

Muhlenberg College

DANA FORUM 2014



Tuesday, April 8, 2014
Great Room, Seegers Union

Thursday, April 10, 2014
Great Room, Seegers Union



About the Dana Scholars Program

Mission Statement

The Dana Program offers outstanding, intellectually versatile students an opportunity to belong to a community of scholars that fosters conversations across disciplines, rigorous academic inquiry, and promotes engaged citizenship and leadership. Each Dana scholar can major in any academic department or program. All Dana seniors engage in collaborative research projects on issues of public concern and interest.

Director: Dr. Mohsin Hashim

Forum Director, 2013—2014: Dr. Francesca Coppa

Faculty Advisory Committee:

Dr. Daniel Doviak, Dr. Margo Hobbs,
Dr. Joseph Keene, Dr. Jefferson Pooley

Student Advisory Committee:

<i>Class of 2014</i>	<i>Class of 2015</i>
Cyrus Kuschner	Melanie Ferrara
Averill Morash	Kyra Smith
<i>Class of 2016</i>	<i>Class of 2017</i>
Jillian Mauro	Alan Mendez
Jessica Wilson	Jacob Parris



Dana Forum

The **Dana Forum** is designed as a senior year capstone experience to deepen a greater sense of community among DANA scholars and to enrich the intellectual climate on campus. Each year the Forum helps Dana seniors develop and execute collaborative research projects that are tied to the Center for Ethics's annual theme. In the Fall semester, under the supervision of the Director of the Dana Forum, students engage academic questions related to the annual theme chosen by the Center for Ethics. They also form working groups to research a topic of their choice and identify a faculty mentor for the project. The collaborative research component of the Dana Forum is completed during the spring semester of the Dana Scholar's senior year under the mentorship of a faculty member chosen by each group. The specific nature of each team's project depends on the students' background, interests, and goals. Because of the goals of the DANA program, projects that also serve the community are strongly encouraged.

Dr. Francesca Coppa, Forum Director, 2013-2014



Center for Ethics

The Muhlenberg College Center for Ethics seeks to develop our capacities for ethical reflection, moral leadership, and responsible action by engaging community members in scholarly dialogue, intellectual analysis, and self-examination about contested ethical issues.

Through thematic lectures and events, the Center for Ethics serves the teaching and study of the liberal arts at Muhlenberg College by providing opportunities for intensive conversation and thinking about the ethical dimensions of contemporary philosophical, political, economic, social, cultural, and scientific issues. In service to its mission, the Center for Ethics hosts special events and programs, provides faculty development opportunities, provides support for student programming, and sponsors a Living & Learning Community coordinated by a Faculty Scholar-in-Residence. The Center and thematic programs are directed by full time faculty members. Muhlenberg College gratefully acknowledges the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation's support of the Center for Ethics.

The 2013-2014 program is entitled *Sex, Ethics and Pleasure Politics*.

Dr. Bruce Wightman, Director, Center for Ethics



Sex, Ethics and Pleasure Politics

Although sexual activity is a central part of socialization and identity formation, sexual behavior is generally considered a private matter, and is seldom examined critically in the public sphere. Universities are no exception; college students - regardless of whether they choose to have sex - are immersed in a campus culture in which 'private' sexual beliefs and behaviors shape the 'public' undergraduate social experience, and yet the uncritical attitudes that shape these beliefs and behaviors are rarely interrogated or considered within an ethical frame. The 2013-2014 Center for Ethics theme, "Sex, Ethics, and Pleasure Politics" aims to develop a comprehensive sexual ethics for the campus community: How do differing moral, political, and sociological attitudes toward sexuality shape our ethics? How do these attitudes enrich or inhibit the possibility of sexual pleasure? How do attitudes about pleasure, the body, identity, and individuality define what sorts of sexual activity will be considered permissible or impermissible? Is pleasure something that we ought to pursue and promote? What is our ethical responsibility to the pleasure of others? How might a comprehensive sexual ethics cause us to rethink our understanding of justice and interpersonal responsibility?

