

**SEX** 2015  
2016

PENN HUMANITIES FORUM

# POINTS of CONTACT

*17th Annual Research Conference by the  
Undergraduate Fellows of the Penn Humanities Forum*

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Since 1999, the Penn Humanities Forum has been renewing insights into the human experience, sharing them with a wide community of students, scholars, and Philadelphia neighbors. Our goal is to show how vital the humanities are to the life of the mind and the health of society, and how connected they are with the most innovative research in medicine, law, business, and the sciences.

Our annual theme-based public events and fellowship programs, together with other university and cultural collaborations, invite people of all ages and places to join us in discovering our common stake in the “thinking arts.”

The 2015–2016 Penn Humanities Forum on Sex questions assumptions across the globe about what sex is and what it means. Is it a biological drive, or a product of human culture? Is sex something essentially private and personal, or the common basis of our entire social and political system? If the real purpose of sex is merely to reproduce the species, why have so many looked to it as the gateway to a higher realm of sensual, aesthetic, and affective experiences?

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A PROGRAM OF THE 2015-2016 PENN HUMANITIES FORUM ON SEX

25 March 2016  
Kislak Center, Van Pelt Library  
University of Pennsylvania

2015–2016  
**Penn Humanities Forum Undergraduate Research Fellows**

Jeremy Cohen	Hannah Judd	Amalia Lund
Sarah Engell	Erich Kessel	Gabriel Ojeda-Sague
Marco Herndon	Izzy Korostoff	Eileen Wang
Helen Hunter		Xeno Washburne

**Undergraduate Humanities Forum Faculty Director**  
Timothy Rommen, Professor of Music and Africana Studies

## Welcome

Welcome, colleagues and friends, to “Points of Contact,” the seventeenth annual research conference of the Undergraduate Humanities Forum (UHF) at the University of Pennsylvania. The 2015–2016 undergraduate fellows have organized their work around this year’s Penn Humanities Forum on Sex. In addition to conducting independent research, we have explored the topic and our own work as a group through bimonthly meetings and guest lectures.

This year, we discussed and analyzed the many ways sex—personal, interpersonal, and socially constructed—comes to the fore in conversations about individual and cultural development. We began the year by discussing Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex*; conversed about the medicalization of AIDS, “sexual health”, and trans experiences with Northwestern Professor Steven Epstein; and explored the erotic potential of classical and popular music with the Daedalus Quartet and Dr. Guy Ramsey, respectively.

Through these shared ventures and many of our own, we have developed complex and problematized notions of “sex” that recognize and recombine its literary, philosophical, and sociological components. It has been a helpful umbrella over a wide variety of individual topics, interests, and personal experiences.

The eleven research fellows, whose presentations you will see today, represent a breadth of humanistic disciplines and approaches to tackling difficult questions of sexual histories, socializations, and injustices. Some focus on the (all-too-brief) history of Sexuality studies themselves; others seek to put theory into practice, offering one-of-a-kind case studies from our recent cultural memory.

We have divided our projects into three broad areas of concern, recognizing that sex has been and continues to be something *regulated, performed, and communal*. You will first hear about the language, policies, and history surrounding sex workers, “sexual health” professionals, and public-education curricula, near and far. Next, we will hear about sexuality as performance in Robert Mapplethorpe’s *Black Book*, contemporary gay pornography, the life of Billy Tipton, and one fellow’s collaborative artistic work. Finally, our panel on communities explores the reaction of popular and scholarly communities to developments in medieval studies, Peruvian society, and autistic gender non-conformity.

Over the year, the UHF Fellows have collaborated as a group and with a number of Penn’s faculty and staff, as talented in their field as they are supportive of undergraduate research. We thank all those involved with our individual projects as well as with conference planning. We would not be here today without the passionate vision and invaluable support of PHF Associate Director Jennifer Conway, Program Manager Sara Varney, and Administrative Assistant Michelle Moon. We express

our gratitude to Professors James English and Heather Love for coordinating an excellent topic that defies easy answers; and we further thank Dr. Love alongside Dr. Samantha Muka and Dr. Ann Farnsworth-Alvear for their contributions as panel moderators today. Above all, we could not be more indebted to Professor Timothy Rommen for his commitment, wisdom, and good vibes as faculty director for UHF. He should know he has our sincerest appreciation.

