

Women's Studies at Rutgers

SPRING 1996
NEWSLETTER



From The Director

As many of you know, the recent search process revealed disagreements in the Women's Studies community about priorities and the hierarchy of scholarship and activism. These arguments have been endemic to Women's Studies over the years, perhaps inevitably in a field where so much is at stake: not only complicated political issues, but also personal issues of fulfillment, and institutional issues of one's place in the university. But we have thought of ourselves as a community, defined as an affinity group rather than, say, a family, or a small town, where your main association is not primarily an affinity of interests. Women's Studies has thrived at Rutgers as an affinity group with loyalties to feminist work, to critiquing traditional definitions of knowledge, and often, because of our lack of support from the university, to changing the university. I sense that now, partly because of the success of Women's Studies, our community is strained because we are so much older and larger, with different generations of scholars as well as enormous diversity in the work being done. We have become more like a family in the sense of having to put up with each other, rather than a like-minded affinity group, and in this sense we are more like a traditional department, where consensus is by no means assured on issues of basic values.

Of course, because we are not a department, but a program with many members who have primary connections to other departments, we do not have to put up with each other, and that's what worries me. It's hard to force people to face arguments if they don't have to, and the easiest thing in the world is not to come to a Women's Studies meeting. But what we need now more than ever is to talk to each other about our disagreements and together forge a vision for the future of Women's Studies at Rutgers. I think that our affinity is least clear right now over our relation to the university, which is starting to give some support both to the program and to individual feminist scholars. As we finally start to get some respect (though by no means from all quarters), we also are plagued by doubt: Have we changed the university or is it changing us? Can feminist politics and feminist scholarship coexist? How do we best serve the needs of our students? What should be our relationship to community activism?

To answer these vital questions I think we have to begin by acknowledging where our basic affinity persists: We are a community committed to feminist work, and we have come to a consensus over the years (through another long-running discussion) that work on gender must always be inflected by race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and the many other factors of location. From this affinity, our principled differences need to be talked through to some renewed consensus about our future. The acknowledgment of differences, whether we are fighting them or celebrating them, has always been our strength.

Harriet Davidson

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First of all, I want to thank everyone for helping to make my return to the faculty after nearly twenty years in university administration both easy and challenging. I cannot imagine a better place to be than in Women's Studies while a graduate program is getting underway and as plans for a new building and more stabilized faculty resources are coming to fruition. And, of course, no one could ask for an environment more supportive than that provided in Women's Studies by Harriet Davidson and Barbara Balliet, and Joanne Givand and Adelina Rodriquez. They have been invaluable in assuring a smooth transition, in both the graduate and the undergraduate programs in this first year while Alice Kessler-Harris (after five heroic years of sustained effort) is taking a much deserved (and needed) research break.

I want to say to our MA students in particular that I stand in admiration of the course you have set for yourselves, and wish each of you success as you approach the end of your concentrated year of graduate work in Women's Studies and related disciplines. Please know that I am available to help in any way I can--as is the rest of the staff. And, of course, the entire Women's Studies community at Rutgers wishes you every success as you work through this challenging course. Good luck!

Barbara Callaway



The Women's Studies Program is pleased to announce that Dorothy Ko has accepted a joint appointment in The Department of History and Women's Studies. She is now Associate Professor of History at The University of California, San Diego.

Dorothy's intellectual trajectory is just as eclectic. The consistent theme of her scholarship, however, is an incessant search for ways to redefine the parameters and paradigms of pre-modern women's history. Her recently published book, Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China, shows how the integration of gender into her analysis leads to new periodization of late imperial Chinese history, new ways to conceptualize power and new approaches to vexing debates on Chinese modernity. She parts ways with the firmly entrenched "victim script" that has dominated Chinese nationalist and communist discourses as well as Euroamerican feminist discourses. She is the first historian to pose the question of "how did the Confucian gender system function so well for so long?" and use women's own writings to attempt an answer.

Currently, Dorothy is seeking to address some of the historical concerns which her first book raised. She is turning to material culture, decoding the nature of the Chinese writing system and the Confucian *wen* culture (civility) of which it was an integral part, and searching for Chinese conceptions of the body. In 1993-4, Dorothy won a prestigious University of California President's Fellowship for her proposed research on a history of Chinese private domestic life from the women's perspectives, partly seeking to reimagine domesticity as a defining, not confining, experience.

