

Education Spotlight/**Buffalo Humanities Festival 2015** explores gender with author **Jill Lepore**

BY REBECCA HALE

Now in its third year, the Buffalo Humanities Festival is fostering a much-needed discussion on gender, sexuality, and their roles in society. Professors and partners from area universities and colleges have been working hard to put together three days of lectures, discussions and live entertainment that aim to form an educated response to society's gender norms.

"[Each year] we want to pick a theme that is relevant and [that] people will have a lot to say about," said Libby Otto, executive director



Jill Lepore and her book



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BUFFALO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL

GENDER BENDER



of the University at Buffalo's Humanities Institute. "Gender allows us to talk about change and radical ideas, but also about continuity."

The festival is titled Gender Bender, and runs September 23–26. The keynote speaker is Jill Lepore, a published author, professor at Harvard, and writer at the *New Yorker*. Many of the festival's events will center around her book, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, a compelling novel that unveils comic heroine Wonder Woman's surprising connection to feminism and famed female activist, Margaret Sanger.

The festival's gender-based content isn't restricted to the interests of women and feminists. Kicking off the festival on Wednesday is "Do Clothes Make the Man?" a lecture by UB professor Patrick McDevitt. This talk will explore the history of the suit as well as feature an exhibit of men's fashion from the Buffalo History Museum.

Thursday's festivities include a small book group at Sweetness 7 Café, where UB professor Susan Cahn leads an intimate discussion on *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*.

Friday features Lepore, who leads a reading, discussion, and book-signing at the Albright-Knox Gallery.

Saturday remains the main event, featuring a full day of lectures, performances, film screenings, and more. More than fifteen events are scattered across six locations and three time slots during the day, as well as time allotted for lunch and a closing reception that features a performance by beloved Buffalo musician and singer Alison Pipitone.

Additional highlights include a double performance of scenes from *Twelfth Night* in Delaware Park, by both an all-male (as intended by Shakespeare) and an all-female cast, a discussion on (and by) female veterans and a presentation

by Buffalonian and professional gender-bender, actor Jimmy Janowski. Also, there will be discussions on gender and sports, the black male body and #BlackGirlsMatter.

A cycle of short films will be screened, as well as a gender-bending musical and storytelling performance by cabaret star Kerrykate Abel and musician Michael Hake. Most events take place in Ketchum Hall on the campus of Buffalo State, but a full schedule is available at buffalohumanities.org as well as ticket prices and opportunity for online purchase. Festival partners include SUNY

Fredonia, Niagara University, Buffalo State College, University at Buffalo, and Canisius College.

Otto says, "The humanities are about ideas and seeing things from a new perspective, and thinking creatively about the world as we know it and the world of the past." The Buffalo Humanities Festival aims to do just that in a community that cares about activism and social change.

Fredonia senior Rebecca Hale is a 2015 *Spree* intern.

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