

# Hampshire in Havana

## Cuba Project Abstracts

### Theme: **Gender & Sexual Identity**

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The abstracts listed here are for projects done on the Hampshire in Havana Cuba program, related to the theme of **Gender & Sexual Identity**. Projects are listed by year beginning in 2008, with the most recent year first and then in alphabetical order by last name. For questions about specific projects, please contact the Global Education Office.

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**Name:** Miari Stephens

**Year:** S2015

**Tutor:** Daisy Rubiera

**Title:** *Nuestro Cabello*

**Medium:** Essay

Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper examines the personal and social significance of Black Women's hair in Havana. Hair carries a significant importance especially for Black women, as it is often classified as a marker of economic or social status, racial identity and personal aesthetic or expression. I conducted over twenty interviews throughout Havana with Black women from the ages of 21-78, residing in various municipalities, with different occupations and a variety of hair textures. Using two key concepts—material conditions and personal, intimate experiences--I investigate Black women's hair as a manifestation of survival. On one hand, Black women's hairstyling can affect their role in the workplace or job market, as many jobs require a specific, limiting *presencia* that predominately targets black features. Thus, the manner in which a Black woman styles her hair may be crucial for her material or economic livelihood. On the other hand, hair can be a form of personal expression that allows Black women to appreciate and love their beauty. In this sense, hairstyling constitutes a form of personal self-survival for Black women— a technique to navigate of a world that devalues and criticizes their features.

**Name:** Alana de Hinojosa

**Year:** S2014

**Tutor:** Margarita Mateo

**Title:** "Aguas Divididas" (Split Water)

**Topic:** Nonfiction short stories about Cuban women/impact of migration

**Medium:** Creative writing

*Split Water* is a collection of nonfiction short stories that retell the stories, memories, and imaginaries of Cuban women living on the island who are separated from the women in their family due to immigration. In looking at these divided Cuban female genealogies, and recording these women's memory making, nostalgia, and feelings of rupture, loss, hope and forgiveness, these stories document how these women expand and redraw not only *cubanidad*, but also Cuba's community boundaries outside of the island. In order to draw out the intricacies, poetry, and experiences of these divided motherlines, the author conducted multiple interviews with 15 different women, read personal letters, looked through family photo albums, and spent considerable time in these women's homes meeting their friends and family. The collection includes the stories from ten of these women. These ten female and motherly voices, whether spoken by a daughter or a grandmother, ultimately tell the stories of what Alana de Hinojosa has called *la matria*: the *other* (and overlooked) Cuban family and country that is built from sentiments and loyalties between and through transnational motherlines. *Across Split Water* is the stories of *el amor, madre, y la matria*.

**Name:** Rachel Klinger

**Year:** S2014

**Tutor:** Olga Marta Pérez

**Title:** "FAAB-ulos@: Creación de un mundo queer en La Habana"

**Topic:** Queer Spaces in the Vedado

**Medium:** Essay

Upon arriving in Cuba, my plan was to focus on transwomen and Cenesex (The National Center for Sex Education), as Cenesex and its programs supporting transwomen have received so much international attention. However, I spent a few weeks wandering around Habana, the visible and public presence of transwomen was very apparent to me; the same could not be said for female-assigned queer people. In my own search for these spaces and these people, I stumbled into my new project.

Through interviews, going out to gay clubs and lesbian baseball games, and otherwise spending time with queer female-assigned friends, I began to map a limited and constantly morphing panorama of queer spaces in the neighborhood of Vedado. As several of the bars and clubs closed over the short three months I was in Habana, it became clear that these spaces were ephemeral; yet just as soon as one closed, another would open somewhere else. I chose to focus my paper on the spaces created by and for queer female assigned people, and how these spaces while functioning as disruptions of heteronormative space, also function as disciplinary spaces, deploying

their own set of exclusionary norms, especially in regards to gender presentation, desire, and race. In my theoretical framing of these events, I use the concepts of Deleuze's rhizome, Lugones' world-traveling, Muñoz's queer world-making and Warner's framing of publics and counter publics.