Dorothy is especially interested in teaching crosscultural courses on women's bodies, on different meanings of clothes and fashion, and on ways of defining the family. It is indeed with great excitement that we welcome Dorothy Ko to our program. ♦

From The Laurie New Jersey Chair in Women's Studies

I did not set out to become a feminist theorist, since when I went to graduate school at the University of Chicago, that professional option did not exist. I had majored in political science as an undergraduate at Wellesley and went to graduate school in political science thinking I would study African politics. During my first years, I was struck by the fact that despite the political events happening on the doorsteps of the university, none of the classes addressed these issues (Martin Luther King Jr. brought SCLC to Chicago in 1966, the Democratic National Convention occurred there in 1968--with its attendant police riot). By the time I wrote my dissertation, my interests had shifted more toward political theory, with a focus on Black political thought. I was active in women's liberation and began writing feminist theory not as part of any academic job but as part of my activist involvement. At the time, (early seventies), Women's Studies programs were just beginning in colleges and universities, and feminist theory was not only not part of the political theory curriculum but not seen as a proper part of the academy at all. From 1974-1979 I was part of the staff of Quest: a Feminist Quarterly, writing occasional articles and acting as the subscription department at a typewriter in a closet in Charlotte Bunch's office in Washington DC. (Charlotte Bunch, now director of the Center for Global Leadership at Rutgers, was also a member of the staff). Like women at many universities, I was part of a group that tried twice to start a Women's Studies program at John Hopkins University where I taught from 1974-1984, but by then I had moved to the University of Washington to become part of the Women's Studies program that turns 26 years old this year. And feminist theory had become a more or less respectable academic focus.

My book Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism was an effort to integrate several literatures: the literature which took rational economic man as the model for all social relations, the arguments about sexuality and domination being made by groups such as Women Against Violence Against Women, and Marxist theory in order to understand more about how power operates in American society. My current project, "Postmodernism and Political Change," is an effort to think about feminist appropriations of several postmodernist/poststructuralist think-

ers. Several features of this appropriation concern me: first, I think that as (especially) French theories have arrived in the U.S. academy, their Marxist dimensions have been dropped, and they too often can appear in liberal pluralist form; second, and related, they seem to have become too easily apolitical; and third, I worry about the displacement of the concerns for diversity expressed by US women of color by postmodernist stress on heterogeneity and uncertainty.

The course I am teaching this semester "Feminist Epistemologies?" examines the question of whether one can speak of specifically feminist epistemologies. Or do feminist epistemologies share important features with the world's views of other "others"? In it, we will examine some of the practices of knowledge production, and address questions such what are the epistemological claims, assumptions, or methods which might be regarded as distinctively feminist and what political and intellectual practices are both opened and foreclosed by various feminist discourses--particularly feminist investments in liberatory practices? Where and how do we encounter the nexus of political and scholarly struggles that enable or obstruct change? The graduate students in the course represent an impressive diversity of interests and backgrounds, and I expect I will continue to learn from the high quality of our discussions.

Nancy Hartsock



The Department of Anthropology and the Women's Studies Program presents the Series
"Sexuality and Gender: Global Perspectives"
Gendered Performances and Carnal Ambiguities: Notes on the Transvestism of Everyday Life

Roger N. Lancaster
Department of Sociology & Anthropology
George Mason University

Friday, March 1, 1995
4:30 p.m.

Room 001, Ruth Adams Building
Douglass Campus

Roger Lancaster is the author of Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua (California 1992) & Thanks to God and the Revolution: Popular Religion and Class consciousness in the New Nicaragua (Columbia 1988).

This talk is from his forthcoming book Queer Body, based on research in the US, the Caribbean, and Nicaragua.

Ma Li Takes Her AIDS Message to Massage Parlors, Church Meetings, Supermarkets and Beauty Salons



The known cases of Asian-Americans with AIDS in New York is just under 1 percent of the city's AIDS cases, according to the City Health Department. But Asia looms as the epidemic's next global battlefront - India alone is projected to have more AIDS cases in the next 30 years than any other country - and advocates warn that frequent migration to and from Asian countries, coupled with sparse information about the epidemic, makes the city's Asian-Americans particularly vulnerable.

Ma Li is the first Chinese graduate of the MA program here at Women's Studies and she wrote a thesis entitled "A Proposal for The Division on Women to Better Serve The Chinese Speaking Battered Women in New Jersey." We wish Ma Li success in her efforts to use her education to help her community and make a difference. ♦

[This is an excerpt from an article by Womini Sengupta in The New York Times, Sunday, January 7, 1996]

Women's Time in Yugoslavia

In an attempt to introduce feminism to her audience in Belgrade, Dasa has helped in translating some of the texts of major feminist theorists such as A. Jaggar, J. Butler, J. Kristeva, and L. Irigaray. In 1994, one of her essays, *Women's Time in Yugoslavia* was published in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* edited by Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (Routledge). She wrote the introduction to the Serbian version of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of The Rights of Women*. Dasa has been invited to attend international symposia such as *Feminist Theory and Women's Movement, A Future without Discrimination?*

Dasa is hoping to go on to pursue a Ph.D. after finishing the MA in Women's Studies this year. She wants to continue teaching since that is the best way she can make a difference by conveying a message to her students that they have the power to make a difference. ♦

◆ Student News ◆

Honor Students Projects

Nancy Eng - Nancy is documenting the experiences of immigrant Chinese women in the garment industry where they are held hostage by abusive labor practices. Contrary to popular expectations, Chinese women go against the "passive, busy-bee" immigrant woman image in their attempts to resist invisibility, and Nancy is hoping to capture these experiences in her thesis. "We see only replays of the same old stereotypes since the first wave of Chinese immigrants arrived as indentured servants and railroad laborers. Little documentation exists regarding the Chinatown communities in America, their experiences and struggles."

