Newsletter, Fall 2011
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Women's and Gender Studies

From the Director: Greetings from Women's & Gender Studies!

By: Chantal Kalisa, WGS Director

I began my new position as director of Women's and Gender Studies in August 2011. It has been quite a busy start, but it has been a great honor and privilege to work with a dedicated faculty and staff. I want to thank associate director Rose Holz, program associate Glenda Moore, graduate student Catherine Medici-Thiemann and our new work study student Brooke Wissler. I am very grateful for their welcome and their hard work to ensure continuity during a period of transition. I also want to thank Margaret Jacobs and other past directors who have made it easier for me to step right in and continue the work of strengthening our program.

As I write this, we are towards the end of our joint search with the Department of Communication Studies. We have worked beautifully with Communication Studies and had an excellent pool of candidates. I want to thank Rose Holz for serving on the search committee and explaining the selection process to us. The search has occupied much of our time, but we will soon resume our work on WGS strategic priorities with our groups in Transnational Feminisms and Science and Gender Matters. We are also excited about our spring 2012 colloquium series, which will focus on masculinities studies (page 5). In addition, WGS is offering a course entitled Introduction to Men's Studies taught by Jan Deeds, director of UNL Women's Center.

I hope to get a chance to meet and work with each of you during my tenure. Here is a brief summary of my background. I came to UNL in 2001 and joined WGS in 2002. Since 2009, I have held a joint appointment in WGS and Modern Languages. My research has focused on violence and gender issues in African and Caribbean literatures, and on the 1994 genocide of Rwandan Tutsi. My current research is on artistic expressions in post-conflict situations with a special focus on transnational theatrical collaborations. As many of you know, my work on Rwanda has deep personal connections for me. I was born and raised in Burundi, where my parents had fled due to increasing violence in Rwanda before independence from Belgium in 1962. Though personally challenging, it has been intellectually stimulating to observe the process of reconstruction and reconciliation and particularly the role of gender in post-conflict situations. I plan on taking students to Rwanda once again in summer 2012. In addition to being a university professor, I am also a wife, and the mother of two boys (13 and 6) who sometimes must tolerate long transatlantic flights.

Thank you for staying involved in supporting our growing program.

No Limits 2012

"Beyond Violence: Dare to Speak"

University of Nebraska-Omaha, March 2 & 3, 2012

Keynote by Dr. Michael Kimmel and a Presentation of "I Want My Jacket Back" by Jenn Freitag

Submissions due January 27. http://www.unl.edu/womenssp/events/nolimits.shtml for more information.

Artwork by Glenda Dietrich Moore

WGS Colloquium Series:

"Brain Sex: Truth, Tall Tales, and Time for a Developmental Perspective"

- Dr. Lise Eliot

Grant Forssberg (Graduate Student, History) and Beth Ridling (Senior, Department of Psychology)

Popular culture has long reinforced the notion of innate biological differences between the sexes as an explanation for a range of cognitive, emotional, and social traits thought to differentiate boys and girls. This may not in fact be the case, as neuroscientist at the Rosalind Franklin University Dr. Lise Eliot, now claims. Rather, socialization may be a more appropriate explanation for some of the differences parents and educators notice in their children in the home and the classroom.

Little empirical evidence exists that females and males are "hard-wired" differently. Many studies reporting sex differences in the brain are not replicable and have inadequate sample sizes or methodology. While there are small sex differences in some areas, these differences do not affect cognitive functioning of females and males as dramatically as we are often led to believe. Instead, there is evidence that environmental factors can exaggerate or minimize differences in the brains of children that continue to develop after birth. Sex differences on aptitude tests in various subjects, for instance, are more likely related to the socialization of children in gender roles. We as a society may be guilty of inducing the discrepancies we cite between boys and girls.

Dr. Eliot's research reveals a cultural dimension to the study of sex and the brain that may well have significance for other areas of medicine, as well as other academic disciplines. To what extent are the empirical studies we conduct influenced by our basic expectations, such as those about gender? Just what can be assumed about human nature, traits, or biology if so fundamental a category as sex may be more fluid than we once believed? Dr. Eliot points the finger at popular books like *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1993) as products of the pervasive cultural expectations surrounding the field and their effect on "good" science. If social scientists have substituted the category of gender in place of sex then we should be cognizant of it in our respective interpretations.