**Name:** Hanna Lauritzen

**Year:** S2014

**Tutor:** Lily Núñez

**Title:** "Cuentapropistas Women in Havana"

**Medium:** Essay

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Cuban government has been dramatically restructuring their economy, which has resulted in rapid social stratification. These reforms have included the "rationalization" of the workforce employed by the state. Workers dismissed from state employment are meant to find new jobs in the emerging private sector, or *cuentapropismo*. Because women are the majority of professional and technical workers employed by the state, rationalization puts them in a particularly vulnerable position. Therefore, it becomes crucial to assess to what extent the new private sector is accessible to women. Disturbingly, the percentage of female *cuentapropistas* has remained at around 26% since the opening of the sector in the 90s. To better understand how women from diverse backgrounds enter into the private sector, I conducted ethnographic interviews with twelve female *cuentapropistas*. My paper demonstrates how the failure of the Revolution in challenging the sexual division of labor both in and outside the home has limited the opportunities for women to enter the private sector, and relegates them to highly traditional, low paid work within *cuentapropismo*. In addition, I analyze the ways in which race, class, level of education, and family structure intersect with gender to facilitate or limit different women's access to the private sector. For women who have been able to enter into *cuentapropismo*, I examine the ways in which their social advantages and disadvantages are reproduced within the sector. I conclude with a discussion of how *cuentapropismo* fits within Cuba's socialist system, and suggest some methods to support women's access and success in the private sector.

**Name:** Callie McGarghan

**Year:** S2014

**Tutor:** Mirta Rodríguez Calderón

**Title:** "Let's Talk About Sex: Conversations About Sex Between Mothers and Daughters in Havana, Cuba"

**Medium:** Essay

In Havana I conducted research about women's sexual subjectivity by interviewing mothers and daughters about the kinds of conversations they are having together about sex and sexuality. What I found was that while most mothers and daughters have an open communication about sex, the discourse on Habanera women's sexuality, within the home and among academics, is based in the realm of health and science. Consequently, conversations that women are having together in reference to sexuality

are about the *risks* of sexual activity such as pregnancy and STIs (sexually transmitted infections), and how to avoid them--rather than about pleasure. In my work I also focus on women's beliefs surrounding abortion in Havana where it is legal, safe, and common. I argue that much like women's sexuality, abortion in Havana is based in a medical realm rather than a moral realm within which abortion is positioned in the United States. As a result Habaneras feel little to no shame in having abortions.

**Name:** Aurelis Troncoso

**Year:** S2014, S2015

**Tutor:** Los Angeles Diez Ferrer

**Title:** "Mujeres de Ocha: Voces con fuego en la lengua"

**Medium:** Poetry, Performance

Afrocuban culture has had a strong presence within Cuban society since the arrival of Africans who were enslaved in the fifteenth century and onward. Africans brought with them a number of religions, which continue to serve as a form of resistance and a way to preserve African traditions. *Mujeres de Ocha: Voces con fuego en la lengua* is the initiation of an investigation that began with my particular interest in black Cuban womyn's resistance within religions of African origin, specifically Regla de Ocha-Ifá. Black Cuban womyn face several forms of discrimination as they are positioned at the intersection of race and gender in the larger society, in addition to having to navigate spiritual spaces that are predominantly occupied by men. These power dynamics in turn impose limitations on womyn in the religion itself, despite the fact that womyn in this religion initially held roles as obba (master of ceremonies), oriate (diviner of diloggun), and as iyanifas (priestesses of Ifá). Throughout this investigation I have attended religious ceremonies, social gatherings, folkloric performances, and interviewed a number of womyn and men who practice Regla de Ocha-Ifá, regarding the representations of womyn in the religion and their opinions regarding the initiation of womyn into Ifá. In these participations I have observed the different tasks that womyn perform and how notions of patriarchy influenced such spaces and are denounced.