The 2013-2014 Center for Ethics program is co-directed by **Jeremy Alden Teissere**, Associate Professor of Biology and Neuroscience, and **Cathy Marie Ouellette**, Associate Professor of History.



Schedule of Events

Tuesday, April 8	Welcome and Opening Remarks Dr. Francesca Coppa Dr. Jeremy Teissere
5:30 p.m.	
	Hors d' oeuvres Served <i>Directing Pleasure: Enacting Queer Counter-Publics</i> Matthew Dicken, Tyler McKechnie, Jeffrey Robb
6:00 p.m.	
	<i>Reconciling Self with Society: A Discussion on Polyamory and Individualism</i> Stefanie Cappucci, Joshua Clement, Nathan Frick
6:30 p.m.	
	<i>The Interplay of Sex and Religion in the Lives of College Students</i> Kimberly Baker, Gabriela Contino, Adora Goldovsky, Evan Teitelbaum
7:00 p.m.	
	<i>Sexualizing Video Games: How Game Modifications Rewrite the Script</i> Cyrus Kushner, Josh Portera, Paul Stathis
7:30p.m.	
	<i>Understanding the Impact of Teenage Birth Rates in the U.S.</i> Ryan Barlotta, John Chojnowski, Alexander Jenkins, Michael Schramm
8:00 p.m.	
	Closing Remarks Dr. Francesca Coppa
8:30 p.m.	



Schedule of Events

Thursday, April 10	Welcome and Opening Remarks
5:30 p.m.	Dr. Francesca Coppa Dr. Cathy Ouellette
6:00 p.m.	Hors d' oeuvres Served <i>Sex, Ethics and Politics: American Views of Political Sex Scandals</i> Sarah Chabolla, Andrew Hasenzahl, Cimarron Sharon
6:30 p.m.	<i>Scaling the Mountain of Sex Education: Designing a Curriculum for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders</i> Rebecca Golden, Nicole Pironi, Kathleen Rogers, Olivia Scotti
7:00 p.m.	<i>Boys to Men</i> Michael Quach, Andrea Rommal, Rianna Sommers,
7:30 p.m.	<i>Sexpectations: Analysis of Narratology Used in Sexual Scripts</i> Elisabeth Guenette, Adam Karp
8:00 p.m.	<i>Sex and the Sitcom</i> Matt Bocchese, Erin Cummings, Averill Morash
8:30 p.m.	Closing Remarks Dr. Mohsin Hashim



Event Schedule

**April 8
6:00 P.M.**

Presenters

Matthew Dicken
Tyler McKechnie
Jeffrey Robb

Mentor

Dr. Jim Peck

**DIRECTING PLEASURE: ENACTING
QUEER COUNTER-PUBLICS**

Our research set out to offer an unsettling of presupposed and stable boundaries regarding the notion of sex acts; we wanted to study spaces of eroticism that do not fit within the socially preeminent focus on genitality. A challenge to dominant modes of knowledge production about sex acts (i.e. empirical data, self-reporting, survey responses) was implicit in our work. We considered dominant ideologies that delimit discourses around sex research. We employed a Practice as Research methodology to study how three distinct art-making practices create directorial relationships, which each shape pleasure and power to form queer counter-publics.

We each engaged individually with a specific form; our engagement informed, challenged, and produced our research. Tyler participated in the staging of circus, which offers a sexually charged spectacle via the skilled manipulation of bodies in space for the titillation of an audience. Matt wrote and performed a solo performance, investigating how theatrical language enlivens and distorts explorations of history, culture, and identity. Jeffrey wrote fan fiction, entering the domain of fandom, in which fans gain agency over the cultural production of pleasure by manipulating popular culture characters and taking on the roles of director, actor, and spectator.

Taken together, these case studies point at otherwise implicit ethical navigations faced by those seeking pleasure from erotically-inflected art-making, including: consent, negotiations of power and domination, communal pleasure, mediation, spectatorship, and alternative desiring. Our research takes artistic practice seriously as a queer mode of producing knowledge about the ethics of sexual activity.



