

IRW/IWL Seminar 2000-2001
Advocacy: Decisions, Data and Discourse

Susan Armstrong West and Sarah Rosenfield

Women's Studies

"Gender & Sense of Self: Impact of Douglass College Mission Course"

As they enter adolescence, many girls suffer from depression and anxiety, which often persist through adulthood. However, girls who receive messages of high self-worth from the adults in their environments are spared these forms of suffering. The present project asks if broad-based forms of intervention incorporating such messages can also protect women. We examine the *Shaping a Life* course offered at Douglass College as one such intervention. Given to all entering students, this course aims to increase the sense of competence and self-esteem of young women in their transition to college. We compare a sample of Douglass students to those at Livingston and Cook Colleges, which have co-educational courses, and at Rutgers College, which has no such course. We predict that courses like *Shaping a Life*, which are aimed at women's sense of self, are an effective means by which research can take an activist role in improving women's well being.

Fran Bartkowski

English and Women's Studies, Rutgers-Newark

"Kissing Cousins: Complicated Kinship at Century's End"

"Kissing cousins" occupy a liminal space in our notions of kin, suggesting boundaries between those we may kiss, and those we ought not to. A book in three parts, each section poses the question of *who may be related to whom* in the late 20th century. In the 21st century we will need new names for our intimates, as the norm shifts and the majority of families no longer resemble the two-parent, two-generational, so-called nuclear family. Part I deals with how transgression and technologies have produced new stories of intimate connections: part II examines how connections across species boundaries are currently understood and the stories we tell help us to speak these interrelations; and part III opens up the stories just beginning to be told, many in memoir form, about how global movement has produced new kinship networks that defy easy categorization. The central dynamic is the one between what we consider *natural* and what we assume to be *cultural*. Both these categories exemplify our human need for boundaries. At the moment all such sites are under reconstruction, renovation and reinvention.

Eleanor Brilliant

Social Work

"Fund Raising and Fund Allocation as an Empowerment Strategy for Women"

This project involves a historical study of women's funds that are part of the Women's Funding Network (WFN), a social movement organization that includes about 70 member funds. The women's funds, and their umbrella organization, WFN, are dedicated to using fund raising and fund allocation as strategies for the empowerment of women and the pursuit of social change goals. My study is concerned with the evolution of the Women's Funding Network in the period

from its formation in 1985 to the year 2000. I analyze critical issues these organizations face in their efforts to balance the development of formal organizational structures while maintaining their social movement goals. I use examples from case studies, surveys, and participant observation over a ten-year period, to contrast and compare different member funds and to illustrate the impact of increasing institutionalization on mission, structure, resource mobilization, leadership, and programmatic activities of the network as a whole.

Ethel Brooks

Women's Studies and Sociology

"Kathie Lee and the Ideal(s) of Transnational Organizing: Eradicating Sweatshops in Honduras and New York City"

My piece is the fourth chapter of seven, part of a larger work in which I explore the dynamics of transnational labor organizing through an examination of both their discursive effects on tactics and goals of organizing, and their manifestations on the shop floors and in communities that are targeted through the campaigns. Other chapters focus on protest campaigns in Dhaka, San Salvador and New York City, in an attempt to explore the possibilities and limitations of consumer/transnational organizing for labor rights—in the name of, and for, women who work in garment factories throughout the world. In this chapter, I look specifically at the ways in which the body of Kathie Lee Gifford was taken up in, alongside, and eventually took over, the debates over labor rights for women garment workers in New York City and Honduras. The Kathie Lee Gifford campaign was one particular movement in the anti-sweatshop movement, but, I would argue, it exemplifies a particular tendency within the movement to draw on advertising images and their particular notions of the workings of race, class, gender and nation, in order to create a politics of transnational coalition.

Susan J. Carroll

Political Science

"Women Public Officials as Agents of Social Change"

Most women members of Congress view women as fundamentally different from men and see themselves as advocates for women within the institution of Congress. Most congresswomen also are very cognizant of the many differences and areas of disagreement among women. However, my strong impression is that women public officials do not see these two beliefs—that women are similar to one another and that women are different from one another—as contradictory. Rather, these two views comfortably co-exist in their belief systems, and both influence their actions in the political arena. Their view that women share much in common enables their (both individual and collective) advocacy on behalf of women at the same time that their recognition of differences among women tempers and shapes that advocacy.

