined. But in the end, I decided it would be best to provide areas of focus and then create time within the course where the intersections of these categories could be examined more fully. Because my students come from different disciplines and do not necessarily have any exposure to the theories and subject matter of the class, especially those related to rhetorical analysis, I divided the semester into five distinct units:



- Language, Rhetoric, and Analysis
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Race/Ethnicity
- Intersections/Service-Learning Projects

Within the first unit I created a foundation whereby the students gained the tools through which they could rhetorically analyze the discourse and those theorizing about gender, sexuality, race, and other categories. In addition to rhetorical theories, I also incorporated definitions and theories related to feminism. For example, one extended definition was included early in the semester from Foss, Foss, and Griffen's "Introduction" to *Feminist Rhetorical Theories*:

For us, feminism is an important perspective for at least three reasons. It validates values and experiences often associated with women. [...] Feminism also is important because it gives voice to individuals marginalized and devalued by the dominant culture and thus provides a more holistic understanding of the world. [...] Finally, we believe feminism is important because it establishes and legitimates a value system that privileges mutuality, respect, caring, power-with, interconnection, and immanent value. These values stand in direct contrast to those that characterize the dominant culture—hierarchy, competition, domination, alienation, and power-over, for example. (5)

This definition and reading provide the students with a framework through which to view dominant and marginalized cultures by placing the underlying values of each at the forefront.

Both traditional and feminist rhetorical theories such as Kenneth Burke, Lloyd Bitzer, Sonja Foss, Gloria Anzaldúa, and bell hooks provided the backbone for this course. I then moved into readings, films, and practical examples that focused on the core areas of Gender, Sexuality,





and Race,<sup>2</sup> emphasizing marginalized communities. Readings and theories of oppression, inequality, and privilege were also incorporated so that students would have the tools through which to apply systemic theories to specific applications. Finally, I brought in guest speakers and chose readings that framed the intersections between and among these categories to provide a foundation from which the students could better understand and interrogate their own projects.

In the remainder of this article I highlight student examples that demonstrate their knowledge and application of specific theories to the larger community. See Appendix B for a description of the course assignments.<sup>3</sup>

### **Theory Applied to Community: Course Readings and Student Work**

In order to reach one of the course goals that students “develop their own theories and terminologies in relationship to assigned texts and reflect on potential practices that arise from those theories,” I used “daily writings” to ask students to restate an author’s argument and then briefly analyze an author or authors in response to a question. For example, in response to a daily writing assignment where I asked the students “How does feminism relate to the other categories we are addressing: Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Marginalized Communities?” April Maltz wrote:

Oppression. The subjugation of minority or weaker subsets of society to the will of those in power. The lines for this power play can be drawn by gender, race, sexuality—any distinguishing characteristic of an individual or a group. Feminism, as defined by Foss, Foss, and Griffin, is a movement against all of these types of oppression. As such, it is relevant to the study of each of these communities, because they are all held under the umbrella of feminist ideals. The belief is that to exclude other marginalized aspects of society is to give less credence to their struggles as a



marginalized community. Additionally, there is crossover between all of these categories: a black person can be a woman, just as a woman can be a black person, just as this black woman can be bisexual, homosexual, or a trans-gender.

Feminism relates both through experience and ideals. All of these communities have suffered, and all strive to thrive. (“Feminism”)<sup>4</sup>

One reading that was particularly powerful for students was Anne Fausto-Sterling’s “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough” where she argues for at least five categories of sexes rather than the traditional male, female, and intersex, based on the differences that actually occur in human bodies related to XY chromosomes, testes, ovaries, and other male and female characteristics. After reading this article I asked students to respond to the following prompt in their blogs:

Consider the following quotes from Fausto-Sterling “The Five Sexes” and then answer the questions:

“Hermaphrodites have unruly bodies” (118)

“[...] a more sophisticated knowledge of the complexity of sexual systems has led to the repression of such intricacy” (116)

“The treatment of intersexuality in this century provides a clear example of what the French historian Michel Foucault has called biopower: The knowledge developed in biochemistry, embryology, endocrinology, psychology and surgery has enabled physicians to control the very sex of the human body. The multiple contradictions in that kind of power call for some kind of scrutiny” (117-118)

- What does Fausto-Sterling mean by these statements?
- What are the inherent arguments?
- What are the implications?



By asking these questions, I encouraged my students to explain the author's arguments and then make their own arguments while drawing out the implications of this theory for people's lives. An excellent example of this process occurred in Natalee Sbrana's blog response where she writes:

Anne Fausto-Sterling means that medical professionals have, intentionally or not, developed and utilized "biopower" to create solutions for intersexual persons outside of the binary sexes. The inherent argument is that intersexual people will live mean, unloved, frustrated lives if they are bereft of purely male or female purpose. "On the other hand, the same medical accomplishments can be read not as progress but a mode of discipline" (118). The implications are that people who are neither male nor female cannot pursue happiness in an intersexual body - an unconstitutional cause, at the very least!

Please Duly Note:

I like the author's description of male and female as being a "two-party sexual system" (pg. 114). I think this best describes the political and biological implications that make up cultural sexuality. I like that she re-introduces the medical community as a key player in the realm of sexuality (doctors also play a role in gender assignment, as discussed in an earlier reading by Kate Bornstein).

Critique:

The author takes too casual a utilitarian approach to the intersexual sacrifice towards freeing the bi-polarization of sexuality. I say there is much, much more to that transition than intersexual activism. Sexuality is not purely about sex and reproductive origins, it also encompasses gender and private property (women and children). ("The Five Sexes")



Within each unit, I also required that the students write a critical essay that establishes and supports a central claim in relationship to the assigned readings. In her critical essay response, Amanda Sliby incorporates Fausto-Sterling into her essay and makes the argument:

Instead of discussing the sexuality of hermaphrodites as “unruly” we should interpret their sexuality as “un-governable” on the same grounds as males or females. This re-definition is a liberating concept because one may view hermaphrodites as self-governing, rather than governed by others, as well as having its own individual needs [...] .

Science attempts to explain the unexplainable. Fausto-Sterling’s article argues that our existing scientific terms cannot encompass the complexity of sex and the numerous ways in which people sexually identify. Each sexual discovery, whether personal or scientific, has the ability to transcend previous knowledge; thus, sexuality is alive and growing. The question is, will we allow these discoveries to be accessible, alive and airborne, or will we smother them in the attempt of preserving our own ideals and sexuality? (“Ideas on How and Where We Should Discuss Sexuality”)

Within both of these responses, each student integrates Fausto-Sterling into her own argument and then applies that argument to the communities in which they live. Amanda asks if our discoveries regarding sexuality will be accessible and alive rather than smothered, whereas Natalee critiques this argument while she relates it to people who are intersexual as well as to theories regarding sexuality, gender, and private property.

