

OCTOBER 2005 NEWSLETTER

President's Report by Ann Braithwaite

Hi everyone... hope you're all well and your various semester/falls are speeding along happily and productively.... Early fall is always an especially busy time here at CWSA/ACEF, as we get the various committees organized for the annual conference, prepare and distribute the call for papers, and get the annual coordinators' meeting planned for those involved. As you'll see below, planning for this year's conference is already well underway. The program committee this year is chaired by Rhiannon Bury, from the University of Waterloo; she and an enthusiastic committee of four other people have put together a really interesting and varied call for papers (and reminder – the deadline is fast approaching....), with three themes and an open call. And they're now eagerly awaiting submissions... so get those proposals together, talk to your colleagues, put together panels and presentations of various kinds, and let's make them work. This year's conference, as you all know, is being held at York University, where our wonderful hosts will be the School of Women's Studies there. Kate McPherson is heading up the local organizing committee there, along with what I'm gathering is a large group of volunteers – so we're all really looking forward to the conference already!

Plans for the annual coordinators' meeting are also well underway for the full day meeting (on May 28 – the day before the conference begins) of coordinators/chairs of Women's Studies from across the country, with Darlene Juschka as our Board of Directors liaison with coordinators. This year's theme is "Interdisciplinarity" – a theme that people in WS know has long been one of the self-identifying features of our field, but that now poses new questions for our various programs and departments as academic administrations (in addition to funding agencies etc.) pick it up as the "future" of both university organizing and research. Among some of the questions we will address during this meeting – with a particular emphasis on how these intellectual questions impact our administrative strategies and program growth – are: what is the function of that term, and for whom? How do we differently define it and mobilize it depending on audience? How can Women's Studies, with its long history as a major proponent of interdisciplinarity, intervene in this new administrative emphasis? Coordinators have all gotten an initial agenda for this meeting, and of course this issue is one that always permeates the rest of the conference too.

We're also busily revamping our association website – as it hasn't been redone in the years since we first introduced it. We're checking all the links right now and thinking of new materials to include and new ways to present it – so if you have any suggestions, feel free to email them to me at abraithwaite@upei.ca or to cwsaacef@yorku.ca – those come to me too! And check back often – we expect to have some of those changes ready by the end of this semester.

And of course, the book award committee is busily reading this year's nominations, so we can notify the winner early enough that she can hopefully attend and present at the conference. Announcements have also gone out for the annual undergraduate and graduate essay competitions – see <http://www.yorku.ca/cwsaacef/cwsaacef/awards/awards.htm> for more info - and encourage your students to submit. We're hoping to have a panel at this year's conference of last year's and this year's winners!

As you'll see below, there's a whole new slate of people on this year's Board of Directors – including a new Secretary, Wendee Kubik, who puts together this newsletter along with new member at large Sikata Banerjee. As we started last year, we're implementing a new "commentary" section to the newsletter – and hope that some of you might be interested in submitting something for this section. Contact Wendee or Sikata if you've got an idea.... Susan Heald also graciously stepped forward to volunteer to be our new Treasurer – in response to my many emails to you all last summer. Susan is also an ex-president of this association (2000-2001), so we're really grateful that she brings her institutional knowledge with her – and actually wants to do this again! The entire Board of Directors is an extremely dedicated and wonderful bunch of people to work with – and we really take our mandate from you all seriously. As always, contact any of us if you have ideas, ways you'd like to volunteer, new issues and concerns, etc. And, of course, thanks for all the work you all do in promoting and developing this amazing intellectual field of ours – one that certainly continues to enthuse and impassion me everyday!

Membership Update **By Beth McAuley**

It's been a quiet summer here at the membership co-ordinator's desk, but I anticipate things to heat up in the coming weeks. Calls for renewals will be going out by mid-November to those of you whose memberships expire this December. I urge you all to renew your memberships for another year (or two). Your support is making all the difference in moving our organization forward. It will be especially important for you to renew if you are planning on presenting at the 2006 CWSA/ACEF conference.

I am actively looking into an online membership registration option and will be able to report to the Board within the coming weeks. Once we have this up and running, we will send you a notice with instructions. The system will allow you to renew online and make a credit-card payment for the fees. I'll keep you posted. In the meantime, thanks for your ongoing support and please encourage colleagues and students to join. If they join now, their membership will run until December 2006, giving them a bonus of an extra two months on their membership.

Conference Update **By Rhiannon Bury**

Mark your calendars! The CWSA/ACEF conference will take place May 29-31, 2006 at York University in Toronto. The theme of this year's Congress is The City: A Festival of Knowledge. In keeping with this theme, the Program Planning Committee is requesting submissions for papers and panels that explore gendered and/or feminist knowledges, experiences and/or practices in a range of urban contexts. The two additional themes are Trans Feminisms and Performances and Representations. For the first we encourage presentations that expand and complicate the relation between 'queer', 'feminist' and 'trans.' For the second, we invite papers that engage broadly with the ways in which a range of normative and non-normative femininities are performed and/or represented in art, dance, film, literature, new media, television, theatre, and/or video. And, as always, there is also an open call, for papers and presentations outside of these themes.

The full Call for Papers and proposal form are available on the CWSA/ACEF website: <http://www.yorku.ca/cwsaacef/cwsaacef/conf/06conf.htm>. The deadline is fast approaching.... See you in Toronto next spring!

The CWSA/ACEF Board of Directors

The Canadian Women's Studies Association is managed by a Board of Directors. Members of the Board are elected for terms of varying lengths at the Annual General Meeting, which is held each year during the Canadian Women's Studies Association's annual conference, held in conjunction with the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation (HSSFC).