Event Schedule

April 8

6:30 P.M.

Presenters

Stefanie Cappucci
Joshua Clement
Nathan Frick

Mentor

Dr. Anne Esacove

**RECONCILING SELF WITH SOCIETY:
A DISCUSSION ON POLYAMORY AND
INDIVIDUALISM**

Polyamory consists of being in emotion-based relationships with multiple partners. Those within the polyamory community claim to challenge the larger heteronormative society by attempting to create a new understanding of sex and relationships. The burgeoning academic field on polyamory is highly contested and there is little agreement on what it means to be polyamorous and how polyamory operates within society. This research project examines online polyamorous communities to identify ways in which the communities understand both polyamory and themselves. The research goals are twofold: to understand how these communities define themselves through both idealization and differentiation, and to determine how these communities deal with commonly expressed anxieties that stem from being polyamorous. Based on our analysis, we have found that online polyamory communities utilize individualized understandings of the self, which are rooted in self-help styled language and credentialization, to serve as a way of regulating how polyamorous individuals ultimately pursue polyamory.



Event Schedule

April 8
7:00 P.M.

Presenters

Kimberly Baker
Gabriela Contino
Adora Goldovsky
Evan Teitelbaum

Mentor

Sharon Albert

**THE INTERPLAY OF SEX AND RELIGION IN
THE LIVES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS**

As colleges across America grow increasingly secular both socially and academically, the presence of practicing religious students is often overlooked. It is a common assumption that college students grow away from their childhood faith and from a commitment to religion as they leave the comfort of a familiar religious community at home. As sexuality in all its forms is omnipresent in our American “hookup” culture, decisions about how to approach sexuality often have a polarizing effect on religious young adults; choosing secular norms of sexual behavior often requires the abandonment or diluting of religious principles, and vice versa. In light of both popular assumption and the reality that religion plays a larger role in student life than is supposed, our group has identified and interviewed college-aged Americans who consider themselves practicing Catholics, Jews, and Muslims, with the direct purpose of analyzing the interplay between religious belief and sexual practice that contributes to the identities of people in this demographic. We have paid particular attention to students’ methods of navigating secular culture, the discrepancies between students’ knowledge of religious teachings and their actual practices, and significant similarities inherent in the experiences of religious students from all three backgrounds.



Event Schedule

April 8

7:30 P.M.

Presenters

Cyrus Kushner

Josh Portera

Paul Stathis

**SEXUALIZING VIDEO GAMES: HOW
GAME MODIFICATIONS REWRITE THE
SCRIPT**

Mentor

Dr. Jefferson Pooley

The nature of the video game is in a state of flux. In recent years, game modification—the creation and implementation of user-generated content—has increased in popularity and altered the modern gaming experience. Gamers are more in control of their experiences than ever before, resulting in a growing community of “modders” inventing ways to make sexually explicit additions to otherwise non-explicit games, and making these add-ons available for public use. Past research into sexual content in video games has all but overlooked this phenomenon, focusing on elements the game developers are creating for the consumer while neglecting to explore sexuality added into games by the consumers themselves. In order to begin to facilitate understanding of this multifaceted community, we used the game modding site *Lover’s Lab* to conduct online interviews with five modders who have created sexual game modifications. From this qualitative assessment we were able to observe the power play between game developers and modders, interpret the complex array of initial reasons for creating a mod, and refine how future studies must understand the synthesis of game mods as part of gaming culture in the hopes of creating a more nuanced and accurate interpretation of the controversial relationship between sexuality and video games.



Event Schedule

April 8
8:00 P.M.