Two theorists who were particularly useful to students throughout the semester were Tracy E. Ore and Marilyn Frye. Ore encouraged the students to think about difference, inequality, and privilege. In “Constructing Differences” Ore argues:



It is not the differences that are the causes of inequality in our culture. Rather, it is the meanings and values applied to these differences that makes them harmful [...]. A fundamental component in examining constructions of difference and systems of inequality is critical thinking about the social constructs on which systems of inequality rely. This requires us to examine how the social structure has affected our values, attitudes, and behaviors (1-2).

Ore's argument brings the underlying values, attitudes, and behaviors to the forefront, which enabled students to apply this and other theories to real-world examples because they were able to look more deeply at how these values were exercised in policies, stigma, access to education, and other specific situations.

In Marilyn Frye's article "Oppression," she defines this term and then explains it within a context of systemic and cultural forces:

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in: all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby-trapped.

Cages. Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire anytime it wanted to go somewhere [...]. It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere. (176)



As my student explains in her final seminar paper, “The Intersections of Oppression: A Visual Representation”:

The metaphor of the birdcage calls attention to the fact that many people cannot conceptualize oppression because a microscopic view is taken; not a macroscopic view that enables understanding of how structural violence abets oppression. A macroscopic view involves understanding the categories of oppression from a historical perspective, as well as looking at the intersections of these categories to see how they relate to the individual. (Sbrana 2)

Students used this birdcage metaphor throughout the semester in order to analyze and make sense of the intersections of oppression. Diana Cabili’s midterm exam applies the theoretical arguments of Ore and Frye to her analysis of the Sex Workers Outreach Project web site, which defines itself as “a national social justice network dedicated to the fundamental human rights of sex workers and their communities, focusing on ending violence and stigma through education and advocacy” (“SWOP-USA: Sex Workers Outreach Project”). She writes:

The idea of matrix of domination is comparable to Marilyn Frye’s definition of oppression which illustrates oppression as systematic. Marilyn Frye in “Oppression” defined oppression as a system in which one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional...[that] are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction (p. 176).

As one further looks into the SWOP website, the reader finds a poem by Daisy Anarchy called “Green River Cry”. In the poem, the writer curses the systemic oppression she and her sister faces in their job as sex workers:



We are going to melt their/systems of death-/missile systems/police departments/their systematic sexism/ their systematic racism/ their Order/ killing us slowly with minimum/wage/or killing us quickly/with bloody violence.

In this example, we see the system of oppression that both Ore and Frye illustrated. Sex workers are systematically oppressed. This oppression is evident by policies of government in which criminal penalties against sex workers are increased and when “protective” legislations like the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) are passed.

Furthermore, oppression of sex workers is also validated by the acceptance of the public to continue to stigmatize the profession; or more than likely, to accept their lack of education of sex workers and the sex industry and just believe the “myths.” Systemic oppression of sex workers are represented in the institution of the State and Public Policy when the majority’s ideology becomes public policy. In order for these policies to be enacted, it is important to know why one group prevails over another. (“Systemic Inequality of Sex Workers”)

This type of analysis is an example of one of my student learning outcomes: “Students will analyze and demonstrate their understanding of the implications of intersections between race, gender, and sexuality for a specific site of research (marginalized community) that illustrates the depth and breadth of their knowledge.” In other words, students will make the theories applicable to people’s lives. Her argument and stance about sex workers is not necessarily what is most important, but rather that she understands and can apply these theories to a real-world organization.

I included readings where authors incorporate theories of gender, sexuality, and race explicitly with rhetorical analysis. In order to draw out the intersections between these categories, I asked the students to



position the authors in conversation, explaining how the authors would discuss certain points based on the articles they had read for that day. One example of the sophisticated connections the students made occurs in Charlie Manter's response to a daily writing assignment where I asked students to:

Choose hooks' "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination" or Anzaldúa's "Borderlands/La frontera" or "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" and explain their argument. Then, based on their argument, analyze one of the readings for today (George Lipsitz "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness," Paul Gilroy "Race Ends Here," Peggy McIntosh "White Privilege and Male Privilege," or hooks "Shaping Feminist Theory"). Basically, apply hooks or Anzaldúa's theory to one of the readings for today—if Anzaldúa or hooks were speaking to one of the authors we read for today, what would they say? How would they relate? How does this reading reflect what the theorist is saying, or contrast with her argument? Use specific examples to support your analysis.

Earlier in the unit we had read hooks and Anzaldúa and had discussed how their arguments are rhetorical because they focus on how language and symbols contribute to how we understand the world and make meaning within it. I include Charlie's full response to demonstrate his analysis as well as its application. He writes:

In "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination," bell hooks describes how black people view white people at large. Despite whites imagining themselves as "invisible" to blacks since blacks are "invisible" to them and historically whites have been able to "control the black gaze," blacks have very vivid imagery associated with whiteness (hooks 168). hooks explains it isn't merely black being synonymous with goodness and white being synonymous with evil (as the reverse is the case in white minds), but rather blacks associate whiteness with terror, which stems from their existence in a society hostile to them.





Peggy McIntosh's theory of white privilege fits perfectly with hooks' theory of whiteness as terrorizing in the black imagination. McIntosh lists some of the unwritten benefits she experiences through no merit of her own, but that she receives anyways because she matches the skin color of the majority of people in her society. Some of these items emphasize why whiteness equals terror in the black imagination. She includes items like her neighbors will be pleasant or neutral to her regardless of where she chooses to live, she can go shopping alone without being followed by a mall detective, and if she gets pulled over she can be sure it's not because of her race.

The opposite of these claims—the fact that neighbors may be disagreeable to you, that a mall detective may follow you shopping, or that you may be stopped, all purely because of your race—is what inspires this fear of whiteness in blacks (these neighbors, mall detectives, and cops will no doubt most likely be white). The theorists also mesh because of the description of the housing situation. hooks argues that part of the fear stems from the segregation of neighborhoods and that blacks feel the most fear in all white neighborhoods, which turns out to be a common phenomenon because of the discriminatory housing practices McIntosh mentions. (“Tuesday, October 27, 2009”)

By holding the two authors in conversation, Charlie makes connections he might not otherwise make and applies these connections to the world in which he lives.