**Name:** Nataly Arroyo

**Year:** S2013

**Tutor:** Rebecca Chávez

**Title:** "Retrato de huELLAS de Cuba"

**Topic:** Female Identity

**Medium:** Documentary film

While it is said Cuba is a revolutionary country where there are no limitations for women or the production of art, this falls short of reality. Drawing from a variety of Cuban films, all directed by male filmmakers, Nataly came to Cuba with the idea that the Cuban woman was little more than a victim of her condition of womanhood and all that it encompasses: an object for men to objectify the moment she sets foot outside her home; the housewife whose only place is the kitchen, something that Castro legitimized a few years ago when he gave all women a crockpot as a token of appreciation for International Women's Day. These identity markers not only defined Cuban women but

also limited the construction and production of artistic voices to challenge these markers. Once in Cuba, Nataly realized that these constructions, while old, have left *huellas* in contemporary Cuban life. Therefore, she decided to seek out four renowned Cuban women artists in order to find out what they have to say in respect to these social and cultural constructions as women. Her questions came out of a curiosity of: Where and how do art and sociocultural constructions about women meet? How these artists who are also women navigate these existing sociocultural constructions and negotiate them in the production of their art? How does these women's role as artists allow them to become active participants in the formation of their own sociocultural identity? In what ways can their creative voices transgress existing sociocultural paradigms of what it means to be a woman for them and for other women as well? *Retrato de huELLAS de Cuba* is a short documentary in which Alicia Leal, Marilyn Solaya, Lesbia Vent Dumois, and Rocío García discuss their experiences as mothers, as artists, and as women who through their personal experiences or artistic endeavors are forging their own identities and whose creative voices are reimaginations of those social spaces. As **ELLAS** share their stories, the lines between culture, art, societal norms, censorship, race, gender, sexuality, and what it means to be a woman become blurred. **ELLAS** demonstrate that the definition of what it means to be a woman no longer means that you have to choose between being a mother, a housewife, an artist, but that they can be all that and more, something that should be celebrated.

**Name:** Stephanie del Pino

**Year:** S2013

**Tutor:** Carlos Lechuga

**Title:** "Yasmin, a Woman Who Wants to be Heard"

**Topic:** Profile of Yasmín Portales

**Medium:** Essay

The internet is a gateway to a massive array of vital information necessary for the benefit and well being of an individual, family, and communities. Unfortunately, accessing the internet and keeping up with innovations in its technologies is an expensive endeavor that many Cubans aren't privileged to afford. Despite this, many Cuban bloggers work around their limited access to reach out and connect with the global community. *Yasmin, a Woman Who Wants to be Heard* is a profile of Yasmín Portales, a feminist, critical Marxist, activist, mother, and prolific blogger. The film will explore the "grey zone" in Cuban blogosphere that she and many other bloggers inhabit because they are writing neither for nor against the government. I'm interested in discovering why she uses this medium to express her views on the intersections of gender/class in Cuba, where internet access is restricted, unreliable, and costly. I will explore questions such as: Why use the blog as a tool for social change and personal expression? How do Cubans gain access to internet? How does Yasmín articulate her organic feminist ideology rooted in lived experience on a blog, and what effect does it have for women in Cuba? And, most importantly, how does she balance a life of activism, blogging, being a mother, and also *resolviendo* in Cuban society?

