RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING AS GENDERED RESISTANCE

APRIL 2024
The mission of the Institute for Women’s Leadership at Marquette University is to advance women’s leadership locally and globally through pioneering research, innovative programming, and collaborative engagement.

Our vision is one of intersectional inclusivity and gender equity. As advocates for justice, we will engage, inspire, and transform students, staff, faculty, and community leaders as we:

• Create an interdisciplinary and vibrant research environment that equitably and inclusively supports faculty and students as they engage in impactful, transformative scholarship.
• Serve as an incubator for innovative leadership initiatives that challenge the barriers to the advancement of women, while embracing intersectionality, as we seek to reduce inequities across institutional structures.
• Cultivate community connections through mentoring and leadership programming that reaches down to high school students, out to university students and faculty, and up to external stakeholders including corporations, nonprofits, and community associations.
During our tenure as Fall 2023 IWL Faculty Fellows, our cohort connected as scholar-teachers reading and researching gender-based violence and resistance across multidisciplinary perspectives and methodologies. We learned from each other how stories shape inclusive discourse and help develop deeper understandings of the intersections of narrative, literature, culture, and social systems. We benefited from building a dialogue around how each of us prioritizes addressing narratives—past and present—as ways to both challenge and amplify the experiences of those who have been doubted, denied, or silenced through time. We believe this is foundational to building a community of scientists committed to hearing the often untold. Thus, we present—as ways to both challenge and amplify the experiences of those who have been doubted, denied, or silenced through time and social systems. We benefited from building a dialogue around how each of us prioritizes addressing narratives—past and present—as ways to both challenge and amplify the experiences of those who have been doubted, denied, or silenced through time. We believe this is foundational to building a community of scientists committed to hearing the often untold. Thus, we will continue to ask ourselves and each other:

Where are our priorities?

How are people and communities resisting structural violence and challenging dominant interpretations of their experiences?

How do we resist the legacies of being misread as we, too, create archives of knowledge?

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in the case of female survivors of genocide and gender-based violence; or, in the case of Saint Joan of Arc, stories clouded by myth, subjective interpretations, and centuries of storytelling. For this reason, Dr. Vanderheyden’s research on Joan of Arc confronts multiple challenges in determining Joan’s narrative. It is uncertain whether Joan could read and write (other than her signature), and the only written words attributed to her are letters she allegedly dictated and the records of her interrogations during the trial that eventually led to her condemnation to be burned alive at the stake. Additionally, we can read stories and testimonies of her contemporaries, including poetry from the female poet Christine de Pisan, to discern Joan’s truth. The silent film The Passion of Joan of Arc by Carl Theodor Dreyer is considered by many to be the best representation of her story, produced to understand the controlling images and cultural stories that circulate about gender-based violence. These sites include medical and forensic interviews, science and research, and the criminal-legal system. The construction of personal stories is often embedded in larger structural frameworks. Thus Dr. Hlavka’s research and advocacy address how survivors of violence are both read and reread through cultural stories and how individuals and communities resist through collective stories that challenge stereotypes and provoke transformation. Through this work, she hopes to inform and support survivor-led and community-centered healing practices that ultimately support transformative justice by privileging the desires and perspectives of violence survivors.

Dr. Vanderheyden’s past research publications include two books on the 18th-century philosopher, author, and art critic Denis Diderot. Her most recent research program centers on Gender Studies and her project comparing French heroines Jeanne d’Arc and Olympe de Gouges. She has also published works of creative writing including poetry and Flash Fiction.