Another example occurred with one student's application of Gloria Anzaldúa's rhetorical theory to her own recent experiences with Facebook. In her article “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” Anzaldúa asks: “How do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?” (419). In asking these questions, she argues that trying to control one's language is akin



to robbing one of her identity. In her essay entitled “Language and Identity in Race,” Damaris Escalera argues:

Language is an important part of our everyday lives. A few weeks ago, a friend of mine spoke about her frustrations of individuals not being able to speak English in the United States on her Facebook page. Her statement immediately made me think of how much we actually oppress the Spanish speakers in this country. The Spanish language is the second most-common language in the United States. Gloria Anzaldúa in “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” argues that “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity.” In this piece, she describes her struggles of being oppressed as a Chicana, the insecurities that she faced and how she fought to keep her “identity”.

After explaining her argument, she concludes her essay with:

Not everyone wants to conform to the “American” ways but they want to celebrate the diversity of each individual. As Anzaldúa states there is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience (424). It is important to not be ashamed of one’s identity but to embrace it.

Anzaldúa wrote about the shame Chicano’s feel when listening to their ethnic music or even talking to a fellow Chicano at a party. How did it get to the point where we feel inadequate to carry a conversation with someone because we have a different dialect or carry an accent even in our own culture? Gloria Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” made me excited to recognize and embrace my own culture and language. We should not discriminate their language and accent; we should be inspired by their attempt to keep their individuality.



“Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?”

*Ray Gywn Smith*  
(qtd. in Anzaldúa)

This analysis and argument is applied theory, as Damaris applies what she’s reading to the real-world context of Facebook and within her own life as well.

Students brought their own interests to the course through their New Scholarship and Theory Presentations. The Theory Presentation requires each student to present a theory to the class that provides additional information and helps contextualize the readings for that day. A New Scholarship Presentation was also required where the students research and present a scholarly source (published between 2006 and 2009) to the class that focuses on a marginalized community in relationship to gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, or other area of interest.

One excellent example was Damaris Escalara’s New Scholarship Presentation, “Anne Fausto-Sterling’s ‘The Five Sexes’ and the Biggest Gender/Sex Controversy in Sports History”) where she highlighted the challenges that exist to normative understandings of sex and gender when she contextualized news articles surrounding South African runner, Caster Semenya, and speculations about her gender. Damaris drew on Fausto-Sterling’s “The Five Sexes” as well as her book, *Sexing the Body*, to analyze this recent situation as well as to ask the following questions of her classmates:

Culturally, we recognize two genders.

- Does this eliminate hermaphrodites from competing in sports?
- If not, what category should they compete in?
- Should they be allowed to compete in the category that they relate to?



- Should Caster Semenya be stripped of her gold medal recently won in Berlin?
- Does she have an advantage over her other competitors? Is it relevant?

What ensued were conversations about practical applications of theory. Damaris concluded her discussion by drawing on Fausto-Sterling's *Sexing the Body* where she argues: "Labeling someone a man or woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision. But only our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place" (348). Within this presentation, her questions and the discussion that ensued were practical applications of theory. This presentation stirred much discussion about gender roles, competition, equality, and how individuals struggle with their placement in these marginalized categories.

### **Guest Speakers: Interactions and Applications**

"I loved the speakers coming to visit with our class last week. It is definitely different hearing personal stories of marginalization from individuals that have experienced it first hand. The theories that we have been reading about have come to life and it makes the situation real. The speakers' emotions were most effective. Sitting with them around the conference table, I had no idea about their exact identities. It shows how much we stereotype individuals in these marginalized communities. I loved hearing their stories. I think the interaction was excellent."

—Damaris Escalera's "Daily Writing"

In order to support my students' analysis of the intersections of marginalized categories, I arranged to have guest speakers present to our class. These presentations occurred at the end of the semester when students were working on their course projects. These speakers were invited for two reasons: First, because a primary focus of the course



is service-learning and practical applications to our civic community, I wanted the students to be able to relate these issues to the local community. Secondly, I believe inviting people from the community into the classroom bridges a gap for both community organizations and students. The students have an opportunity to talk to people who understand these issues as they relate to their particular communities, and the local organizations have an opportunity to gain a perspective on what academics are teaching about these issues—while simultaneously emphasizing that professors value their experiences as equally important to the course readings, lectures, and discussions.

The first event was comprised of a panel from Metro Charities, an organization that works in both St. Petersburg and the Tampa Bay area to educate and provide services to the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) communities. This panel consisted of three people who worked for and contracted with the organization, and they all personally identified as belonging to one of these marginalized groups (two women identify as lesbians and one identifies as a female-to-male transgendered man). One of the panelists was also able to speak to the issues of being marginalized in terms of her race, and how oppression can be exacerbated because of the multiple hierarchies that involve both sexuality and race. After discussing their organization and its work in the local community, they each explained who they are, their own experience with the organization, and what they believe are the major issues for GLBT communities. The panel then took questions from the students. Some of their questions included:

- What kind of outreach does your organization do? What kind of support services do you offer?
- What kind of sexuality education do you offer? Is it offered through the schools, or through other organizations? How does this sexuality education relate to desire, responsibility, sexually transmitted infections, etc.?
- What does it mean to be “too black?” or “too lesbian?”



- What was your experience transitioning from female to male? How did you know that you wanted to be a male? Are you comfortable talking about that?

At one point in the discussion, panelists were asking questions of each other in terms of their own experience about being “out” and “public” regarding how they identified, if they were afraid in specific circumstances, and how their personal lives relate to their work experiences and expertise. Overall, the students and participants valued the interchange, and it was particularly educational and beneficial for the students because they were confronted with people in the community who are directly addressing these issues and marginalized communities.

The second guest speaker, GW Rolle, is the Community Education Coordinator for the Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless. He is also the Director of the Faces of Homelessness Speakers Bureau. This speaker had been to prison at a young age and earned a degree at Syracuse University as a means of leaving prison while simultaneously earning this degree. Rolle experienced homelessness sporadically since the age of fourteen, and his latest episode of homelessness was a five-year period in St. Petersburg, Florida. While homeless, he became an outspoken advocate for homeless persons’ rights and dignity. He is also the 2009 National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty’s McKinney Vento Personal Achievement Award winner. I asked Rolle to come to our class because he challenges many of the common perceptions of people who experience homelessness and have been to prison, and he works with the local homeless community and has extensive knowledge and credibility based on his own experiences and those related to his work. Having read articles such as Gregory Mantsios “Class in America—2003,” David Cole’s “No Equal Justice: Race and Class in the American Criminal Justice System,” and Angela Davis’s “Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex,” students were able to talk to the speaker about these



theories and how they relate to lived experiences—both personal and based on his employment with a social service organization. Students had discussions about ongoing problems related to homelessness, capitalism and socialism, how other countries confront these problems, and the mental struggles that accompany homelessness. Based on this discussion, one student was motivated to change her course project and work on the *St. Petersburg Homeless Image*, a newspaper Rolle was in the process of creating. This project is explained in more detail in Student Projects: “Bringing Sex, Gender, and Race to the Globe.”

