

WISE WORDS

the first , but certainly not the last, word in women's studies . . .

Spring 2005

Addressing the Gender Gap: The Current Hot Topic!

. . . A Message from the Director

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WISE WORDS

Newsletter provides a forum to encourage students and friends of Women's Studies in the communities to come together (connect) for the purpose of discussing issues of importance in the region; and, to enhance existing relationships and generate new partnerships.

We can't seem to get past the simplistic and satisfying temptation of dichotomous thinking about gender – lumping all the boys together and comparing them to all the girls. One size fits all – Mars or Venus, hunters or gatherers, bread-winners or caretakers. No need for theorizing . . . it seems pretty evident! Three recent examples of the persuasiveness of such gender polarization come to mind. The first example involves the provocative comments by Harvard University President Larry Summers last January in which he explained the gender gap among top-tier tenured science professors by saying that “women are just not as interested as men in making the sacrifices required by high-powered jobs” and that “men may have more intrinsic aptitude for high-level science.” He also admitted that “women may be victims of old-fashioned discrimination.” The second example is a recent publication by the Ontario Ministry of Education entitled *A Practical Guide to Improving Boys' Literacy Skills*. In order to justify the focus on boys, the booklet states that “providing equitable opportunities for girls is a familiar topic.” If one buys into the notion of gender differences

whereby males are better at science and females are better at reading it is not difficult to also be convinced that females are more emotional and nurturing and males are more objective and logical.

Such simplistic binary thinking also provides a convenient rationale for why women should stay home and take care of husbands and children as well as why they earn less money for the paid work that they do. Women, it would seem, are less ‘committed’ to the workforce and are constantly leaving early to deal with their domestic chores or interrupting their careers for maternity leaves. Moreover, these inconvenient issues are left solely in the hands of women to deal with. The cover story of *Newsweek* magazine on February 21, 2005 perpetuates this viewpoint. *The Myth of the Perfect Mother and Why it Drives Real Women Crazy* offers advice to mothers about how to balance their busy lives. Never factoring fathers into the equation, the author instead suggests that women ‘with options’ should drop out of the work force and “apply their skills at climbing career ladders to pushing their children up them instead.” With such powerful

PLEASE SEE *MOVE BEYOND DICHOTOMIES/ P2*

I would have girls regard
themselves not as adjectives
but as nouns . . .

~ Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Newsletter Focus . . .

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Move Beyond Dichotomies

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statements stacked against them, it's a wonder that any girl/woman is resilient enough to even dream of higher learning or a career in science or any other field. (Ironically, women have outnumbered men in college for more than a decade).

Gender polarization also opens the debate about 'why' men and women differ. While one argument supports the notion of genetic and biological differences, the other emphasizes socialization. Amanda Ripley addresses this question in the March 7/05 issue of *Time* magazine – *The Real Truth About Women's Brains*. Although women's brains are smaller, they appear to be more densely packed with neurons and have more connections between the parts of the brain that handle emotions and language. The parts of the brain that handle verbal fluency appear to mature earlier in girls but the parts involved in spatial reasoning appear to develop earlier in boys. For schools, this might mean that we change the learning environment and provide a range of experiences that would value and enhance all abilities regardless of gender. Rather than privileging math, science and linguistic over the arts, we might do well to realize that we need all types of intelligences and that gendered traits are partially learned and adaptable.

As Rachel Falmagne (2000) points out, the mode of logical thinking was promoted by Aristotle in the Athenian institution of public debate many centuries ago. As a result, abstract reasoning superseded concrete, subjective knowledge and became a masculinist instrument of epistemic domination. The influence of logical (scientific) thinking on Western thought has been profound and enduring over the years. Piagetian epistemology, for example, posits formative

logic on a higher cognitive level than concrete operations. Falmagne concludes that gender cannot be treated as an untheorized variable in debates about cognitive phenomena. The fact that women have historically been shut out and denied access to formal rationality provides a counter argument to brain theory research. By valuing logical, scientific thought in our schools, other ways of knowing have been discounted and silenced. Over time, this foregrounding of male thinking modes has also led to the invisibility of women, their experiences and their perspectives in all fields of study.