Presenters

Ryan Barlotta
John Chojnowski
Alexander Jenkins
Michael Schramm

Mentor

Dr. Michele Deegan

**UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF
TEENAGE BIRTH RATES IN THE U.S.**

According to the United Nations Population Fund's 2013 report on the state of the world's population, "When a girl becomes pregnant, her present and future change radically, and rarely for the better. Her education may end, her job prospects evaporate, and her vulnerabilities to poverty, exclusion and dependency multiply." Many countries and international aid organizations have taken on the task of reducing teen birth rates. The United States Center for Disease Control has made reducing teen birth rates one of its six "Winnable Battles", and over the past decades, the number of live births to girls age 15-19 has dropped dramatically. Still, the United States's teen birth rate remains higher than any other advanced industrial economy. Additionally, statewide teen birth rates vary drastically. New Hampshire ranks closely with highly developed Northern European countries, while Mississippi is comparable to some third-world countries. Why is the teen birth rate so high, why does it vary so greatly between states, and what is the nationwide impact of high teen birth rates on such factors as poverty rates, educational programs, and election results? Through innovative analysis of statistics, nationwide surveys, and governmental programs, we seek to explore the underlying causes of teen births in the United States. Specifically, we have focused on state government-enacted education programs, demographics, socioeconomic factors, and election results to shed some light on this persistent problem. We also seek to recommend several crucial ways to reduce teen birth rates nationwide, and to explain why this action is necessary.



Event Schedule

April 10
6:00 P.M.

Presenters

Sarah Chabolla
Andrew Hasenzahl
Cimarron Sharon

Mentor

Dr. Christopher Borick

**SEX, ETHICS, AND POLITICS:
AMERICAN VIEWS OF POLITICAL
SEX SCANDALS**

This year's Center for Ethics theme, Sex Ethics and Pleasure Politics, focused on critically examining private sexual acts in the public sphere, and how moral, political, and sociological attitudes toward sex shape our ethics. As such, we have explored a realm in which the theme of sex seems to be ever present – the realm of politics. Political sex scandals seem to be all over the media, most recently with Anthony Weiner and Herman Cain, to name a few. With these scandals being ever present in the American conscious since Bill Clinton, we investigated how Americans responded to various politicians caught in different scandals. Our main research questions include: What factors influence political survivability after a scandal? What are the ethics at play during a scandal? Why did some politicians' careers survive over others? How do people view the women of the sex scandals (i.e. the spouse and the "other woman")? How does level of government, sex act performed, and political party influence perceptions of the scandal? We have gathered data concerning numerous sex scandals in an attempt to create a model to predict survivability. Additionally, we conducted a survey in order to quantitatively assess responses to various scandals, and to compare the survey responses to the qualitative data gathered for the model. An in depth analysis of the "survivors" of sex scandal provides insight into the significance of certain ethics and values on public attitudes towards political sex scandals. Our research will add to a lacking body of literature on perceptions of private sex acts in the public sphere.



Event Schedule

**April 10
6:30 P.M.**

Presenters

Rebecca Golden
Nicole Pironi
Kathleen Rogers
Olivia Scotti

Mentor

Dr. Jeff Rudski

**SCALING THE MOUNTAIN OF SEX
EDUCATION: DESIGNING A CURRICULUM
FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM
SPECTRUM DISORDERS**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's most recent report, one in 68 children has been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Many adolescents with ASDs engage in sexual acts and express a desire for intimate relationships. Individuals with autism, however, struggle to understand social cues, rules, and norms -- these are important aspects of sexuality that individuals without ASDs normally learn in informal settings. Without clear, explicit instruction and explanations, those with ASDs struggle to learn, resulting in a lack of understanding and knowledge about sex and sexuality, as well as increased potential to engage in sexual behavior that deviates from social norms, rendering them vulnerable to bullying, harassment, and sexual abuse. We developed a general plan for an up-to-date, comprehensive sexual education curriculum for eighth grade students in an inclusive, general education classroom, but specifically with the needs of students with ASDs in mind. We decided an inclusive setting would be most appropriate for this curriculum based on the idea that students without ASDs also could benefit from more direct and explicit instruction about social and communicative aspects of sex. The curriculum addresses content inspired both by existing sex education programs and by relevant suggestions and concerns expressed in an online community for individuals with ASDs and their families. Course content is presented through methods consistent with current theories of cognition and development, incorporating strategies the literature has proven effective for those with autism. In addition to a review of interdisciplinary peer-reviewed articles and an analysis of themes in forums for individuals with autism, guidance regarding the development and hypothetical implementation of the curriculum was obtained from communication with leaders of community centers that work with adolescents with ASDs.