The final guest speakers were representatives from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and the Student/Farmworker Alliance. The CIW is a

Community-based organization of mainly Latino, Mayan Indian, and Haitian immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida. [...] From this basis we fight for, among other things: a fair wage for the work we do, more respect on the part of our bosses and the industries where we work, better and cheaper housing, stronger laws and stronger enforcement against those who would violate workers’ rights, the right to organize on our jobs without fear of retaliation, and an end to indentured servitude in the fields (“About CIW”).

As Amanda Sliby wrote in her blog response:

On Thursday, November 19, a member from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and a member from the Student/Farmworker Alliance came to our class to discuss human rights for tomato pickers in Florida. The information they shared was eye opening to issues of modern-day slavery on farms across the state. Astoundingly, both people represented very successful organization and resistance against the domination of corporate giants.



To this day, CIW and SFA are working together on campaigning for a code of conduct, written and discussed between the farm workers, corporations and farm owners that include human rights; and just one more cent per pound of tomatoes that they pick. In a video we watched about CIW, someone mentioned that CIW's campaign against Taco Bell (back in 1998?) was the first instance of 'paying money back down the supply chain.' This statement really struck me. ("Guest Speakers—CIW and SFA")

Members of the Coalition and their allies, or Fair Food activists, were traveling throughout the country to educate and "protest Publix's [and other grocery stores] refusal to support tomato growers who today are implementing more ethical farm labor practices" ("TOP Stories"). This movement against Publix mirrors those that the CIW has successfully held against such corporations as Taco Bell,<sup>©</sup> McDonald's,<sup>©</sup> Subway,<sup>©</sup> and Whole Foods.<sup>©</sup> All of these organizations, after letter campaigns, demonstrations, and boycotts, agreed to pay the workers who pick tomatoes one penny more per pound. Oscar Otzoy, Staff Member of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, and Meghan Cohorst, National Co-Coordinator of the Student/Farmworker Alliance, educated the class about the issues and then answered their questions. As Charlie Manter wrote in his blog:

I learned a lot from the CIW. They truly demonstrate the power that a small group of people can have when they organize. I also learned that the reason farm workers can't form unions stems from racism. The Wagner Act, which gives workers the right to organize, excluded domestic workers and farm workers because many of the Southern Democrats that FDR needed to pass his New Deal agenda had black house workers and black tenant farmers and sharecroppers working on their land and didn't want them unionizing. This is a classic example of the institutional oppression of public policy as outlined by Tracy Ore. The power of the CIW stems from the pathos of their campaign. These people who do





manual labor and end up making less than minimum wage were only asking a giant, nation-wide corporation with millions in profits to pay an extra penny per pound of tomatoes. That seems like nothing, yet these workers were claiming it would drastically improve their standard of living. It's hard to deny them that penny per pound. Although they were marginalized, they were able to achieve their goal because public opinion was on their side. Marginalized communities are usually marginalized precisely because public opinion isn't usually with them. ("Tuesday, November 24, 2009")

Because I had invited the guest speakers to visit our class at a time when the students were beginning to work on their course projects, the students could more directly explore the relationships between their projects and the local community. For example, one student wanted to contact the panelists from Metro Charities in order to incorporate examples of people in the community into her construction of a "birdcage" that represented Frye's argument. In addition to providing resources for the students' projects, these speakers offered a more broad and detailed understanding of the needs of the communities they represented—which therefore allowed for a greater investment from the students in making their projects applicable to the civic community.

### **Student Projects: "Bringing Sex, Gender, and Race to the Globe"**

Central to this course is my requirement that the students create a project that analyzes a particular marginalized community in relationship to the theories we have discussed throughout the semester. The students were also required to create a visual/performance presentation of their course project that they would include in a community event at the end of the semester. The purpose of this presentation is to share the students' work, analysis, and projects with the general community, thereby providing an audience beyond our class while simultaneously sharing new information with the community. These projects and the final community presentation directly benefit the



students, as well as the community, because the students are invested in their projects, have chosen an issue they know has implications in a specific community, and are often-times working with community members to complete their projects. Therefore the assignment is not one that simply fulfills a requirement or helps them to earn a course grade. Because the projects are shared with the community, the students must consider their audiences and how to present their information most effectively.

The students could choose from several course project options, including:

- a more traditional seminar paper that presented research and their analysis of a marginalized community;
- a collaborative course paper, where the student could work with another class member to develop questions and answers about a particular issue;
- a literature review/annotated bibliography that outlined an issue or area in more depth that could provide the basis for further research in a thesis or another course;
- two to three creative pieces in response to the readings and themes of the class. If this option were chosen, each creative response would be accompanied by a short reflective memo that outlines the thought processes and rationale for the response, or;
- papers appropriate for conference presentations. Based on conference proposals selected by the student, they would represent a substantial research base that would be summarized for a particular audience.

The students titled their community event “Bringing Sex, Gender, and Race to the Globe,” as a play on words because it was held at the Globe Coffee Lounge in downtown St. Petersburg. We designed a flier and distributed it on campus and in the downtown community. Because The



Globe Coffee Lounge is located in downtown St. Petersburg, we hoped that the community would be drawn to and attend this event.<sup>5</sup> The pictures that accompany the descriptions of student projects were taken at this final event.<sup>6</sup> Some of their work is also included in this issue, as well as links to their complete essays, hosted on the *Reflections* web site.

An example of direct community involvement in a service-learning project occurred with two students. One example involved the sex worker community and its annual event, the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, which occurs on December 17<sup>th</sup>. I asked my students if anyone would be interested in working on a project related to this event because of its proximity to the end of the semester in December. I planned to attend the national event in December 2009, and I thought a student might want to create a project or undertake research that could be shared with the larger community. In addition to asking if students were interested in this project, I also sent an email to several sex worker led listservs in which I participate asking if there were any projects that students could work on for this upcoming event. A colleague responded, stating:

I've always been curious about the origins of the "NHI - no human involved" designation which was routinely assigned to murdered prostitutes on official police forms. I believe it originated in the 1940s but I'm not positive. Preliminary research could include state and local police, museums, police unions/legions.