The December 20/04 issue of *Time* provides a powerful example of how this trend in profiling male thinking continues today. In a feature story titled *The Best Pictures of the Year*, fourteen of the photographers who took the pictures were men and two were women. Sixteen of the photos included men or boys as subjects while only three included women. Seven of the sixteen male photos depicted acts of aggression, five others showed acts of heroics or rescuing people and several others showed emotional men reacting to scenes of violence. In contrast, the women were photographed losing a race in the Olympics, participating in a lesbian marriage and voting for the first time. If pictures are worth a thousand words, what would these words be? Apparently women just don't make interesting subjects or don't do much that is newsworthy. They fall over hurdles and are just gaining the right to vote. If women react emotionally, it is not even worth a picture. *Time* describes these photographs as "our collective soul in 2004." And yet, the Ontario Ministry of Education suggests that we have focused enough on girls and it's time to return to the boys. Why can't we do both and look for new approaches beyond dichotomies that will enhance and support everyone?

'Apparently women just don't make interesting subjects or don't do much that is newsworthy'

We'll miss you, Sharon!

The Centre for Women's Studies is saying goodbye to Sharon Abbey as WISE Director. Over the past three years the Centre has benefited greatly from the many contributions Sharon has made. Students, staff, and faculty have all been at the receiving end of her encouragement and support, her insight, enthusiasm and wisdom. While it's impossible to sum up a person in just a few lines, what comes to my mind is Sharon's calm and gentle ways of promoting all things women! Always quick to suggest ways in which we can support and encourage each other, she is a proponent of building bridges, and a believer in finding ways to connect people rather than erecting barriers that cause separation and isolation. She is not afraid to step in and voice opposition against inequity and injustice, as she often says, "Sometimes we just need to stir things up a little bit." Sharon will be on sabbatical this coming year. We wish her well, and hope that she may enjoy many new experiences of growth and learning.

Women's Studies Welcomes Newest Faculty & Staff



Ellen Faulkner
(Sociology)

The Center for Women's Studies welcomed Dr. Ellen Faulkner to Brock in September of 2004. Dr. Faulkner completed her Ph.D. in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education from OISE/Uof T. She holds an Honours B.A. in Women's Studies and an M.A. in Sociology. Women's Studies courses were consciousness raising for her, and helped link her volunteer work at women's shelters with her research. This began her research on activism. She has many publications, and prior to coming to Brock has taught *Women in Law* at the University of Windsor. Her current work, *Living in the Shadows: Queer Bashing in Canada*, researches hate crimes, particularly as they relate to lesbian women's experience. She notes that more often than not, more attention is given to hate crimes and abuse against gay males than it is to the experience of lesbian women. Dr. Faulkner gave a guest lecture on anti-gay/lesbian violence for *WISE 3P95* in 2005. Dr. Faulkner supports Women's Studies as an employable degree, and welcomes the opportunity to become more involved with the Centre for Women's Studies in the future.



Lynne Bubic
(Harassment Prevention Officer)



Lynne Bubic stepped into the role of Brock's Harassment Prevention Officer in August 2004. Lynne comes to this position well qualified. She completed her Honours B.A. Psychology at Brock University 1991, and Bachelor of Law in 1994 from the University of Western Ontario. She practiced Criminal and Family law in Niagara Falls from 1996-97. But it was her work in the non-profit voluntary sector for the John Howard Society and the Ontario March of Dimes that provided her with a greater sense of job satisfaction. She has also taught classes at Brock in the past, such as Labour Law, and Strategic Management, for the Faculty of business. Ms. Bubic's goal is to create and encourage a more positive environment for students at Brock, one that includes more recognition of the diversity among students. Her position as Brock's Harassment Prevention Officer allows her to combine her legal background and her experience in the volunteer sector. Women's Studies, she says, is important because women often have a different perspective and approach to solving problems, which often times generates a more positive outcome.