We thank all of you for attending the conference, and for your ongoing support of novel undergraduate research at the University. Join us today as we explore sex, society, and our points of contact.

Jeremy Cohen, Helen Hunter, Erich Kessel  
2015–2016 Steering Committee  
Undergraduate Humanities Forum

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## Acknowledgements

The undergraduate fellows would also like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their generous contributions, guidance, and support.

Violeta Barrientos	Amy Hillier	Kathy Peiss
Kathy Brown	Giovanni Infante	Adriana Petryna
Judith Butler	Jackie Kay	The Platt Family
Rita Copeland	Demie Kurz	Guthrie Ramsey
Meghan Crnic	Walter Licht	Ralph Rosen
Antonio Feros	Molly McGlone	Dana Tomlin
Kirk Fiereck	Diane Middlebrooks	Tamara Walker
Judith Halberstam	Lauris Olson	Vera Wishman

Latin American & Latino Studies Program  
Penn Program on Democracy, Citizenship and Constitutionalism

We extend our sincere thanks as well to all our classmates, collaborators, friends, and family.

# POINTS<sub>of</sub> CONTACT

A Conference by the Undergraduate Fellows of the Penn Humanities Forum  
March 25, 2016

## 9:00-9:30a | Registration and Breakfast

### 9:30-9:45a | Opening Remarks

Timothy Rommen, Faculty Director, UHF; Professor of Music and Africana Studies

Jeremy Cohen, Chair and Research Fellow, UHF

### 9:45-11:00a | REGULATIONS

Moderator: Samantha Muka, Lecturer, Critical Writing Program; Instructor, History and Sociology of Science

Helen Hunter, C'16, History (she/her)

Redefining American Motherhood: Emily Mudd's Mission at Home and Abroad

Sarah Engell, C'16, American History, Political Science (she/her)

Replacing Periods with Question Marks: A Study of the Role of Public Education in Kanawha County, West Virginia

Izzy Korostoff, C'18, Urban Studies (he/him)

Ill-Fame on Blackberry Alley: Prostitution in 19th Century Philadelphia

Eileen Wang, C'16, Health and Societies (she/her)

Choice, Control and Childbirth: Cesarean Deliveries on Maternal Request in Shanghai, China

### 11:05a-12:20p | PERFORMANCES

Moderator: Heather K. Love, R. Jean Brownlee Term Associate Professor of English; Topic Director, 2015-16 Penn Humanities Forum on Sex

Gabriel Ojeda-Sague, C'16, English (he/him)

Plague Desires: A Re-reading of HIV/AIDS Politics in Contemporary Gay Pornography

Erich Kessel, C'16, History of Art (he/him)

Black Performance's Remains in Mapplethorpe's *Black Book*

Amalia Lund, C'16, History of Art, Comparative Literature (she/her)

Gallery 404

Hannah Judd, C'17, Music (she/her)

Navigating Gender: Billy Tipton and the Jazz Culture of Masculinity

## 12:30-1:30p | Lunch

### 1:45-2:45p | COMMUNITIES

Moderator: Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Associate Professor of History

Jeremy Cohen, C'17, Classical Studies (he/him)

*Same-Sex Unions* in the Politics of Ancient History

Marco Herndon, C'16, Urban Studies, Latin American & Latino Studies (he/him)

*Soy Moderno y No Quiero Locas*

Xeno Washburne, C'16, English; Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies (he/him or they/them)

Autistic Gender Non-Conformity: Negotiating Narratives of Pathology

### 2:45-3:00p | Closing Remarks

Helen Hunter and Erich Kessel, Steering Committee and Research Fellows, UHF

## Abstracts

### Jeremy Cohen

CAS, 2017; Classical Studies (he/him)

#### **Same-Sex Unions in the Politics of Ancient History**

John Boswell's *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (1994) achieved a level of popularity unusual for classical philology, arguing that the little-known and barely attested Byzantine ritual of *adelphopoiesis* was evidence of officially condoned homosexual marriage in the early Christian world. Both devoutly Catholic and openly gay, Boswell dedicated the book to friends who had died from AIDS complications, a fate he shared later the same year. The book was critically panned, from a non-academic publisher, and marketed to a large layperson audience. Indeed, there are technical errors and perhaps fundamental biases (anachronism, Orientalism) in the work, but detractors tended toward *ad hominem*: the work's flaws cast as personal failings rather than academic ones. The delineation between a piece being 'bad scholarship' and 'not scholarship' is a subtle act of quarantine. Considering also G.E.M. de Ste. Croix's *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (1981) and Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* (1987), this project examines transgressive scholars finding in classical antiquity an opportunity for sociopolitical relevance, while Classicists' reactions have been mixed.