The NHI designation is a shocking and poignant example of the type of extreme marginalization sex workers have faced in our not-so-distance past. If we could locate an actual form, and trace its history, I think it would be a powerful tool for us to use in making people comprehend the depth of the issues sex workers have to face. (Anonymous e-mail correspondence)<sup>7</sup>



Figure 1: “No Humans Involved” poster

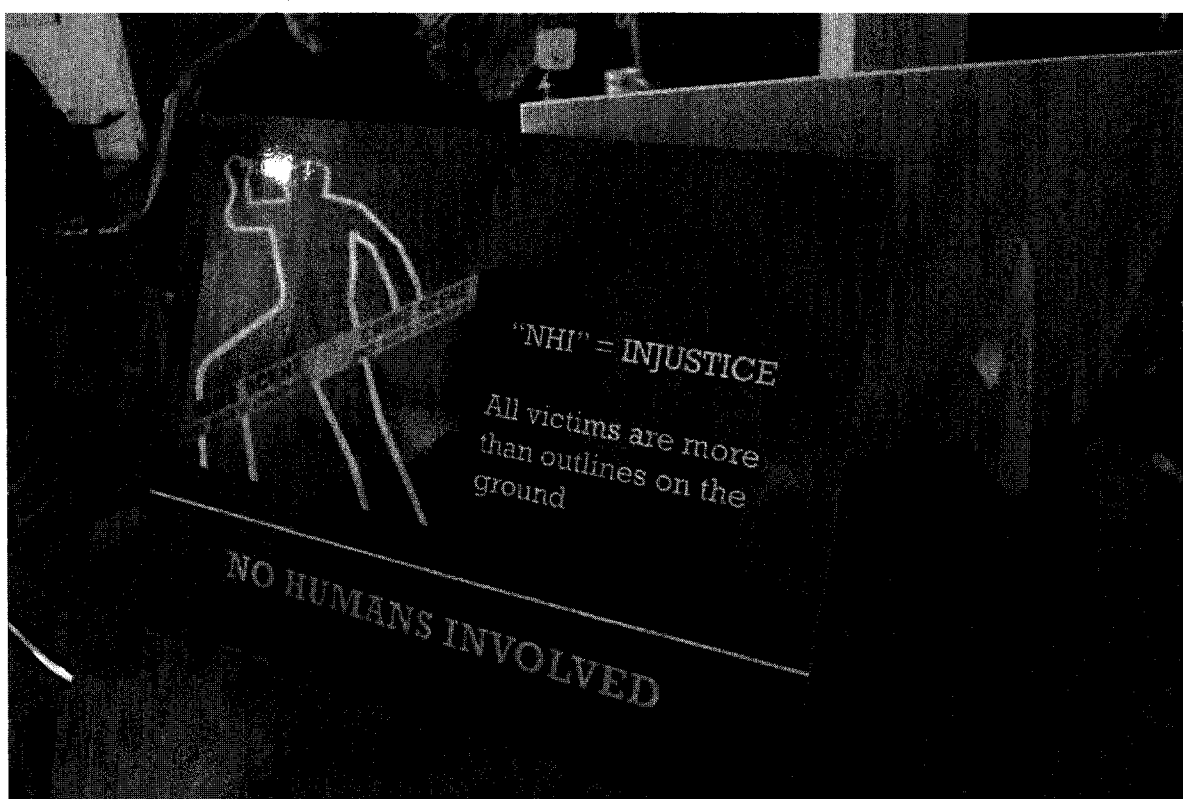


Figure 2: “‘NHI’ Condones Violence Against Prostitutes” poster



I made this information available to my students, and one student chose this issue for her course project. The colleague who suggested the project also served as an “advisor” for the student. This student, Diana Cabili, researched the No Human Involved (NHI) designation and then designed and printed three posters for the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers event.

In addition to these posters, Diana also wrote and performed a rap song at the community event that accompanied a presentation of pictures of the women that were killed by the “Green River Killer” or Gary Ridgeway (see McCarthy, Rule, and SWOP-USA), an American serial killer who killed numerous women whom he identified as “prostitutes.” In addition to the posters and her community presentation, Diana wrote an analysis of this NHI designation and how it served to marginalize sex workers, as well as others. Her essay in its entirety, as well as her song, can be found at <http://reflectionsjournalonline.org/drupal/node/3>. I took her posters with me to the national event, and therefore Diana was able to reach an audience beyond our local community (Cabili “NHI Condones Violence Against Prostitutes”).

Another student chose to work with a community member who was a guest speaker in our course. GW Rolle is the executive director of the *St. Petersburg Homeless Image*, a newspaper that is written for the local community and is sold by people who are homeless in order to generate income for themselves. Within this project, the student, Damaris, designed the newspaper template, created the first issue, and helped Rolle learn how to use the software program in order to complete future issues. In addition to her layout of the issue, Damaris also wrote journals about her experience working on the paper and analyzed the newspaper articles and the newspaper as a whole, based on the theories we encountered in class. She then wrote a paper that outlined her process, analyzed the articles, and provided suggestions for Rolle and the *St. Petersburg Homeless Image* that could be incorporated to make their newspaper more effective. She presented



this newspaper at the community presentation, as well as a poster that provided background information about homelessness in St. Petersburg. Damaris plans to continue her work with the newspaper, helping to layout additional issues. The first issue of the *St. Petersburg Homeless Image*, as well as her paper “Changing the ‘Homeless Image’” can be found at <http://reflectionsjournalonline.org/drupal/node/3>.