Event Schedule

April 10
7:00 P.M.

Presenters

Michael Quach
Rianna Sommers
Andrea Rommal

Mentor

Dr. Marcia Morgan

BOYS TO MEN

We are exploring the perceptions of the external factors on male sexuality. More specifically, we are investigating how males perceive the influences on their sexuality throughout development, ages 4 to 16. Our group looked at four main external factors: formal sexual education, peers, media, and family. In particular, we wished to investigate what the participants remember being told to them during their formative years and conversely, what they received as the main messages for them to take away. We interviewed males using a person-centered, semi-structured style on the Muhlenberg College campus for our data collection. One of the goals of this research was to showcase the diverse array of how males perceive their own sexuality.



Event Schedule

April 10
7:30 P.M.

Presenters

Elisabeth Guenette
Adam Karp

**SEXPECTATIONS: ANALYSIS OF
NARRATOLOGY USED IN SEXUAL
SCRIPTS**

Mentors

Dr. Jeremy Tessiere
Dr. Cathy Ouelette

Research suggests that students who participate in "hook-up culture" are seeking one of three goals: pleasure, meaningfulness, or empowerment, and few [are] getting any of these things in great measure" (Wade, 2011). Our study examines the narratives used to describe hook up encounters by students at Muhlenberg College. We performed interviews with 21 students on their experiences in and perceptions of hook up culture and analyzed the results based on a social scripting theory. This lens poses that we use scripts to navigate all of our interactions with others and these scripts guide the ways in which we behave, think and even feel, as well as how we expect others to behave, think, and feel. We specifically focused on narrations of sexual scripts, meaning the scripts used to navigate sexual situations, and the role of expectations in defining and constructing the scripts used in hook up culture. These data are crucial to our understanding of the ways in which students participate in, perceive, and/or understand hook up culture so that we can better promote a safe environment for, open communication within, and increased comprehension of hook up culture.



Event Schedule

April 10
8:00 P.M.

DESCRIPTION

Presenters
Matt Bocchese
Erin Cummings
Averill Morash

Mentor
Dr. Elizabeth
Nathanson

SEX AND THE SITCOM

In this study, we explore the representations of sex in popular situational comedies. Specifically, we studied *Seinfeld*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Office*, and *Parks and Recreation* because they represent two sitcom sub-genres: friends-in-the-city shows and workplace mockumentary shows. Each subgenre is divided into one show that started the genre (*Seinfeld*, and *The Office*) and one that is currently airing (*How I Met Your Mother*, and *Parks and Recreation*) so that changes over time can be tracked. We chose these sub-genres because they are meant to represent everyday life, making it easier for the norms and stereotypes that they show to be perpetuated in American culture. These sitcoms are also very popular which leads to the influence that they have with viewers.

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analytic methods, we explored the following questions: How prevalent are sex or sex-related jokes on network sitcoms? What types of sex jokes are most common on sitcoms? How often are depictions of sex acts connected to a sex joke? Does sexual humor change with characters' relationship status? Can sitcoms show or imply sex without invoking humor? Are some sex acts seen as more humorous than others? What norms, if any, do sitcoms perpetuate about sex? Where is the power most often within the sex jokes in a sitcom?

Quantitatively, we found that these series have an average of a little over nine sexual references per episode, with almost two of those being jokes about body parts. The majority of the sexual references were vague or implied rather than stated outright. Qualitatively, we continued to explore the way sexual humor objectified characters by referencing only parts of their bodies, and how the euphemistic nature of the humor contributes to taboos about sex in our culture.



DANA Scholars

Forum Presenters 2014

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Ryan Barlotta
Matthew Bocchese
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