Student Focus:

Paige Blacklock
(3rd year WISE Major and Brock University Residence Don)



Paige Blacklock will be one of the first students to graduate with a B.A. (Honours), WISE major from Brock. After taking *WISE IF90* as an elective, and really enjoying it, Paige decided to do a WISE co-major with English. She was excited when, in 2005, Brock offered WISE as a full major, and quickly changed her major declaration. Paige chose this program because she believes in it and has a passion for it. She loves deconstructing issues pertaining to women and their surroundings. After graduation she plans

to go either to Teachers College or do Graduate Studies. She would like to be an elementary school teacher because she believes that in order to make a change you need to make a difference. She plans to use feminist pedagogical techniques in the classroom, and hopes to "expand the minds of children beyond the ordinary."

Last year Paige was a Don Designate, and this year she serves as a Don in the student residence. She enjoys interacting with students and serving as an outlet for them if they need someone to talk to or just need a friend. She finds that her

students often ask her about her major in WISE and want to know what it is about. In her experience, Women's Studies is not as openly embraced as some other majors are, so she uses people's inquiries as a "teachable moment," educating when she can about women's issues.

International Women's Day Event 2005

On March 9, 2005, almost 100 women packed into a meeting room at the St. Catharines Centennial Library in celebration of International Women's Day. They laughed, cried, and nodded in agreement as four local women told their inspirational and thought-provoking stories.

Laura Thomas encouraged us to not let traditional gender roles stop us from doing what we want to do. She didn't let the idea of 'no chicks in the band' stop her from doing what she wanted. Among her many musical activities, she is an associate symphony conductor and percussionist, two roles traditionally held by men. She delighted us with her response when a teacher pointed out that she "didn't write like Ian." "Of course not", she said, "I'm not Ian!"

Lee Ann Pocknell always knew she was gay, and her story inspired us to not only be true to ourselves, but to be proud of who and what we are. Lee Ann left home at 15, and spent the next few years drinking, doing drugs, and partying. Tired of being ashamed of who she was, she went into rehab, sobered up, finished high school, and now works for the Regional Niagara Public Health Department. She has a particular passion for young people, especially those who don't "feel like they have anyone to go to," those who think "nobody cares."

Malika Mounir came to Canada because her ambitions were too big for Morocco. An immigrant herself, she founded and co-ordinates The Immigrant Women's Network of Niagara. She sees many newcomers to Niagara, especially refugee women struggling with the same things she did. The monthly support group she co-ordinates offers seminars and career training specially tailored to refugee women. Many refugee women are often sent ahead with their children, and they are at a loss as to how to start a new life. "I know what they're going through," Malika said. "I walked the walk."

Marion Walker spent 40 years doing two jobs: raising 10 children while doing full-time paid work. This was at a time when most women stayed home. When men asked her how she did it all – took care of all those children and worked full time in the paid labour market – she looked them squarely in the eye and asked "how do *you* do it?" After retiring, her son pointed out that all she did now was bake, garden, and shop. Wasn't there something else she would like to do? She's now one year away from earning her B.A. in Women's Studies. And she doesn't plan to stop there. Marion made it very clear that retiring does *not* mean you actually have to retire.

Welcome MeriJean!

The Centre for Women's Studies welcomes MeriJean Morrissey as its new Director. MeriJean completed her B.F.A. at the University of Illinois, spent a year at Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in Paris, followed by a term at the Art Institute of Chicago. She came to Brock in 1984, and is Associate Professor and Director of the Visual Arts Program. She teaches Honours Studio as well as advanced painting and drawing. MeriJean's own practice focuses on the use of poetic devices, in particular how parody and metaphor are used to enhance meaning. While she is a master printmaker, painting and installation work play a prominent role. Her practice is sensitive to postmodern and feminist representation. MeriJean's work is represented in over fifty public and corporate art collections. What she likes to do most, however, is to work closely with students, in particular