Dr. Zemlak is a nurse scientist who prioritizes women’s well-being through qualitative and mixed methods research, emphasizing trauma-informed approaches. Her program of research focuses on intimate partner violence, sexual/reproductive health, mental health, disparities, technology in healthcare, and social determinants, aiming to advance equity and improve healthcare outcomes.
Dr. Jessica Zemlak prioritizes improving the mental and physical well-being of marginalized communities in her research by centering her work on addressing inequities and health disparities using a community-engaged approach. Dr. Zemlak's passion for this work is informed by her clinical practice—having worked for over twenty years as a nurse and Family Practice Nurse Practitioner. Through Dr. Zemlak's clinical practice, she works closely with women and members of the LGBTQ+ community who experienced violence, substance abuse, and unmet health needs, where she frequently saw how social determinants of health were closely related to health inequities. In Dr. Zemlak's role as a clinician, she can work individually with her patients to address their health needs. It is through research and clinical work that Dr. Zemlak, RN, can make a broader impact and amplify the often-silenced voices of marginalized communities in her healthcare—Addressing health inequities and Health Disparities Using a Community-Engaged Approach.

Among many marginalized communities, there are often intertwined issues such as intimate partner violence, mental health symptoms, substance use, and social determinants of health (e.g., access to care) that impact health. These complex social and structural issues influence health outcomes. To more deeply understand how these issues were impacting the health of women in our Milwaukee community, in 2021-2023, Dr. Zemlak collaborated with the Benedict Center Sisters Program by examining unmet health needs among women who sell sex in Milwaukee. Through a quantitative survey and insightful focus groups, the study became a vessel for the unheard stories of a highly marginalized population. This study built a strong foundation, which informs Dr. Zemlak's current work. In this study, key information was learned about this hidden population that helped Dr. Zemlak focus her research on centering participant-voiced priorities. From this research, lessons learned included that transgender and gender-diverse sex workers felt underrepresented in tailored health programming, and telehealth was identified as a potential mechanism to improve healthcare access to HIV prevention services.

The team of Dr. Zemlak and her collaborators from SLU recognized that while sex work is extremely heterogeneous, there is a dearth of research aimed at understanding the different types of sex work, the diversity of populations that participate in it, and their unique needs and circumstances. So in this study the team explored the diverse types of sex work and the settings where sex work occurs among a large, national sample of transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Using latent class analysis, the team was able to identify patterns and types of sex work across the diverse sample. This research adds to the state of the science in deepening understanding of the different settings and activities that encompass sex work. The patterns across the classes (i.e., groups of sex work types) uncovered in the current study have the potential to be used to understand how different sex workers have different needs and experiences. Ultimately, this information can be used to most effectively support and advocate for the sex worker community.

In Fall 2023, the Benedict Center Sisters Program helped women in the street-based sex trade using a harm reduction lens through programs such as street outreach and community drop-in centers. The team for Women's Leadership Faculty Fellowship in Fall 2023 became a catalyst for expanding the scope of Dr. Zemlak's research among transgender and gender-diverse sex workers who sell sex. She was able to use her time during this fellowship to understand the diverse landscape of sex work. It was clear to Dr. Zemlak from the participants of her Milwaukee-based research as well as through a review of the scholarly literature, that the stories and experiences of transgender and gender-diverse sex workers require more representation. Subsequently during Dr. Zemlak's time as a faculty fellow, she collaborated with scientists at Saint Louis University (SLU) on a study to learn more about the experiences of transgender and gender-diverse sex workers.
interested in accessing care. However, many women who sell sex did not have the privacy or technology to support accessing telehealth services. Telehealth has expanded in utilization since the pandemic and will continue to grow. As a researcher focused on social determinants of health and health inequities, Dr. Zemlak is concerned that the marginalized communities she works with may be left behind in the evolving telehealth expansion.

To address this need, Dr. Zemlak is currently leading a pilot study embedding a telehealth service in a community drop-in center serving women in the street-based sex trade. These drop-in centers are areas women frequent for basic needs services, such as meals and warming rooms, and the centers are highly trusted and valued by women. Telehealth services in these drop-in centers are potentially a low-barrier access point to healthcare. Therefore, the goal of this feasibility and acceptability study is to explore if women like receiving telehealth services in the drop-in center. There is great potential to expand and improve how women engage in the healthcare system through bringing this service to them in a way that works best for them. This work was informed by the voices of women in the sex trade.