Rose Corrigan

Political Science

"Talking to Strangers"

"Talking to Strangers" traces the development of discourse about sexual violence which has recently resulted in laws to control "sexual predators." I propose two related paths of inquiry to

investigate the proliferation and impact of sexual predator laws. First is a history of the philosophical and political strategies of the anti-rape movement, exploring how the disjunction between theory and practice undermined the strength of the movement and facilitated the emergence of problems like sexual predator laws. The second is to gather data to examine the effects of sexual predator laws in New Jersey. The process of designing and gathering data will be informed by the needs and interests of activists. Practitioners will be encouraged to articulate and present their needs as a valid basis for feminist research and to explore connections between theory and practice in issues of violence against women.

Jocelyn Crowley

Public Policy

"Fathers in Absentia: Child Support Policy in the Twenty-First Century"

By most measures, the child support program in the United States has been an extraordinary success. In total, the program collected over \$13 billion in support in 1997 alone, up from \$736 million in 1979. Despite these gains, however, encouraging a certain sub-group of fathers to play an important part in their children's lives, both emotionally and financially, has been much more difficult. These fathers fall into two separate categories: fathers who cannot or will not pay, and thus are delinquent, and fathers who continue to pay, but have voiced concerns against the current system. Interestingly, the child support system has mobilized these two different groups of fathers in two different ways. Court-ordered parental responsibility programs bring the non-payers together to struggle with their plight, while interest groups attract the frustrated payers and spur them to political action. This research project will examine the impact of both types of mobilization on fathers, children, and the long-term health of families.

Barbara DiCicco-Bloom

Family Medicine

"Cultural Diversity Among Nurses and Its Impact on the Health Care System: Female Nurses Born in Kerala, Educated in India and Practicing in the United States"

The focus on the care needs of the increasingly diverse patient population in the United States is presently a very popular area of exploration. A subject which has received far less attention is the increasing diversity of those employed at all levels of health care delivery. The project I would like to pursue is a study of a group of immigrant nurses from a "developing nation" and their experiences with relocation, as women of color, and as health care providers using feminist interview techniques. The findings will provide insight into the working lives of a marginalized group of women and the actual as well as potential impact these experiences are having on the American health care delivery system. Insights gained from these nurses' experiences may have broad application to nurses from other developing countries.

Sunday DiPalma

Social Work, Rutgers-Newark

"Advocacy in the Academy"

I am interested in exploring women's progress in social work academia relative to women's status in the broader academy as well as society at large. As the discussion below will demonstrate, the

social work education community has experienced a sea change in representation of women in all levels of the faculty and in the two highest levels of leadership: Dean of a graduate program and Director of a baccalaureate program. However, this is not the case for women in other academic disciplines, according to the recent report issued by Committee W of the AAUP and a review of other national data sources. What can the larger academy learn from social work regarding women's progress in academia? How has a discipline which is dominated by women and favors qualitative research to the extent of requiring "single-subject" research in the curriculum made so much progress in a male dominated, quantitative research oriented environment? I content that it is largely as a result of the continuing advocacy efforts of the Women's Commission, a caucus within the Council on Social Work Education, the national accrediting body for the profession.

Ann Graham

Center for Russian, Central and Eastern European Studies
"Women's Advocacy in Central and Eastern Europe"

The project, "Women's Advocacy in Central and Eastern Europe" is an ongoing program developed by the Center for Russian, Central and East European Studies at Rutgers to strengthen the leadership skills and knowledge of grassroots women in Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States who wish to participate actively in the public policy decisions of their communities. I will examine collected data in order to understand how women construct and define political identity and advocacy in their community work. The project will also examine the nature of participatory research in which the roles of researcher and project director are interviewed in order to advocate social change identified by the participants and to disseminate findings that encourage broader knowledge of women's activism in the region.

Renée Larrier

French

"Women Bearing Witness: 'Témoignage' or the Affirmative I in Caribbean Literature"

In literature one way in which women's advocacy emerges is when women characters testify, not in court, but in first-hand accounts about their experiences. In fact, first-person narratives characterize francophone Caribbean literature by women. This strategy clearly situates them as speaking subjects and agents. In this project, I will examine the various ways in which advocacy is inscribed by writers from Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique, from Edwidge Danticat's Amabelle Désir-narrated *The Farming Bones* to Maryse Condé's multi-voiced *La Migration des coeurs* and *Désirada*. That latter two texts, I argue, qualify Condé as a "collagiste textile," [textile collagist], a title Guadeloupean artist, Francelise Dawkins, created for herself.