One student, Amanda Sliby, examined and compared concepts of feminism across cultures, specifically the United States and Chiapas,

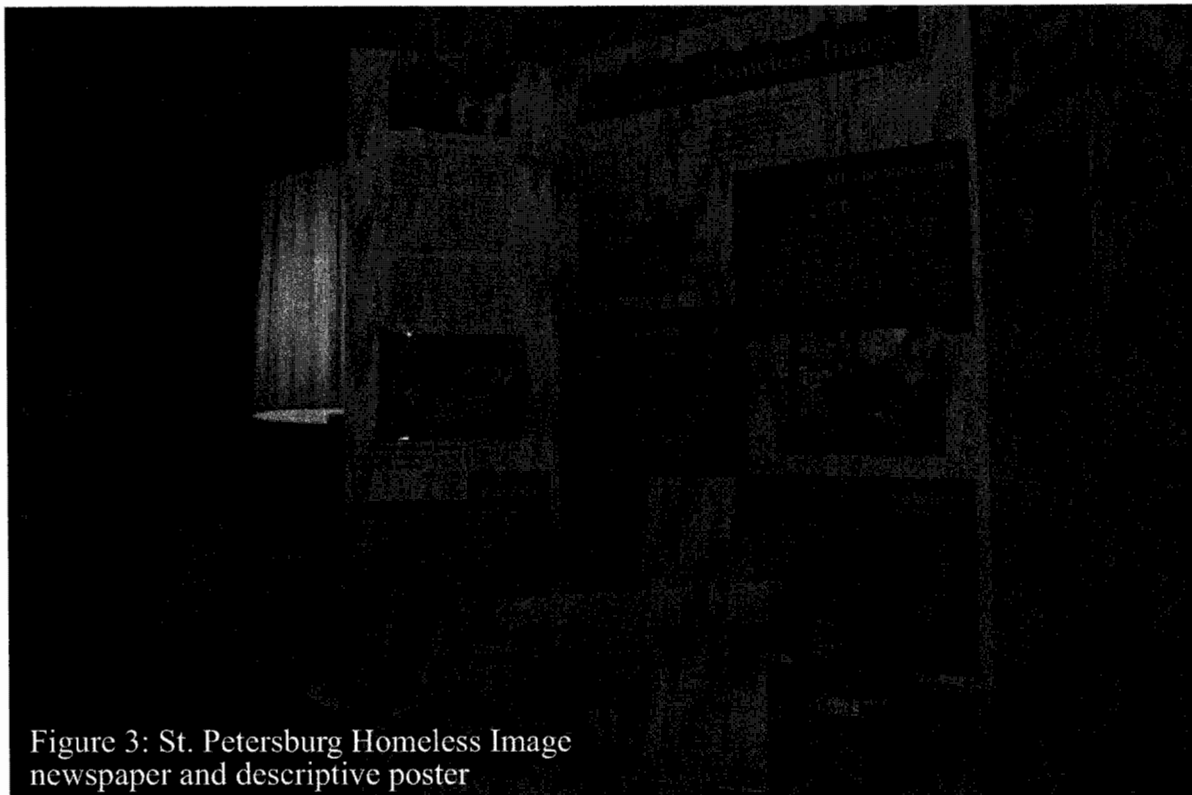


Figure 3: St. Petersburg Homeless Image newspaper and descriptive poster

Mexico. As she states in her final seminar paper:

Through in-class discussions, the classroom became the first space outside of my internal pondering, the first “community” [...], where I began to interpret feminism. Now, at the end of the semester, I am looking at how different communities define and discuss feminism. Reading about different feminisms helps me to have a broader understanding of what it means to identify as



“feminist.” (“Discovering Feminisms: A Cross-Cultural Analysis for a Deeper Understanding”) (2)

Joshua Lovelace, in his project “In Whose Best Interest? The Marginalization of Men in the Family Court System,” created a personal and political analysis of “gender bias prevalent within the family court system” (5). Another student, Fabiola Lambert, rhetorically analyzed the Child Protection Compact Act of 2009, which seeks to “to protect and rescue children from trafficking by the establishment of Child Protection Compacts between the United States and select, eligible countries with a significant prevalence of trafficking in children” (qtd. in Lambert “Trafficking of Children and the Child Protection Compact Act of 2009” 2). Finally, two student projects drew on Frye’s birdcage metaphor. Their visual representations are included below, as well as an explanation of their cages written in their own words in their accompanying analyses.

The first cage is explained by April Mantz and Charlie Manter’s opening paragraph of their final seminar paper, “The Genesis of Oppression”:

What is the origin of oppression? Why do we hear so much about it from some circles, and yet can rarely identify it when it confronts us in our everyday lives? We set out to answer this question within the context of our Honors Seminar, Gender, Sex, Race, and Marginalized Communities. We focused on rhetorically analyzing oppression as it occurs in American society using Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory, which states that our reality is represented through the use of symbols and that it is created by the terministic screens through which we view these symbols. We also drew on Tracy Ore and Marilyn Frye’s theories of oppression. Tracy Ore claims that oppression is institutionalized, and that there are five types of institutional oppression: family, media, education, state and public policy, and economy. The institutional



oppression creates the framework for interpersonal and internalized oppression, with interpersonal speaking about actions taken against an individual and internalized referring to the identification with the negative stimuli of the surrounding oppression and absorbing it as self-image even as it is against self-betterment. Frye speaks on these levels of oppression as through a macro and micro lens: when one looks from within the system, one cannot see the bars that hold them, but when one steps away from the institution, the cage becomes clear. In employing these theories, we have created three birdcages each nested within the other, like the matoyshka dolls, commonly referred to as Russian dolls. The arrangement from outermost to innermost is: institutional, interpersonal, and internal. Each cage has its own unique attributes to symbolize visually the nature of its oppression. (1)

The second cage focused most directly on Frye's metaphor of the birdcage, and as the Natalee Sbrana explains in her final paper "The Intersections of Oppression":