### Sarah Engell

CAS, 2016; American History, Political Science (she/her)

#### **Replacing Periods with Question Marks: A Study of the Role of Public Education in Kanawha County, West Virginia**

In 1974 the proposal and adoption of new language arts textbooks, which sought to emphasize themes of multiculturalism and egalitarianism, sparked a violent year-long protest in Kanawha County, West Virginia. The opposition perceived the texts as overly sexual, anti-American, and intrusive, while supporters celebrated the diversification of narratives and information.

The ability of newly adopted language arts textbooks to spark an explosive controversy reflects the impact of textbooks and, more broadly, public education on creating a sense of identity and belonging. Through objecting or supporting the textbooks and the language they contained, the citizens of Kanawha County were bitterly fighting to protect their own definitions of what it meant to be a good student, parent, teacher, community member, and American. Furthermore, through protesting and ultimately reworking the process of textbook adoption and inclusion, the citizens redefined who and what was included in their notion of a good public school education.

The study seeks to understand how a community's perception of public education and the role it should play in a child's life impacts the inclusion of the public in academic decision making as well as the insertion and definition of controversial matter in the classroom. This work also seeks to better understand the triangulation of rights in public school between students, teachers, and parents.

### Marco Herndon

CAS, 2016; Urban Studies, Latin American & Latino Studies (he/him)

#### **Soy Moderno y No Quiero Locas**

This paper explores the LGBT rights movement in Peru from 1980 to the contemporary period. It uses a historically based ethnographic methodology to explore the relation between globalization and LGBT rights. Particular focus is paid to the *Movimiento Homosexual de Lima* and the recent *Union Civil Ya!* movement. It builds off existing critical scholarship that examines how Latin American LGBT movements respond to their historical and cultural conditions and develop notions of progress. Judith Butler's and Anne Tsing's theories on universality and globalization as well as Peruvian Gonzalo Portocarrero's analysis of Peruvian nationalism are also considered. The paper's main claim is that the Peruvian LGBT movement's negotiations with global LGBT movements inhibit its ability to build a grassroots movement.

### Helen Hunter

CAS, 2016; History (she/her)

#### **Redefining American Motherhood: Emily Mudd's Mission at Home and Abroad**

In 1929, Emily Hartshorne Mudd risked arrest by volunteering as a nurse at Philadelphia's first birth control clinic. Visibly pregnant with her second child, Mudd relied on an antiquated law that barred the incarceration of a pregnant woman in order to serve women in need of contraceptive advice. Before this bold venture, Mudd had worked for a decade as her husband's unpaid research assistant in immunology, and had personally experienced the conflicting pressures on woman in the early twentieth century who aspired to be both mothers and professionals. Over the next seventy years, Mudd became a key player in the development of marriage counseling as a way to help women navigate their maternal and professional ambitions. Scholars have remembered Mudd for her contributions to the field of marriage counseling but have failed to recognize the extent of her larger professional ambitions. This thesis reconsiders her achievements by examining her early career in the birth control movement and her trips to Germany and the Soviet Union around the Second World War, where she examined and warmly approved of government support for working mothers. These missions characterize Mudd as a strong-willed and pragmatic realist making concessions to a slowly changing social order.

### Hannah Judd

CAS, 2017; Music (she/her)

#### **Navigating Gender: Billy Tipton and the Jazz Culture of Masculinity**

Billy Tipton (1914-1989) was an American jazz musician and bandleader who lived his life as a man but was posthumously discovered to be biologically female. Tipton initially presented as male in the professional sphere only. It was not until later in life that he presented as male full time. I explore this within the dichotomy of gender performativity and literal onstage performance. Tipton's gradual shift from professional to full-time male is one I explore in the contexts of jazz, history, and culture: how did

the choice benefit him, and what were his reasons for making it? In this research, I map Tipton's choice to pass as male onto the greater ability for success in the male sphere during his life, as well as the way that instruments are divided by gender in western and jazz contexts. In what ways were the enforced code of jazz masculinity an external incentive?