WGS Colloquium Series:

"Motherhood, the Elephant in the Laboratory: Reconsidering What It Means to be a Scientist"

-Dr. Emily Monosson

Kathleen Lacey (PhD Student, English and WGS Minor)

On March 15, 2011, Dr. Emily Monosson, toxicologist and editor of the recent book *Motherhood, The Elephant in the Laboratory: Women Scientists Speak Out* (2008), gave a talk as part of the WGS Colloquium Series, "Science and Gender Matters." I was pleasantly surprised at Dr. Monosson's focus on women whose work takes place outside of the university. Of particular interest was her response to the idea of the "leaky pipeline," which is used to describe the disappearance of women at various stages of becoming and then working as a scientist. She felt that not only was this metaphor short-sighted but it did not take into account the various ways one could be a scientist. "The leaky pipeline" has a very narrow view of what constitutes scientific work, and tends to follow the model set forth by institutions that have not caught up with contemporary concerns about flexibility and raising a family.

Dr. Monosson wanted to be a scientist, but she also wanted to be a mother; in order to do her best at both, she decided to work part-time. Yet, as anyone who has been privy to the struggles of motherhood in academia can attest, her decision cast doubt upon her "dedication" to her work. She also faced criticism from those in the field because she decided to pursue different avenues of scientific work. Much of her work comes from grants and consulting; such work, she says, is not given as much respect as that of academic scientists. Not an isolated situation, her book showcases essays from other women concerned with these same struggles; all have seen their work devalued because of their choices to pursue alternative ways to do science while raising children. This outpouring of common experiences, Monosson says, is a reflection of the common belief that the more time one puts into their work, the more dedicated he or she is; as a result, scientists like Monosson end up looking as though they do not care about their work as much others.

Perhaps the most important point of Monosson's talk, at least for me, was her emphasis on changing the perceptions of what it means to be a scientist. The idea that one is a "failure" if one pursues a career outside of academia is pervasive. Dr. Monosson's life and experience show us that this is simply not the case, and gives someone like me permission to step off the beaten path.

WGS Colloquium Series:

"Gendered Innovations in Science and Engineering"

-Londa Schiebinger

Catherine Medici-Thiemann (PhD Student, History and WGS Minor)

On April 4th, University of Nebraska-Lincoln alumna Dr. Londa Schiebinger spoke about her work as the director of the Gendered Innovations in Science, Medicine, and Engineering Project at Stanford University. In her talk, Schiebinger (who is also the John L. Hinds Professor of the History of Science at Stanford) discussed the three distinct levels for analyzing issues concerning women and gender in science. These include how to increase the number of women in science, how to remove institutional barriers, and how to analyze sex and gender in order to yield new ideas. Her focus was on this third area, what she calls "Gendered Innovations." She sees this in the use of methods of sex and gender analysis as a resource to create new knowledge. Schiebinger presented several concrete examples of how gender analysis can profoundly enhance excellence in science and engineering, including how to make seatbelts better for women.

Schiebinger also discussed the Stanford Gendered Innovations Project where they are developing state-of-the-art "Methods of Sex and Gender Analysis" for basic and applied research in science, medicine, and engineering. She argued that gendered innovations, fueled by sophisticated gender methods, stimulate the creation of new gender-responsible science and technology, and by doing so enhance the lives of both men and women around the world. Schiebinger's work shows that an interest in issues of women and gender can lead scholars in many directions, including truly interdisciplinary work.

WGS Colloquium Series:

"Playing at the Center of the Cosmos: The Meaning of Hildegard's *Ordo Virtutum*"

- Dr. Margot Fassler

Mevi Hova (PhD Student, English)

On October 10, Margot Fassler, Keough-Hesburgh Professor of Music History at the University of Notre Dame, presented on Hildegard von Bingen as part of WGS's Fall Colloquium 2011 Series. Dr. Fassler offered an interesting analysis of Hildegard of Bingen's play, *Ordo Virtutum*, believed to be composed in 1151 and now considered the first liturgical drama. Hildegard of Bingen, often referred to as "Germany's first woman doctor and scientist," was a Catholic nun who later became the abbess of the Benedictine Monastery of Disibodenberg. She is also considered one of the first mystics of the modern age because she experienced and wrote of her visions. *Hildegard's Ordo Virtutum (The Play of the Virtues)* depicts the epic journey of the soul and its struggles between the virtues and the devil.