**Name:** Diana Diaz

**Year:** S2012

**Tutor:** Celia Cedeño & Olga Marta Pérez

**Title:** "La mujer y la familia en la literatura y el teatro: un acercamiento a la realidad cubana contemporánea"

**Medium:** Essay

Diana's examination of Cuban narratives and plays produced after the 1959 Revolution attempts to reveal the presence of women as literary subjects through the vision of women writers and actresses and their endeavors to reflect their realities, reinterpreted artistically from different points of view. In her assessment, Diana first contextualizes the Cuban woman as a beneficiary of many public policies that protect and support her in becoming a professional, joining the labor force and fulfilling her reproductive role without jeopardizing her professional achievements. Drawing from interviews with writers, actresses and regular women, Diana concludes that it is especially during times of economic distress (i.e. the Special Period and its surviving effects) that women are expected to direct their home regardless of the equal participation commanded by the Family Code. In the selected works of narrative created by women writers of the nineties (Marilyn Bobes, Nancy Alonso, Maria Elena Llana, Lourdes de Armas, and Adelaida Fernandez de Juan) and plays with transcendental protagonist female characters produced by male playwrights after 1959 (Virgilio Piñera, Eugenio Hernandez, Alberto Pedro and Hector Quintero) for the lack of recognized female playwrights-, Diana identified five elements of contact with lived reality: the idealization of women in the private world and their rejection to live in limited societal roles, family in a social context, daily survival--the daily struggles of "resolver," and emigration as a possible solution--and the crisis of social and family values.

**Name:** Suanny Garcia

**Year:** S2012

**Tutor:** Carmen Gómez

**Title:** "Cuban Women: Clothing and Identity"

**Medium:** Essay

Suanny designed a project that evaluates the image Cuban women choose to display through their clothing. Her 19-page historical and analytic paper compares women's choice in garments grouped by age, economic status, sexuality, and identity. Through interviews with women on the streets of El Vedado, Old Havana, and Central Havana--and a small number in Santa Clara--as well as fashion designers on the island, Suanny evaluates the relationship connecting clothing and identity. Her two primary subject groups were: women ages 18-25 who are studying or just entering the work field and 35-50 year old women, who have experienced numerous changes in Cuba's political and social climate. She sought to understand what differentiates the two groups, what sets them apart, and if it was possible that Cuban women could express a collective identity through their image.

**Name:** Grace Hirt

**Year:** S2012

**Tutor:** Zaida Capote

**Title:** "Cuerpos bajo control: relaciones de poder en Cecilia Valdes"

**Medium:** Essay

Grace's project centered on careful reading of a selection of Cuban novels from two critically important periods in the nation's history: the mid-19th century's political and intellectual thinking and the practice of slavery, and the first decade after the triumph of the Revolution. Her work grew out of an interest in the concept of the female body in the male imagination, and how this body is constructed in relation to a transitional national identity. Her first fully-developed essay focused on "the great Cuban novel," Cecilia Valdés by Cirilo Villaverde. She also incorporated readings of three other novels from the same period with similar themes. In the study of this novel, Grace analyzes the ways in which societal tensions and corrupt power relationships are inscribed onto the bodies of Cecilia and the other female characters, all of whom play important symbolic roles but are given little or none of their own agency. Grace then examined three novels from the first revolutionary decade, 1959 - 69: Alejo Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces*; José Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*; and Edmundo Desnoes' *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. In her final composition, she focused on the figure of Sof'a in *El siglo*?, and the implications of Carpentier's identification and appropriation of the feminine--defined as inextricable from corporality, nature, and motherhood--to construct his grand vision of history and American identity. Throughout her study, Grace incorporated feminist and literary theory to deepen her analysis, concentrating on the idea of the female body as the body of the nation and how this conception has manifested itself in the national literature.

**Name:** Katherine Huppert

**Year:** S2012

**Tutor:** Eduardo Hernández

**Title:** Untitled

**Topic:** Experience of queer/gay visual artists & technical training in paper cut

**Medium:** paper cut

Katherine's project centered on two key components: a general observation of "queer"/gay culture in Cuba, in particular the experience and position of queer/gay visual artists on the island whose work deals explicitly with themes of gender and/or sexuality and the technical training and production of paper cut pieces. Underlying this observation were several key questions: Can the specific ideas of culture and identity in the U.S. translate to the Cuban context? How do you create the necessary visibility to have a voice in society while living in a culture with practically no room for individuality? In what ways can you claim, or simply occupy, space in the public sphere while under multiple forms of censorship? Does a culture have to be concrete or highly visible in order to exist? She interviewed the only three visual artists in Havana who are openly gay-identified on their views of the gay underworld in Cuba, the motivations behind their work and viewers' reactions to it, and the ways in which they navigate both their artistic

and personal identities. Responding to these interviews as well as her own perceptions while in Cuba, Katie produced three large-scale pieces in the art of paper cut under her tutor's supervision, which reflect some of the major themes and contradictions of gay life she observed.

