

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: DR. SALLY HIRSH-DICKINSON

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Dr. Sally Hirsh-Dickinson, Instructor of English and Communication, finds new sources of scandal in *Peyton Place*.

"We're beholden to more than just the text. We're often informed by the historical movement out of which a text arises. A lot of interdisciplinarity is brought to English scholarship as a result." — Dr. Sally Hirsh-Dickinson



(PHOTO BY JODIE ANDRUSKEVICH)

In January, Dr. Sally Hirsh-Dickinson served on a panel at the 125th Annual meeting of the American Historical Association. "Popular and Profane: Race, Gender, and Regionalism in *Peyton Place*" included discussions on how the novel itself functioned as a form of gossip, New England's Puritan heritage and its evolution from high-minded to hypocritical, and how *Peyton Place* opened the doors for frank discussions about women's sexuality.

"I feel really honored to be included with this particular group of scholars—they're all well-established," Hirsh-Dickinson says. "Stephen Nissenbaum, who chaired the session, is a Pulitzer finalist."

Hirsh-Dickinson's paper, "Dark Past, White Lies: Reconsidering the Sources of Scandal in *Peyton Place*" investigates how race functions within the novel. The paper considers "not just blackness, but also whiteness," says Hirsh-Dickinson. "*Peyton Place* was hugely scandalous

when it burst onto the scene in 1956. In addition to the sex for which it's renowned and notorious, perhaps what inspired the outcry was the way sex and race are brought together and articulated through various characters in the novel," she says.

The paper condenses research in Hirsh-Dickinson's forthcoming book, "Dirty Whites and Dark Secrets: Sex and Race in *Peyton Place*." She says when she first encountered the novel in graduate school she was fascinated that little scholarship existed on the book. "There are only a few articles and Emily Toth's literary biography of Grace Metalious," she says.

Though the town's founding father is mentioned a third of the way into the novel, Hirsh-Dickinson says he's quickly buried again. "As a reader, when I finished the book it seemed that was a largely overlooked element for understanding what was happening in the novel." The 1957 film and the TV series that ran from 1964-1969 altered or eliminated the story of the town's founder. "A really critical element for understanding the town and the story in the novel is bleached out of subsequent versions of the story—for me, that very much changes the nature of the story being told," she says.

Though *Peyton Place* is best-recognized as a piece of pop culture, Hirsh-Dickinson has presented her work at conferences organized by the Literature/Film Association and several historic associations as well as the New England Popular Culture Association. "My work is interdisciplinary," she says.

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AT A GLANCE

LIFE OUTSIDE RIVIER

Dr. Hirsh-Dickinson may sound familiar—literally. As one of New Hampshire Public Radio’s weekend hosts, she’s reported on subjects ranging from political news to how tornadoes work. Since 1999, she’s covered a variety of different shifts at the station. She was part of a team that earned Associated Press top honors for breaking news coverage in 2007 for reporting on a hostage situation at Hillary Clinton’s Rochester, NH campaign office.

ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS

- Ph.D., University of New Hampshire, English
- M.A., University of New Hampshire, English
- B.A., University of Massachusetts, English and psychology