REFLECTION FROM THE SCHOLAR
During my time as an IWL scholar, I was able to share how, as a nurse scientist, I can tell the stories of an often-hidden population of people who sell sex. Through collaboration and sharing with this multi-disciplinary team of scholars each with a different lens, I saw how we can advocate, empower, and elevate the stories that are not often told. My time as an IWL scholar and member of this interdisciplinary team has deepened my passion and commitment to research that places the stories and priorities of my community at the center.

—Jessica Zemlak, PhD, MSN, RN

HEATHER HLAVKA, PHD

RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING AS GENDERED RESISTANCE IN SOCIOLOGY—Addressing Interpersonal and Structural Violence at the Intersections of Race, Gender, Science, and Bodies

As a feminist sociologist and sociolegal scholar, Dr. Heather Hlavka started studying gender-based violence and carceral systems as a first-generation college student at the University of Minnesota. There she was confronted with the reality of trauma including numerous disclosures of interpersonal violence from friends and the lack of safe spaces to share those experiences or to seek adequate, survivor-focused healing and redress from institutions and systems. She became interested in learning more about the effects of gender-based violence and exploring the collective meaning of assault among survivors wherein community, healing, and resistance might simultaneously reside. The discipline of sociology gave her the language to better understand the roles of power, knowledge, and subversive voice—especially how, to varying degrees, women and young people have long been silenced, shamed, or their stories erased from dominant history and consciousness. During her college years, Dr. Hlavka began volunteering for crisis-line intervention services and participating in peer education seminars, later leading support groups for survivors and their families and friends during graduate school. At Marquette University, she is also an on-call advocate supporting those impacted by interpersonal violence.
and harassment. Her work thus focuses on the lived experiences of gender-based violence to better understand how cultural narratives and stories play a significant role in what we know about sexual assault, especially in a post-forensic age. Narratives are crucial to understanding trial and legal outcomes for sexual assault, with the help of Marquette undergraduate students and research assistants—attending nearly 700 court appearances and interviewing judges, attorneys, forensic scientists, jurors, court advocates, and sexual assault nurse examiners. This research centers on legal storytelling and narrative analysis—or stories told in law and legal practice to make sense of crime and violence. In their book, Bodies in Evidence: Race, Gender, and Science in Sexual Assault Adjudication, they used legal storytelling as counterstorytelling to address embedded preconceptions and myths as well as institutional biases, myths, and perceptions that can ultimately impact how survivors are treated by the criminal-legal system, the medical system, as well as within research and science.

Dr. Hlavka is interested in amplifying the stories and voices of those who have been most marginalized within systems of power and privilege. She prioritizes the experiences of those identifying as BIPOC women, nonbinary persons, and young people who have experienced sexual violence. There is immense value in privileging the knowledge, voices, and interpretations of those who have experienced violence as authorities and authors of their stories. These stories often reveal how survivors make sense of, negotiate, resist, and respond to interpersonal violence through powerful cultural stories and personal experiences of violence. Her work thus focuses on the lived experiences of gender-based violence to better understand how survivors make sense of, negotiate, resist, and respond to interpersonal violence through powerful cultural stories and personal interpretations of violence as well as institutional biases, myths, and perceptions that can ultimately impact how survivors are treated by the criminal-legal system, the medical system, as well as within research and science.