**Name:** Jo Nguyen

**Year:** S2012

**Tutor:** Nelson Rodríguez

**Title:** "Cuban Women of the Third Age"

**Medium:** Oral history: audio documentary narratives & photographic report

Jo has created an oral history project which is a combination of audio documentary narratives or vignettes and photographic report about the so called women of the "third age." Her pieces are reflective, amusing, informative or surprising. They are not about accomplishments but instead about a person's passions, dreams, struggles, and the stories that make up their lives. These vignettes are an attempt to capture the spirit of the city and its residents, and particularly these elderly Cuban women. Key to Jo's project has been to give voice to an elder generation who is often overlooked by society. Her taped interviews were usually around thirty-minutes so that she could select what the piece's focus would be. She also had several photo sessions to become acquainted with her subjects and be able to capture the singularity of the storyline or narrative. Jo's four vignettes are not complete, full pictures of a life, but snapshots, glimpses, moments, windows.

**Name:** Sentinaro Sojwal

**Year:** S2012

**Tutor:** Alfredo Prieto

**Title:** "Exoticism and the Tourist Imagination: An Examination of Cuban Female Identity at Home and Abroad"

**Medium:** Ethnography, written paper

In her ethnography, Senti addresses the sexualized and racialized construction of Cuban women in the tourist imagination and examines the juxtaposition between this simplified production and the ideas of Cuban femininity and identity that exist within the nation itself, from the voices of its women. The accounts from Senti's field research illuminate the interconnectivity of the discourses of imperialism, nationalism, femininity, and globalization and highlight select significant effects of a tourist economy on Cuban women's lives and self-identification in the nation today. Drawing on academic texts and personal interviews with Cuban women (ranging from scholars to university students to a woman in the sex trade), Senti explored colonial legacies, the historic construction of the mulatta, sex tourism in Havana today, contemporary Cuban sexual attitudes, and the impacts of reggaeton, Cuba's most popular music, on female identity and sexual expression. Senti upholds that the commodified image of Cuban women that is proliferated today defines her as an exotic object for tourist consumption and silences her voice in the surrounding discourses of history and nationalism, serving a kind of erotic imperialism.



**Name:** Danielle Cattan  
**Year:** S2011  
**Tutor:** Cirenaica Moreira  
**Title:** "Fusion of Realities: A Collaboration with Cuban Female Artists"  
**Topic:** Cuban female artists' experiences  
**Medium:** Mixed Media

Danielle's project centered around an exploration of Cuban female artists' experiences. Together with these artists, she created a collaborative mixed media piece about their joint experiences as women and as artists. Vitally connected to this, a key aspect of her project concerned breaking down the wall between subject and photographer. This seemed particularly important to Danielle at this moment in Cuba given her observation that so many current (and particularly tourist) images of women in Cuba portrayed them in an exoticized and objectified fashion.

In the course of their collaborative production of joint canvasses and photographs, Danielle identified one seemingly key theme that emerged: the question whether one can be a productive female artist and remain on the island. She understood how anxiety laden this question was for her collaborators, and how the fact that all had chosen to stay, was reflected in the work they accomplished together.

**Name:** Dorothy Goldberger  
**Year:** S2011  
**Tutor:** Marta Núñez  
**Title:** "Por lo menos, las mujeres jóvenes no están perdidas"  
**Topic:** Young Cubana women  
**Medium:** Photography

In her project, Dot wanted to understand the radical differences between the lives of young women, compared to the preceding generations of women in Havana today. As a result of the Special Period, she argues, these women were born or grew up in the midst of severe economic and social instability. They now inhabit spaces and roles similar to their mothers, aunts and grandmothers, but in a new age and context. In her study, she finds that while these young women may share commonalities in their daily lives, they can have drastically different experiences from each other.