Surabhi Kukke - Surabhi is exploring the relationship between gender and power and the historical medicalization of child birth. She is doing a comparative textual analysis of an obstetrical text, midwifery texts and pregnancy guides to understand what health care providers are taught about these constructions. This exploration is not intended to suggest her ideals about the best method of delivery but rather to examine the intersections between gender and power in the application of medical science and especially technology to women's health care.

John Kruger - John is trying to construct a "feminist" or "politicized" phenomenology out of the "ashes" of Martin Heidegger's work. John finds Heidegger's method fascinating and powerful, yet finds it lacks the punch to satisfy his Marxist and feminist leanings. John plans to continue his study of Marx and Heidegger after graduation and may go on to graduate school to study continental philosophy.

Stacy Morrison - Stacy is examining menstruation and how it is perceived throughout contemporary culture. She is interested in how conceptions of waste and perceptions of shame are associated with the menstrual cycle and the effects this has on women. Stacy will specifically scrutinize the manifestations of waste and shame in both the medical sphere and popular culture. In the medical epistemology, she will be exploring how menstruation is comprehended as a failed mechanism of reproduction, hence a wasteful process. Her focus on popular culture lies in "knowing your body" videos that are shown to elementary students and how messages of shame are conveyed.

Yaakov Perry - Yaakov is interrogating the construction of narratives, tropes, and paradigms which together organize gay and lesbian self understandings, inform their articulation, and mobilize political actions inspired by them. Yaakov wants to examine cultural expressions of gay and lesbian experience, the narrative of marginality and marginalization, the possibilities and dangers of community politics, and the limitations and opportunities inherent in daily politics.

Senior Internships

Alex Baczynskyj - Alex is interning at the New Jersey Women's AIDS Network. She helps to produce their newsletter and runs a program training HIV positive women to become community speakers.

Meghan Marich - Megan is interning at Elijah's Promise Soup Kitchen, which serves the greater New Brunswick area. "Considering that 70% of the world's people in poverty are women, I want to focus my energies on women guests in order to gain a first hand knowledge of the effects of welfare reform," says Meghan.

Allison Rojas - Allison is interning at Women Aware Inc. in New Brunswick. She is taking a 40 hour training session on domestic violence.

Nichole Quiles - Nicole is interning at the Consortium for Educational Equity. She is helping with the annual National Coalition for Sex in Education conference.

**Spring 1996 Calendar for The Institute for
Research on Women and The Center For
Women and Work**

- Mar. 6 **Dorothy Hodgson, Anthropology**
Toward 2000 Seminar
27 Clifton Ave., Douglass - 1-3 p.m.
- Mar. 21 **Drucilla Cornell, Law School, Rutgers-Newark
& Political Science- New Brunswick**
Thinking About Women Series
27 Clifton Ave., Douglass - 4:30 p.m.
- Mar. 26 **Ruth Milkman, UCLA**
"Mapping the Macro-Sociology of
Paid Domestic Labor"
Labor Education Building, Cook - 4:30 p.m.
- Mar. 30 **Third Annual Graduate Student Conference**
Gender Technology Place
Douglass Student Center
- Apr. 3 **Mary Gossy, Spanish**
Toward 2000 Seminar
27 Clifton Ave., Douglass - 1-3 p.m.
- Apr. 16 **Elizabeth Higginbotham, Memphis State**
"Black and White Professional and Managerial
Women's Perception of Workplace Discrimination"
Labor Education Building, Cook Campus
- Apr. 18 **Sara Suleri Goodyear, English, Yale University**
"Feminism and Minority Discourse in Postcolonial
Literatures"
Miron Conference Room
27 Clifton Avenue, Douglass Campus
- May 21 **Women Work: Celebration of Our Work
Conference**
Keynote Speaker: **Heidi Hartmann, Institute for
Women's Policy Research**
"How Are Women Faring in the New Economy"
Trayes Hall, Douglass Student Center
8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Women's Studies at Rutgers

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**The Leadership Institute for Women of
Asia and the Pacific Islands**
*Fourth Annual "Success Through
Leadership" Conference*

Thursday, May 23, 1996 from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. in
Trayes Hall, Douglass College Center.

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Prema Mathai-Davis, National Executive

Director of the YWCA of the USA

Afternoon will cover four workshops on contemporary
issues relevant to women.

Registration Fee* \$50.00

Payment Received Before April 30, 1996 \$40.00

Student Fee \$20.00

*Registration Fee includes: Conference materials,
continental breakfast, international buffet luncheon,
and post conference reception.

For further info. contact: Dr. Margaret Varma, Director
LIWAPI at (908) 932-6521. LIWAPI is an inclusive
organization, and welcomes all women to its events.

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