those in the Women's Studies Program, a program she has been involved with since its inception. "I am so looking forward to participating fully with all the wonderfully WISE women, who commit their time, hearts, and knowledge so generously to the excellence of the program, as well as getting to know more of the students" she says. While it may be a bit early for MeriJean to have a clear vision for the program, as someone from the Humanities Faculty, she certainly hopes to encourage more humanists to become involved. "I do believe we are in a very socially and politically conservative period," she says, "where it has become imperative to recommit to many of the original ideals of feminism. I hope that the Centre will be able to provide leadership by raising our profile in the university and the community. With so many terrific women helping, I know we can do this, and have some fun too."

This edition of *WISE WORDS* was edited by Beatrix Prinsen. Contributions by Krista Barnett, as part of a volunteer placement for *WISE 3P95: Experiential Learning*, and layout co-ordinated by Penni Lafleur. To find out how you can assist with the creation of the Fall 2005 edition, please contact Beatrix Prinsen at bprinsen@brocku.ca. An electronic version of this Newsletter can be accessed at www.brocku.ca/womensstudies

Words To The WISE

UPCOMING EVENTS:

WISE MIX & MINGLE

Dr. Sharon Abbey will be hosting a social for WISE Majors and Co-Majors, faculty, TAs, and staff on Tuesday April 12, 2005 (5:00 - 7:00 p.m.), 112 Marsdale Drive (off Lockhart at base of escarpment).

ROSALIND BLAUER AWARD

Dr. Roberta Robb, past Director of WISE, is this year's Rosalind Blauer Award recipient. The award and reception will be held on Friday April 29, at 12:15, in the Alumni Lounge of Schmon Tower.

WISE AWARDS, SCHOLARSHIPS AND BURSARIES

Dr. Susan Clark Scholarship (\$1250): Awarded annually to student in WISE program who demonstrates financial need. Students must apply.

Nellie Award in Women's Studies (\$80): Awarded to second year student with major in WISE program with highest average in WISE courses.

THE FOLLOWING AWARDS ARE SELECTED BY WOMEN'S STUDIES' AWARDS COMMITTEE

Josephine Meeker Research Fund in Women's Studies (\$250): Awarded to fourth year students in women's studies to offset costs of the honours thesis. This award is traditionally divided among all fourth year major students (after the last Friday in October).

Melvin Perlman Scholarship (\$500): Awarded to best all-around student in WISE program (minimum 75% average).

Mallie Frances Jones Bursary (\$500): Awarded to major or co-major student in WISE program who exhibits academic promise (minimum 70%) and demonstrates financial need.

Hazel M. Wood Prize (\$125): Awarded to a student, in any year, who has displayed strength in academics and participation in the University community and who has financial need.

Rosalind (Hyman) Blauer Award (\$500): Awarded to members of Brock community (students, staff, faculty) engaged in activities which illuminate research and bring attention to, or improve the position of women in contemporary society. Nominations should be directed to the Director of Women's Studies to be considered by the Awards Committee.

WISE COURSES

SPRING 2005

WISE 1F90: *Introduction to Women's Studies.*

Overview of socio-cultural, political, institutional and theoretical approaches to, and historical, philosophical and literary foundations of the study of women's lives.

Lectures, seminar, 3 hours per week.

WISE 3P96: *Women, Men and the Body (also offered as PEKN 3P96).*

Critical and reflective examination of historical, philosophical, socio-cultural and religious influences on the body from a variety of feminist perspectives.

Lectures, tutorial, lab, 3 hours per week. Prerequisite: WISE 1F90 or PEKN (PHED) 1P93 or permission of the instructor. Note: experiential work (somatic, movement, expressive) is part of the course experience.

Completion of this course will replace previous assigned grade in PHED 3P96.

SUMMER 2005

WISE 2P00: *Classic and Contemporary Discourses in Women's Studies.*

Issues-based approach to the gender-intersected character of society and culture from women's perspectives within a variety of feminist theoretical frameworks. *Lectures, seminar, 3 hours per week.*