In a series of in-depth interviews with five young women ranging in ages from 14 to 26, and four Cuban authorities whose work is on gender and women, Dot explores, in their environments, the realities of the lives of these young women. Based on her interactions with them, she photographed and created with them a series of images that helped to represent aspects of their daily lives. Through this visual representation and a brief commentary involving the tentative conclusions she has drawn about their lives, she

sought to offer insight into the experiences of young Cubanas as they navigate their roles as women in their culture and society.

**Name:** Hanna Grieb

**Year:** S2011

**Tutor:** Margarita Mateo

**Title:** "Journeying into Darkness: A Literary Exploration of Special Period Havana"

**Topic:** Examination of Mirta Yáñez novel: Sangra por la Herida

**Medium:** Thesis paper

The Special Period prompted a shift in the focus of Cuban women's literature due to the inconceivable way sociopolitical developments rapidly changed their lives. Writers that experienced this dark era came to know a different Cuba, a Cuba that suffered a painful and dramatic change since the days of their youth. Hanna's intensive examination of literature incited by this traumatic period formed the basis of a composite work that includes several analytical essays and fiction narratives.

Hanna channeled most intensive efforts into the examination of Mirta Yáñez's most recent novel, "Sangra por la herida" (2010). Within this complex novel she sensitively unravels the resonant voices of a large cast of habaneros, who reflect upon los años duros of their past and present. In an entirely related context, she conducted an interview with a writer and economist Josefina de Diego, exactly of the new generation of woman writers, entitled "Mis recuerdos son como un rumor que me acompaña siempre." Throughout their discussion, Diego reflects upon the creative force yielded by remembrance and recognizes her work as "pequeños testimonios de esta cotidianidad." The finished interview has been accepted for publication by one of the most important journals dealing with Cuban culture.

Woven into her work, Hanna endeavored to meditate upon the ravages of recent history in her own fiction. In these short narratives, she considered the ways in which the Special Period directly and indirectly impacts the lives of those around her. Her literary investigation enhanced her understanding of the way a writer can wield literature as a transgressive instrument to inspect, reflect, and complicate popular histories embedded within society.

**Name:** Oskar Peacock

**Year:** S2011

**Tutor:** Lourdes de los Santos

**Title:** "cruzando margines"

**Medium:** Film

Oskar's field study project involved the filming and production of a visual document centered upon an exploration of individuals or groups of individuals in three communities that have developed, out of their own volition, along the margins of the cultural, philosophical, and economic parameters of the revolution. His film attempts to

explore these individuals and communities to get at a concrete personification of the nature and scope of these transgressed boundaries. He observed, carried out interviews with, and filmed his three subjects in individual chapters: first, Samantha, the star of the drag queen show held weekly in the Cabaret de las Estrellas in the Havana district of Lawton; second, Yanel Lorretta, a transsexual woman; and third, residents of the Cuban-Haitian community who, beginning in the 1990s Special Period settled, and indeed created an "illegal" community in, La Piedra, a shanty town on the outskirts of the Havana district of San Francisco de Paula. The chapters look at the history of each individual/community, and seek to get at the fraught nature of living on the boundaries of the acceptable, vis-à-vis the larger society and the state.

**Name:** Thais Guisasola  
**Year:** S2010  
**Tutor:** Rebeca Chávez  
**Title:** "Ladies First?"  
**Medium:** script, video

In a society where one's sexual identity and orientation is limited and controlled to fit the norm, actions that transgress and challenge expected behaviors reconfigure the meaning of citizenship and national identities. With this short script and video, I aim to be another voice reinforcing the importance of a society where different identities can coexist. This script/video is about performance in the content of Havana, Cuba

**Name:** Alicia Eddy-Quintana  
**Year:** S2009  
**Tutor:** Cirenaica Moreira  
**Title:** N/A  
**Topic:** Male Identity  
**Medium:** Photography