### **Erich Kessel**

CAS, 2016; History of Art (he/him)

#### **Black Performance's Remains in Mapplethorpe's *Black Book***

Robert Mapplethorpe's 1986 *Black Book* was subject of much political controversy in the years following its release. In the drama of this controversy, Mapplethorpe's figure—as an Artist and an Author—grew more dominant in discourse at the same time that it was battered by right-wing attacks. The growth of his figure cast a dark shadow over the other bodies implicated in his project: those of the black men he photographed. How might a history of their place in this book's creation be written, given an archival silence? This project will engage the model's pose as a performance that resists Mapplethorpe's gaze and the many imperatives that structure his photobook as a consumable object of racial fascination.

### **Izzy Korostoff**

CAS, 2018; Urban Studies (he/him)

#### **Ill-Fame on Blackberry Alley: Prostitution in 19th Century Philadelphia**

The 19th century offers a view of prostitution in a time of its open celebration. A remarkably permissive attitude towards sex work defies conventional understandings of "Victorian prudery" and makes for a fascinating period of American sexual history. Although the 20th century history of prostitution is defined by efforts to regulate the practice on moral grounds, the 19th century allows an assessment of the bawdy life through the eye of the market. In the mid 19th-century, the era of established brothels as social spaces, the urban leisure and sex trade was found objectionable only as noise disturbances. This project conducts a spatial analysis of the 19th century leisure economy via a public guide, in contrast to the 20th-century post-reform accounts of prostitution in arrest records or city Vice Commission reports.

### **Amalia Lund**

CAS, 2016; Art History, Comparative Literature (she/her)

#### **Gallery 404**

404 is an experimental gallery and home. The project explores the possibilities of alternate, more intimate spaces for art and dialogue. 404 is not interested in inaccessible, material art work. Over several months, 404 explores installation, performance, and instructional-based art work.

### **Gabriel Ojeda-Sague**

CAS, 2016; English (he/him)

#### **Plague Desires: A Re-reading of HIV/AIDS Politics in Contemporary Gay Pornography**

This project will study the methods by which contemporary gay pornography has confronted and attempted to radically reconfigure the narratives, politics, and erotics of AIDS/HIV. Focusing especially on the film *Viral Loads* by Treasure Island Media and the controversy that surrounded its release, characterized by articles on the film from *VICE* and *Salon*, I argue for the ability of the film to produce a re-reading of major stigma against viral bodies and the condition of sickness within eroticism through the form of pornography and erotic spectatorship. I also argue that the hyper-exposition of the viral gay male body in sexuality offers a healing mechanism against the fear, marginalization, and pathologization that come with stigma towards AIDS/HIV.

### **Eileen Wang**

CAS, 2016; Health and Societies (she/her)

#### **Choice, Control and Childbirth: Cesarean Deliveries on Maternal Request in Shanghai, China**

Cesarean deliveries on maternal request (CDMR) have become increasingly common in China within the past 20 years, coinciding with the dramatic rise in cesarean section rates. In recent years, the state has tried to control the escalation of cesarean section rates by restricting those that are considered medically "unnecessary" and particularly those requested by mothers. Drawing upon eight weeks of ethnographic fieldwork and 34 interviews with women, providers and family members at a district hospital in Shanghai, I plan to present a chapter on my thesis focusing on the negotiations among the state, provider and woman over control of the childbirth process at the point of cesarean decision-making. I will show that even in light of the recent state regulations circumscribing CDMR, women nevertheless continue to successfully request cesareans and navigate state and medical authority. However, such "legitimate" requests break down along socioeconomic lines; those who request it successfully must have a certain knowledge base, social or economic capital, or proof of some valid risk calculation to convince the doctor to deviate from her "scientific judgment."

### **Xeno Washburne**

CAS, 2016; English; Gender, Sexuality, Women's Studies (he/him or they/them)

#### **Autistic Gender Non-Conformity: Negotiating Narratives of Pathology**

I will analyze the experiences and narratives of autistic transgender and gender non-conforming people juxtaposed with medical and scientific interpretations of autistic gender non-conformity to examine the contradictions between and within these approaches to gender deviance in autistic individuals. This narrow focus will allow me to examine the intersections of norms of gender and sex and norms of ability and ultimately explore the relations between gender, sex, disability, embodiment, and autonomy as crystalized in the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming autistic individuals and their resistances to medical narratives of pathology.