Dr. Fassler's presentation showed how *Ordo Virtutum*, through its music and meaning, sheds light on how this extraordinary woman was ahead of her time in terms of her writing, music, art, and interpretation of the Bible. Dr. Fassler also noted that the play's setting is drawn from Hildegard's illustration of the cosmic egg–one of her visions. Through its various layers, the cosmic egg, as Dr. Fassler asserted, displays what Hildegard viewed as the relation of the natural world to the Godhead. Every part of the egg stands for specific biblical symbols and truths, but interestingly, the egg, according to Fassler, also represents a womb that is positioned in a birthing posture. For Hildegard, then, the egg illustration serves as a symbol to guide human beings through their making of choices. It was interesting to discover through Dr. Fassler's presentation that all of Hildegard's symbolism, though strongly focused on Christianity, found its source of inspiration in womanhood.

Faculty Achievements

Susan Belasco (English) gave the keynote address, "Stowe in Her Time and Ours," at "Harriet Beecher Stowe at 200: Home, Nation, and Place in the 21st Century," a conference celebrating Stowe's 200th birthday at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine.

Barbara DiBernard (English and WGS Emerita) received the Pound-Howard Award for Distinguished Service at UNL from the faculty senate.

Rose Holz (WGS Assistant Director) has been promoted to Associate Professor of Practice in Women's and Gender Studies.

Alice Kang (Political Science) presented her paper "Bringing International Women's Rights Home: Issue-Specific Mobilization in Muslim and Non-Muslim Africa" at the American Political Science Association Meeting in Seattle, WA.

Margaret Jacobs (History) published two articles in the last year: "Getting out of a Rut: Decolonizing Western Women's History," *Pacific Historical Review* and "Western History: What's Gender Got to Do With It?" *Western Historical Quarterly*.

Stephen Lahey (Classics & Religious Studies) has been promoted to Associate Professor of Classics and Religious Studies with tenure.

Kristen Lucas and Carly Woods (Communication Studies) will present their research project on gender and labor activism, "Gossard Girls and Girdles: Gender, Labor, and 'Material' Rhetorics at the 1949 Gossard Strike" at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association convention in New Orleans in November, 2011.

Julia McQuillan (Sociology) has been promoted to Full Professor in the Department of Sociology.

Julia Schleck's (English) book, *Telling True Tales of Islamic Lands: Forms of Mediation in Early English Travel Writing, 1575-1630,* was published in June 2011by Susquehanna University Press.

Pat Tetreault's (LGBTQA Resource Center) article, "Perceptions of Campus Climate" will be published in the *Journal of Homosexuality*.

Carly Woods (Communication Studies) was selected as the winner of the 2011 Outstanding Dissertation Award from the American Society for the History of Rhetoric (ASHR) for her dissertation, "Women Debating Society: Negotiating Difference in Historical Argument Cultures."

Wendy Weiss' (Textiles, Clothing and Design) work will be part of two upcoming exhibits, *Symbiosis* and *Nebraska Now*.

Student /Alumni Achievements

Sean James (LGBTQ/Sexuality Studies Alum) is studying law at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Ananya Krishnan (WGS Alum) is working with the Peace Corps as a community health educator in Cameroon for the next two years.

Catherine Medici-Thiemann (WGS Grad Specialization) won the graduate paper award at the 2011 South Central Renaissance Conference for her work, "'A Very Goddess of Persuasion': Representations of Elizabeth's Privy Chamber Woman, Mary Sidney."

Susan Sheppard (WGS Alum) is a community educator with Central Health Sevices of Nebraska. She is working on HIV testing and education and reproductive planning.

Justin Shilhanek (LGBTQ/Sexuality Studies Alum) is studying law at the University of Iowa.

Welcome to our New Faculty

Stephen Buhler, Aaron Douglas Professor of English. Buhler's interests include the literary culture of Early Modern England, especially literature's connections with philosophy and the performing arts.

Beth Burkstrand-Reid, Assistant Professor of Law. Burkstrand-Reid's research focuses on how the assumption of nontraditional gender roles impacts the development of family law.