President: Ann Braithwaite, UPEI

Incoming President: Lori Chambers, Lakehead University

Secretary: Wendee Kubik, University of Regina

Treasurer: Susan Heald, University of Manitoba

Membership Co-ordinator: Beth McAuley, Sumach Press

Members at Large: Sikata Bannerjee, University of Victoria, Darlene Juschka, University of Regina

Commentary

By Sikata Bannerjee

What's in a name? Gender Binaries and the Woman in Women's Studies

As a mature discipline, Women's Studies is now at a point where it may have to deal with some difficult issues about the bodies and identities that underline its knowledge production. As more and more research is done on the social production of bodies and identities, gender as performance, and the exceptional malleable nature of both physical bodies and sexual identities, there is a growing perception that the "woman" in Women's Studies, needs to be examined. This perception was certainly shored up by a recent discussion on the CWSA coordinator's listserv as well as several lively debates both on panels and during informal discussions at the 2005 CWSA conference.

This sort of debate has led several of us (myself included) who define ourselves as working within the academic discipline of Women's Studies to ruminate on the nature and implications of such changes. It seems to me that these types of shifts incorporate questions about the knowledge that is being produced not just in the sense of intersectionality i.e. the complex interplay of class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and nation on both physical bodies of women and/or within social ideas of manhood and womanhood but in the sense of whether there is a fixed essentialized binary opposition—man/woman; masculinity/femininity—both physically and culturally.

Pioneering work by Butler, Halberstam, Kimmel, Noble, Sedgwick, Thomas and others, have destabilized/troubled the gender binary. Many Women's Studies departments (including our own) in an attempt to include this research have either changed or are in preliminary stages of debating name changes. Since many of the researchers in this area do have an analytical focus on deconstructing masculinity, not surprisingly, dialogue surrounding such changes has provoked a fear that gender may be conflated with masculinities and male bodies, and once again women and femininity will be marginalized. This apprehension is further supported by the fact that some university administrations are pushing such name changes in the hope of increasing enrolments. The idea being that the "dangerous" and "scary" feminism (read male bashing in the popular imagination) implicit in Women's Studies will be diluted if Gender is added to the title or if Women is replaced by gender and hordes of students will then want to take these courses. No wonder the foremothers of Women's Studies who fought long and hard to create niches for feminist

scholarship may become perturbed.

On a personal note I find this dialogue and the innovative work that facilitated it quite stimulating and I am quite convinced that women's lives and social constructions of womanhood will not disappear in this process. The flowering of multiplicity and shattering of binaries should not lead to a hegemony of a certain perspective if we are to remain true to the hybridity, fluidity, and the deconstruction of power/knowledge that feminist research has facilitated.

Let me begin with (as a good academic) my own research. My work on nationalism assumes a construction of hegemonic masculinity within a nation as the point of departure and then goes on to examine the suffocating gender binary that this construct creates and which in turn has very real consequences for the lived experiences of women. Although, I focus on women, hegemonic masculinity has implications for male bodies or indeed any body that does not fit this construct. In a way, I don't trouble binaries but show the implications of the suffocating hold of these within the nation. However, I do not see this work as overpowering or being marginalized by work which does trouble gender binaries and/or looks at transgendered bodies. Nor do I see my work overpowering or being marginalized by research that assumes a very, unambiguous female body whose experience is mediated by a network of class, race, sexuality, nation etc. Why not? Because ultimately, we are talking about power and how it circulates through bodies and lives (I insist we remember this, that no matter how we trouble binaries conceptually, the power of binaries has real consequences for real bodies) and if we remain vigilant, that in our studies we do not ignore or forget about some bodies, then the fear of women disappearing is not real. When I say this, I do not mean that we all individually have to be endlessly inclusive in our work, but as members of Women's Studies departments we have to be clear that all forms of feminist work gets represented and that none gets dismissed as passé or "not innovative." Good research that looks at women in sweatshops in Toronto or Dhaka or both is just as relevant/important as theoretical musings on gender binaries or bodies and/or masculinities. Both have (indeed a concerted effort must be made to make sure that they do) a place in a department that may be named 'Gender and Women's Studies.'

I end with a question that troubles me about the power of names, but to which I have no definitive answer. Why Gender and Women's Studies? Why not Race and Women's Studies or Class and Women's Studies or Nation and Women's Studies? By adding "Gender" are we making a move that may be troubling? My own inclination would be to argue that if departments do want to add to the "Woman" in Women's Studies, then their choice should reflect their particular strengths of faculty teaching and research, and not some global preference for a term. However, I do realize that this approach may have its limitations (and which I am sure, some people will inform me of in detail). So let's keep talking and realize that many departments may decide that Women's Studies does capture the reach of their teaching and research.

Some Recent Job Postings

1. Tenure Track joint appointment in Transnational Gender History, University of Toronto:
http://link.library.utoronto.ca/academicjobs/display_job_detail_public.cfm?JOBID=1804
2. CRC Social Justice Tier II position at Brock University:
<http://www.brocku.ca/sociology/news/crcsocialjusticead.html>

3. Academic Position: Cinema Studies/French, University of Toronto:
http://link.library.utoronto.ca/academicjobs/display_job_detail_public.cfm?JOBID=1764
4. Tenure Track appointment in Sexualities and the Body, School of Women's Studies at York University:
<http://webapps.yorku.ca/academichiringviewer/viewposition.jsp?positionnumber=629>
5. Tenure Track appointment in Women's Studies, Luther College, University of Regina:
www.luthercollege.edu/u/employment_opportunities
6. Bank of Montreal visiting scholar in Women's Studies, Institute of Women's Studies, University of Ottawa/University of Ottawa:
<http://www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/womenst/eng/visiting.asp>