Legal Subjectivity among Youth Victims of Sexual Abuse

Hlavka & Mulla | “Thinking Forensically: Law, Medicine, and the Nomos of Sexual Assault Adjudication”

11 Hlavka | “Legal Subjectivity among Youth Victims of Sexual Abuse”

10 Hlavka | “Legal Subjectivity among Youth Victims of Sexual Abuse”

9 Hlavka & Mulla | “Intersectionality and Credibility in Child Sexual Assault Trials.”

8 Delgado & Stefancic | Critical Race Theory: An Introduction (3rd Edition)

7 Petitta & Hlavka | Researching Gender-based Violence: Embedded and Interactive Approaches

6 Hlavka | “Regulating Bodies: Children and Sexual Violence”

5 Hlavka | “Normalizing Sexual Violence: Young Women Account for Harassment and Abuse”

4 Hlavka | “Speaking of Stigma and the Silence of Shame: Young Men and Sexual Victimization”

3 Hlavka | “Legal Subjectivity among Youth Victims of Sexual Abuse”

2 Hlavka | “Normalizing Sexual Violence: Young Women Account for Harassment and Abuse”

1 Hlavka | “Legal Subjectivity among Youth Victims of Sexual Abuse”

Addressing Interpersonal and Structural Violence at the Intersections of Race, Gender, Science, and Bodies

In court when attorneys leverage stereotypes about Black and Brown youth as sexually promiscuous, rebellious, and blameworthy for their assaults. Similarly, Black and Brown families as ‘crazy,’ ‘dysfunctional,’ or ‘criminal.’ Black and Brown women as “hypersexual”—a persistent narrative used by attorneys to sexually degrade women of color, imparting racial hierarchies and narratives that further stigmatize Black families. Therefore, the courts legal practices of storytelling reproduce gender and race stereotypes and scripts about women and children for court and observers while they also become cemented in legal archives and case law.

At the heart of the book lies a critique of the use of forensic evidence to power and imagined by the specific independent, dispersive, and objective. Take the quotes below by two Milwaukee County Assistant District Attorneys:

“I think jurors are very susceptible to the TV influence and that certain scripts of mind, and try to do what the public wants to like, ‘How many folks here watch CSI?’ in every [jury selection] especially if I have no forensic evidence, I guess, the less evidence I have, the more I want to attack that head-on. If I have good forensic evidence or other types of forensic evidence. I’ll go a little bit more. ‘Like, You’re not going to see everything you see on CSI, but you might see some type of that evidence.’”

“Even if it doesn’t have anything to do with DNA, I’ll be saying, “You notice there wasn’t any DNA?”... Mostly again, just talking to them, alerting them that these are going to be issues in this case. I’m going to be arguing about the presence or non-preservation of DNA.”

Prosecutors told stories about DNA and forensic evidence in

...
authored chapter that compares Patricia Hill Collins's seminal work on the historical “controlling images” and myths of Black women in the U.S. with present-day legal representations. Each image fixes Black women in specific frameworks related to maternity and sexuality. It is crucial to show how historical stories, images, and narratives circulate within contemporary legal and medical spaces and how they remain embedded in U.S. gynecology, and the rise of forensic evidence. In this work, Hlavka and Mulla show how controlling images and stories are constructed about Black women and girls who are continually subjected to and policed by long-held racial tropes operating in U.S. jurisprudence. Herein lies the power of storytelling as resistance: to challenge and subvert the dominant narrative that courts act as objective arbiters of law or legal factfinders and to produce a counter archive. Narrative analysis and counterstorytelling reveals how courts reinscribe rape myths with new scientific authority, further reproducing inequality and racial and gender injustice.

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As a scholar and researcher in 18th-century French literature, Dr. Jennifer Vanderheyden began her career with a study of how the literary body communicates non-verbally through gestures and other theatrical portrayals of the body’s speech, specifically in the works of philosopher, art critic, and writer Denis Diderot.19 Her interest in gender studies developed after researching Diderot’s “modern” views of women, especially as expressed in his work “Sur les femmes” (“About Women”). This inspired Dr. Vanderheyden to consider women writers in the 18th century, especially Olympe de Gouges, whom contemporary psychoanalyst and writer Julia Kristeva20 considered by many as the first French feminist because of her political activism and writing during the latter part of the 18 century. Olympe de Gouges countered the Revolutionary text “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” with her text “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen” (even though women were not allowed to be citizens). She was guillotined in 1793 during the Reign of Terror for her radical activism and writing.