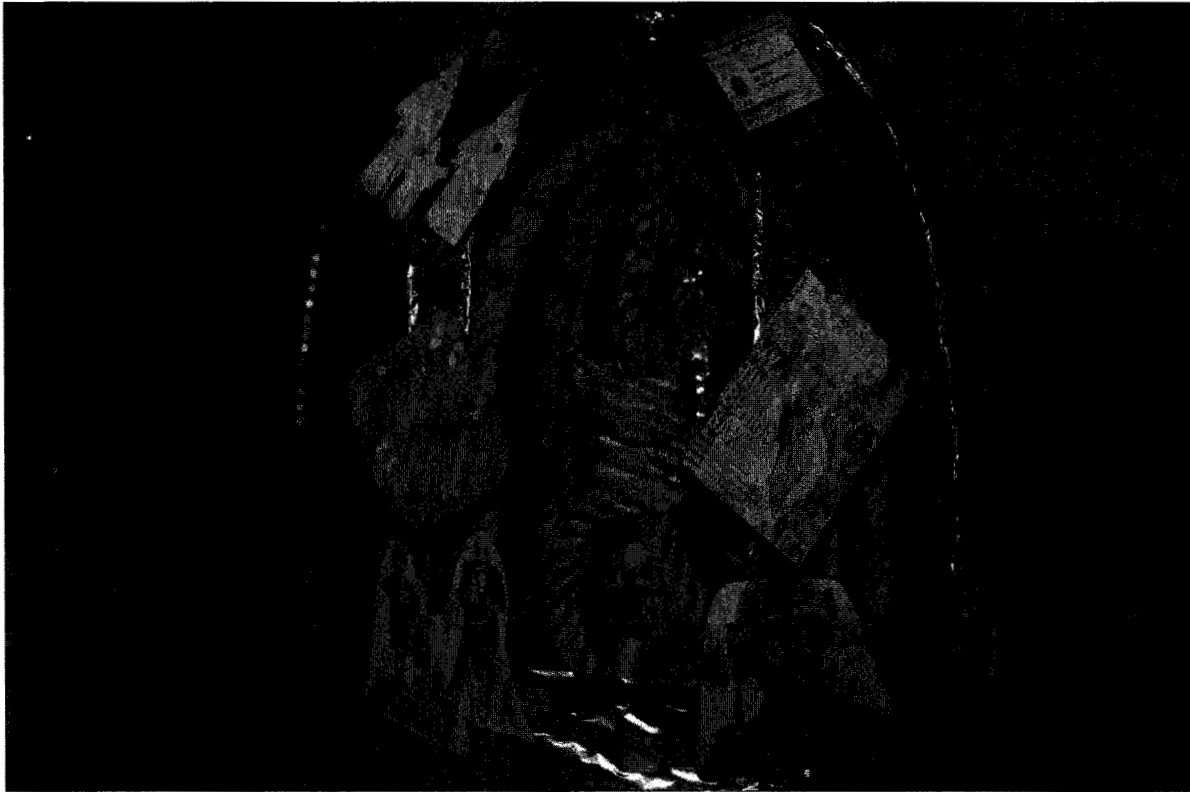


Figure 4: Front view of "The Genesis of Oppression"





Figure 5: Rear view of “The Genesis of Oppression”



I created a birdcage out of eight collage panels which depicted images of the categories of oppression race, sex, gender, sexuality, and class. As this birdcage was to be presented to the community, I decided to focus on local events to highlight the fact that oppression does not exist “out there, somewhere in the United States,” but rather right here, in Florida [...] The primary goal of this project was to illustrate how structural violence services oppression and how those categories that are used to validate violence and oppression result in physical and symbolic violence. A secondary goal was to illustrate how communities can also come together in solidarity to fight for those people who are marginalized. This goal stems from the understanding that we are all marginalized, and we all benefit from the marginalization of people to some degree. (3-5)

All of the students gave a short presentation at the community event where they explained their projects. They then took questions from the audience and were available after the presentation to discuss their

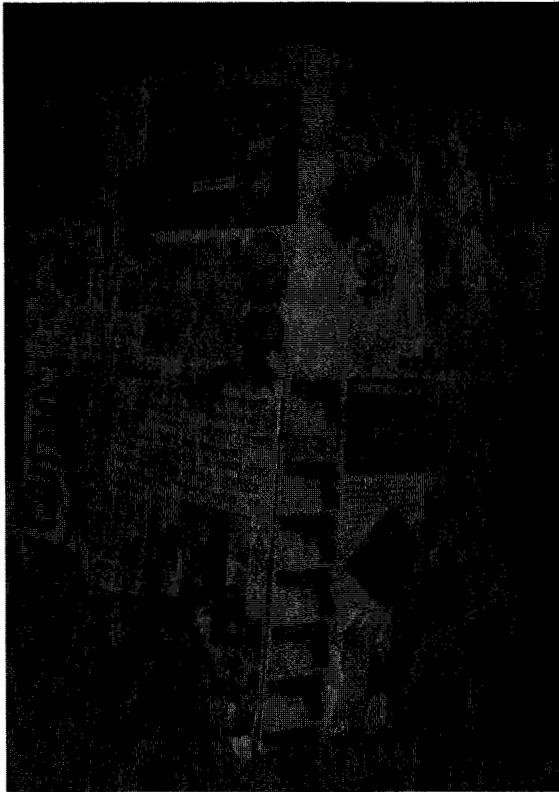


Figure 6: One side of “The Intersections of Oppression”

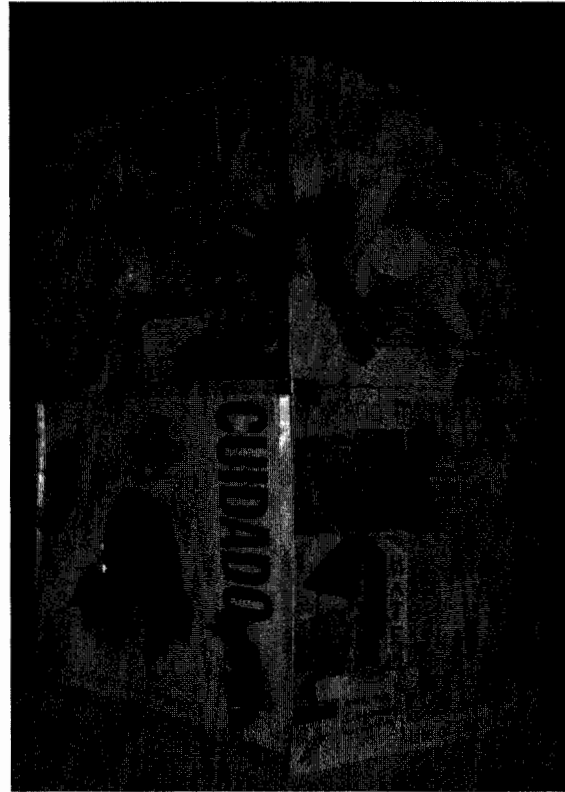


Figure 7: Other side of “The Intersections of Oppression”

projects. Making this knowledge available to the local community moves their academic engagement into a civic sphere—thereby applying academic knowledge to citizenship.

**“This course is actually affecting my life—and I’m not sure I like it!”**

About midway into the semester, I arrived a few minutes early to class and heard the students talking about their lives. One student said something to the effect of: “This course is actually affecting my life—it even played a role in my most recent breakup!” We discussed this statement a bit in terms of how he understood gender roles based on our readings and their impact on his own analysis of his interpersonal relationships. “And you can’t take it back,” he went on. “You can’t forget that you’ve learned all of this stuff.” I agreed. You can not take it back. This was the first tangible glimpse that I had of this course’s



influence in my students' lives. I include this final section, in part, at their request. Because I was writing this article during the semester in which the course was occurring, I asked for my students' feedback on various drafts. Not only did I want them to give me permission to include their work, but I wanted them to evaluate my portrayal of the course to make sure that it corresponded with theirs. Later in the semester, during our first discussion of my article, almost all of the students complained that I had provided an overview of the course and their work, but I hadn't really emphasized how powerful the course was for them and how much it was affecting their view of the world—how they understand their other courses, their interpersonal relationships, policy decisions, news stories, and their roles in the world around them. They encouraged me to address this oversight—which led to the addition of this section.