What are the messages conveyed by these narratives? Who are the "narrators," in other words, to whom these messages are directed? How are they interpreted by scholars, by the reading public? Do the writers have an agenda? How do Bébel-Gisler and Condé, both academics, negotiate the spaces between advocacy, scholarship and creativity? What are the ways in which women writers challenge or reaffirm what we know about historical events? How do first-person narratives differ from one another? Does Patrick Chamoiseau's novel *Texaco* narrated by Marie-Sophie Laborieux articulate similar concerns as those written by women? In my analysis of the

texts, I will draw on the work of feminist theorists Carole Boyce Davis, Lizabeth Paravisini Gerbert, Myraiam Chancy, Jacqui Alexander, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Obioma Nnaemeka.

Ardele Lister

Visual Arts

"Advocating Independence"

The issues of "impartiality" or objectivity have long been under consideration in the visual arts, in particular in the critical viewing of and writing about documentary work. All boundaries have been crossed and possibly contaminated. We are looking at multiplicities of truths in their contexts as we continue to deconstruct systems of belief about "truth" and the possibilities of neutral points of viewing. In the post deconstructive age then, is there a place for advocacy? What can one champion or advocate if truths are relative, if audiences are specific, if one artist's work is possibly as compelling or "valuable" as another's? Can we discern and then articulate what it is that makes one artwork more interesting than another or is it all obscured in aura?

I would like to examine the relationship between "scholarship"—in this case, the making of films and videos by women—and advocacy. I will present some of my own works as well as other women's works which have attempted to expand our understanding of how people and society work.

Lora Monfils

Educational Psychology

"South Asian-American Young Women and Mathematics: An Exploratory Study"

The question of gender differences in achievement in mathematics and science has been central to the work of many researchers and practitioners in the field of education. Western cultural knowledge suggests that mathematics is a male domain. On average, males score higher than females on standardized tests and take more advanced math courses, with the achievement gap widening as students become older (Cole, 1997). This is a major concern to educators and proponents of gender equity because mathematics is a gateway course for entrance into such high-paying technical fields as engineering and computer science (NRC (Matyas & Dix) 1992; NSF, 1996; AAUW, 1999).

An interesting counterexample to this Western culturally accepted view of sex differences comes from India, where females are considered not only to have equal ability in mathematics but where they perform better than their male counterparts in terms of classroom grades and on standardized tests of achievement in mathematics. This study will explore the influences that contribute to or detract from the achievement in mathematics of South Asian females in the US. Focus groups and surveys will be conducted, and national education datasets will be analyzed. Advocacy issues concerning dissemination of findings and recommendations for program development and educational policy will be discussed.

elmira Nazombe

Adult Education

“Feminist Popular Education as an Advocacy Strategy”

The project is to be an exploration of feminist popular education as a transformative methodology for supporting and fostering advocacy by addressing issues of women’s poverty, the exploitation of women’s labor, particularly as a result of macroeconomic policy, and issues of gender subordination in general. Feminist popular education is by its very nature about advocacy for women and against oppression. The data of feminist popular education is by its very nature about advocacy for women against oppression. The data of feminist popular education is the reality of women’s lives as interpreted by women themselves and therefore unapologetically not “neutral.” The development of a feminist critique of new-liberal economic policy, and globalization in particular, provides an excellent lens to review and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of feminist popular education.

Waranee Pokapanichwong

Anthropology

"Negotiating Rural Subsistence: Cultural Politics and the Commodification of Thai Female Sexuality"

This project combines ethnographic and historical approaches to the study of Thai women's participation in the commercialization of female sexuality as a means of rural subsistence. At the village level, I examine how women and men in economically marginal rural communities, through cultural practices, negotiate their complicity and resistance to the rationalization of prostitution. My ethnographic research focuses on rural belief systems regarding the sexuality of young men and women, gender and economic expectations, local cultural assessments of sexuality as labor and as a commodity, as well as how these views have changed over time, how they have been affected by HIV/AIDS deaths, and what community members negotiate as alternatives. My historical research traces the relationship of local beliefs and practices to national development policies and international tourism. Combining data from both ethnographic and archival/media sources, my project examines the historical development of the commodification of women from Northern Thailand.

Sarah Rosenfield and Susan Armstrong West

Sociology

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