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A survivor of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, Consolee Nishimwe considers these two women under the following lenses:

1. As visionary geniuses who understood political boundaries and stereotypes;
2. A comparison of their interrogations and trials, especially the performative and revolutionary nature of their defenses as women, that illuminates the complexities of their fierce patriotism; and
3. The influence of their legacies on France's current governance.

Adding Centuries of Interpretations of Engendered Heroine Saint Joan of Arc

The Joan of Arc Chapel vibrates at the heart of Marquette, its inspirational and serene structure and grounds serve as a point of grounding for the Marquette community, both in real-time and long after they depart campus. At the beginning of the pandemic, a live broadcast from the chapel reached out to all who watched as not only a source of comfort, but also as a reminder that our history as human beings demonstrates our fortitude to survive—especially if a teenage girl from Domremy-la-Pucelle could inspire and lead a country to crown a king and fight against British occupation. The Chapel beckons us all to a place of quiet reflection. According to the many myths and legends surrounding Joan, her body was burned three times, then

advocating for their equal rights and citizenship, to support a just government based on the will of its people, and to call for the elimination of colonial slavery. Although each woman has been discussed regarding their heroic sacrifices as well as their refusal to adhere to gender expectations, to Dr. Vanderheyden's knowledge no scholarship exists that seeks to compare in detail their words and actions. A re-evaluation of such heroines, maligned in their time, into present-day France requires an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that encourages relevant inquiry and debate in such areas as social justice, human rights, gender studies, and political science.

During the Fellowship at the Marquette Institute of Women's Leadership, Dr. Vanderheyden continued her research on Joan of Arc by developing a course she will offer in Fall 2024: “Saint Joan of Arc: Truth Behind the Myth.” To make the course accessible for all students, Dr. Vanderheyden will teach it in English with the option for French students to do the work in French. The interdisciplinary course will include the historical, theological, and political aspects of Joan’s mission to save France from English occupation in addition to the cultural and political impact of her story on present-day France and beyond. This course on Joan of Arc will afford students the opportunity to experience an in-depth examination of the history, faith, myth, legend, and passion of such a saintly French icon, as well as her global legacy. Also during her IWL fellowship, Dr. Vanderheyden worked on an article that analyzes the film Vivre sa vie by Jean-Luc Godard and his use of scenes from the silent film The Passion of Joan of Arc (Dreyer).
Many aspects of my research during the IWL Fellowship have been about the need to amplify the voices and stories of those who are often silenced or ignored in public discourse. Our collective work, informed by the potential to transform our understanding of resistance, narratives across gender, race, identity, and bodies and has challenged long-held assumptions, myths, and cultural reevaluation of existing repositories of knowledge can not just interpret stories—we live and witness them to simultaneously engage in and move beyond text and talk the past in often new and transformative ways. Stories about experience. They inform the future by telling us of life documented in a potential archive of knowledge. Each data point, interview transcript, or survey response; every photograph or poem, letter, artwork, film, medical chart, or trial record is someone's representation. Each voices: “go, Jehanne, God will lead you to save France from the English. God will lead you to restore Charles VII as King of France.” I answer the call, name myself Jehanne Le Pucelle to show that I am pure of heart and body, I dress like other soldiers in battle. I carry a banner of leadership and pride. I am a warrior beyond gender. You have called me many names over the centuries: miraculous, witch, impostor, cross-dresser, heretic, saint. I answered my calling and only answer to God is showing me my way; this is what I was born for…...Even though she was a woman among men who thought she was a witch and heretic, she remained in her faith. As for Jeanne d’Arc…what can I say? She was judged by men with rules created by men to do work that men thought that only men could do. Her crime was to dress a man in order to do what a man could not do.

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