As I expressed through the heading of this section, the students felt a lot of frustration throughout the course—much of which I am sure was not shared with me. The course content emphasized inequality and oppression, as well as the privileged roles many of my students inhabit. Some of this frustration was included in their daily writings and critical essays. For example, Amanda Sliby wrote a blog response early in the semester that directly addressed her frustration with others in the course. Entitled "Listen men," she writes:

I have to admit that I am upset by the declining number of males in our class, which discusses feminism, gender and sexuality. I study feminism because I care about what it means to be a woman in today's world. I read feminist theories because I want to understand why I have nasty feelings of oppression even though I think I'm not afraid to speak out. [...] I speak about feminism because I care about women and I care about myself.

It feels like a blow to my core when a man says, "I like the way things are." I immediately try to give him the benefit of the doubt



(because I don't want to become the non-Feminist's caricature of a defensive man-hating feminist) by saying that he is just ignorant; he has no idea what it is like to be woman; he is "a product of his culture." But why should I make excuses for him? You shouldn't have to be a woman to care about their needs. [...] You don't have to be woman to celebrate her.

I'm so frustrated because it feels like no matter how much I care or how much I write about women's rights, it doesn't matter until men start to identify as feminists along with women. If we want to live in a society that equally treats two sexes (or four or six sexes for that matter), man and woman, I think (in the words of Judith Lorber) "we have to learn to be women and men." We need to identify with each other. For men that means thinking about what kind of person he is by identifying or not identifying as a feminist.

Another student, Josh Lovelace, expressed his frustration with the course material in his critical essay about race/ethnicity:

I'll be honest this section has had a profound impact on how I feel. I can point to notes written in class where I told myself that I'm not a racist and I gain nothing from being in a society with a group of upper class white males at the heart of the power complex. But looking back on those now, I feel foolish at how blind I've been. [...] I'll admit that at times during these past few weeks I have been angry and frustrated at what I thought were personal attacks on my character. It was only after careful analysis that I realized there is a lot of truth in the theories offered by these authors. Now it's up to me to take what I've learned and do something positive with it. ("Racism Essay")

Their frustration, enthusiasm, and investment in the course stemmed from its content. The students emphasized this point again and again. Anyone could talk about gender, race, sexuality, and class—it wasn't



something they had to have an in-depth knowledge of like “calculus or chemistry.” Therefore, the students found themselves talking to their friends and family, educating them in a way, about the subjects we explored in the class. As Charlie Manter wrote in another blog:

First, the course has affected my life because the themes of the class come up all the time in everyday situations and the ideas are accessible to everyone. They’re subjects that are easy to talk about and that everyone has an opinion on. They also make for lively conversation as opposed to denser subjects like chemistry or calculus. The course has also fundamentally altered my perceptions of what things like gender, sexuality, and race are. I’m certainly more tolerant than I was at the beginning of the semester. The concept of rhetorical analysis alone has made me look at everything I read and everything I see in a new light. I end up asking different questions than I used to. Let’s say I’m watching the news—instead of merely analyzing policy prescriptions and criticisms on their face, I look beneath the surface. [...] I’m also constantly looking at the racial makeup of TV casts and looking for the subtler stereotypes and thinking about how my own romantic relationships mirror this idea of patriarchy. (“Tuesday, November 24, 2009”)

Ultimately, I believe the combination of theory, examples, guest speakers, and in particular, the service-learning components of the class helped my students find a way to work through their frustration and discontentment with the theories in order to create projects that they believed made a difference in their community. During the final month of the course, the students analyzed the intersections between these categories based on local organizations, guest speakers, and their own projects. Rhetorical theories and analysis became tools they could use to educate and persuade others—specifically in relationship to these marginalized statuses the students came to care deeply about. Students



were able to incorporate these theories and issues into their lives. They were invested in their own and each others' projects. They were enthusiastic about the community event and presenting their projects to the community because it allowed them a space through which they could make their own difference in the way marginalized communities are shaped and can be shaped differently.

Ultimately this course changed the way many of the students viewed the world, their course projects, and their own actions in the world. As April Maltz wrote in her blog from which I quoted at the beginning of this article:

This class has regularly been a topic of discussion outside of the classroom between me and my fellow classmates, and me and my friends. It has opened my eyes to the invisible injustices and shed new light on the blatant. I take care to express this knowledge to those who will listen. I have been inspired between this and other classes to begin an Amnesty International student chapter at the USFSP campus. I will be going to the march with the CIW on December sixth, and I recruited one of my good friends to go with me with the phrase, "the more voices, the louder the demands" and "make capitalism work again." I feel that I am better able to argue against and analyze the systems of oppression that we all encounter so frequently without even noticing, like Tatum's "smog breathers." I now find myself seeing seemingly innocuous phrases and concepts in new, more insidious ways—and I want to change it. This class has turned me into an activist. ("Daily Writings – Due November 24")

Applying these theories to people's lives through service-learning increases students' passion for the subject and enriches the connections between the academy and the local community. Both the students and the communities in which they live benefit from the theoretical and applied knowledge the students create and share.



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## Endnotes

1 First and foremost I want to thank my students for making this class possible. I am honored and impressed by their willingness to engage with theories they knew little about, question their own assumptions and ideologies, and fully participate in the hard work of analysis and practical applications of these theories. Thanks for challenging me, making me a better teacher, and co-creating a class that was unforgettable.

2 Within the “race” category, I included readings about class/ socioeconomic status as well. These categories, as well as others, emerged frequently in many of the readings and discussions.

3 I want to thank Morgan Gresham, colleague and friend, for her initial assignment descriptions that I used as a basis for these course assignments. I also want to thank my research assistant, Michael Silva, for his dedication to finding and making sources available for the course.

4 Because my students were writing to complete assignments rather than for publication, I have edited their work for clarification and grammar, but have not changed their content. All of the students in the course granted me permission to edit and use their work in this publication. All of the students are referred to by their real names.

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6 We thank Melanie Marquez for publicizing and photographing the community event “Bringing Sex, Gender, and Race to the Globe” for inclusion in this journal issue.



7        Because allies of sex workers are marginalized and stigmatized as well as those who work in the sex industry, this colleague chose to remain anonymous.