Graduate Students Win Fulbrights

WGS graduate specialization students Carrie Walker (English) and Laura Roost (Political Science) were awarded Fulbrights. Walker will travel to Jamacia and conduct archival research to examine how Jamaican women have addressed the status of women through letter-writing since Independence in 1962. Roost will travel to Rwanda to conduct research on the role of women's non-governmental organizations in the country's post-genocide recovery. Both Carrie and Laura participated in the Women's and Gender Studies Transnational Feminism group and attended the Practicum on Advocacy at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Congratulations, Carrie and Laura!

Congratulations Graduates

PhD Specializations:

Cynthia Williams

Majors:

Chelsea Chappell, Karen Criss, Shasta Inman, and Ananya Krishnan

Minors:

Devon Allen, Whitney Clausen, Eva Gautam, Sylvia Hall, Kimberly Knox, Rebecca Richters, Hayley Stefkovich, Catherine Damm, and Sarah LaRose

WGS Colloquium Series:

"The History of ACT-UP"

- Sarah Schulman

Jennifer Florimón, (Senior; Psychology major,English and LGBTQ/Sexuality Studies minor)

The AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP) was founded in 1987 to combat out-of-control costs for AIDS treatment and the stigmatization faced by those with AIDS. These activists began a movement of direct action and gave time, money, and energy to a cause they knew needed immediate attention. ACT-UP arranged public funerals, threw ashes on the White House lawn, and protested outside of both the CDC and the FDA to get women's symptoms recognized and research conducted for better treatments for their conditions.

In her October 28th talk about the history of ACT-UP, Sarah Schulman also showed a sneak preview of a feature film on the history of AIDS by Jim Hubbard and Schulman. This project, "United in Anger: A History of ACT-UP," was developed as a response to a radio comment which disregarded all struggles faced by those early advocates for better health care for those suffering from AIDS. The film clips we saw included footage from the protests and campaigns ACT-UP led. As hard as it was to watch these nonviolent protesters be cuffed and dragged away, it was necessary in order to gain an understanding of the battles fought to get to the point we are at today. The film contains a side rarely seen that the dominant members of society tend to gloss over, and it should be taught in schools around the nation. Part of Schulman's work is also dedicated to developing an accompanying Teacher's Guide to provide educators with a way to discuss various aspects of the film more easily and openly.

Sarah Schulman came to UNL to show the history of a political group dedicated to getting treatment for people with AIDS, but the other side of her message was one of hope: individuals can band together to create social change. It isn't impossible to transform the world.

SAGE and Students For Choice Update

Two of the student groups affiliated with Women's and Gender Studies, SAGE (Students Advocating Gender Equity) and Students for Choice, have been revitalized this year!

SAGE seeks to provide a place of action, discussion, and academic development for students interested in feminist and gender concerns on the UNL campus and the Lincoln community. SAGE meetings are held jointly with the student group Students for Choice. UNL's Students for Choice is a student organization dedicated to increasing awareness of reproductive health and rights and promoting the security of personal reproductive choices, as well as other issues related to personal freedoms. This fall SAGE and Students for Choice have been holding weekly meetings, phone banking for Planned Parenthood, and holding "Crafternoons" where members can meet informally.

Meetings are held Wednesdays from 11:30 – 1:30 in the Nebraska Union (room posted). On many Thursdays from 6-7pm the groups do ad hoc volunteering for feminist organizations. For up-to-date information on meeting locations, please check the groups' Facebook pages, facebook.com/SAGE.UNL and facebook.com/UNL.CHOICE.

For news, events, & info, go to:
http://www.unl.edu/womenssp

Spring 2012 Colloquium

The Women's and Gender Studies Program's spring 2012 colloquium series will focus on issues of masculinity. It will feature a talk in January by Maria Camboni on masculinity in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and in April a panel on masculinity by UNL professors James Garza, Jan Deeds, and Iker González-Allende. On March 1, the series will feature a talk by Michael Kimmel based on his recent book *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, a best-selling investigation of young people's lives, based on interviews with more than 400 young men. For more information on this exciting series, see the colloquium page on WGS website.

Spring 2012 Special Topics Course:

WMNS 498/898 Introduction to Men's Studies

This course is an introduction to the field of men's studies from its beginnings in the 1970s to the present. Drawing from multiple disciplines, students will examine the history of men's movements, the definitions of masculinities, and the intersection of masculine identity with race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender performance, age, and other characteristics.

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Campaign: LASWMNS07

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