In many respects the history of Latin America has contributed to the rise and presence of the male-dominated social code of Machismo. My story begins with man's fear of losing power when their Other gains her own. This series of images began in Havana, Cuba in the spring of 2009 and will continue for years to come. It is a study, both personal and public, where identity and power are the focal points. I have attempted to create a figure of a man: a man who makes it easier for me to hate than love. This masculine figure has no reverence for me and therefore I often have contempt for him. Yet while my frustration with this man overpowers my ability to love him, I still have faith in him. Thus the images try to be respectful. They present the respect I have for him and the respect I wish was reciprocated. The images are close, detailed, and deep to show the intimacy I feel towards him while still displaying the detachment I believe exists. The camera serves as this separation. The lens of the camera allows me to get as close as possible while still representing a metaphorical severance. Thus, I am left with this contradiction. The photos are the beginning of my attempt to break this contradiction and to mend our fractured relationship.

**Name:** Courtney Hooks

**Year:** S2009

**Tutor:** Rodrigo Espina

**Title:** Negra Luz/Black Light

**Medium:** Essay, multi-media

I hope to raise the voices of black women and shine light on their life experiences from their points of view. For too long, the experiences of black women have been devalued, silenced, and erased. Enough already! I interviewed 35 women from diverse ages, vocations, economic situations, regions, skin colors, and hair types. We talked about various themes, including: how they view different forms of racism; the process of racial identity; the beauty ideals of black people; and their experiences with hair, hairdressers, perms, and other products. I am so grateful to all of the women who participated in and supported me throughout this project. They shared their food, their homes, their time, and above all, their truths.

Through this herstory I realized that hair is a site of happiness and pain, community and independence, oppression, and liberty. I would like all black women to know that we are beautiful as we are. Our natural state is not "broken" and doesn't need to be automatically "fixed." Our hair, our skin colors, our features don't need to be changed for anything or anyone.

In this project I use hair as a window through which I analyze racial identity and the position of black women in Cuban society. With these photos and interviews, I hope that the women in my project can illuminate their own stories and awaken some people that still don't know what significance the hair of black Cubanas holds, those who don't know that hair tells a grand tale.

**Name:** Sasha Mishkin

**Year:** S2008

**Tutor:** Eduardo Hernández

**Title:** "Hermanada: Cuban Life, Cuban Identity, from the Perspective of Cuban Women"

**Medium:** photo, text

In a country where multiple generations often live in one home, often even sharing one bedroom, where privacy is as hard to find as privatization and a crisis in material resources means few new houses are built, where numerous domestic responsibilities often demand the need for the cooperation of numerous family members, how does one distinguish the individual from the mass?

In a country where everyone seems to participate in a national sense of Cubanidad, where does one look for differences? One of the most pronounced differences I have found is that of gender. The responsibilities in the lives of Cuban women are distinct, as are their experiences. Though the state sought to socialize women's work with the triumph of the revolution (drawing them out of the domestic sphere and into the national labor force) the perseverance of gender norms and distinctions between men's and

women's work generate very different manners of self-identification within the collective whole.

Furthermore, since the special period, racial, and economic disparities have become ever more visible, so that the Cuba lived by one is not the Cuba lived by all. Still, there exists a Cuba that defines the daily lives of its people and a Cuba in which the Cubans define themselves.

With this project I intend to explore, through narrative photos and text, variations of self-identification in Cuban women. The project is composed of the stories, histories, and points of view of three women, all of different ages, races, and locations within La Habana. Since generational influence is a strong force, due to the close quarters in which people tend to live, I have decided to focus this project on the interacting identities of mothers and daughters.

Different generations of Cubans often have different relationships to the state and to their statehood. A woman who grew up in the eighties or nineties, at a time of crisis, may see her Cubanidad as different from that of a mother or grandmother who experienced her youth in the sixties, at the start of the revolution. Yet their views and experiences may intermingle and inform one other. The narratives employ the words and opinions of the women documented to demonstrate their individual relationship to Cuba and to themselves.