

FAILURE IS IMPOSSIBLE!



Feminism and Family Studies Section Newsletter
National Council on Family Relations
Number 5, March 1996

From Alexis
WITH GRATITUDE

The November meeting of the National Council on Family Relations was a professional and personal highlight for me. I was pleased with the actions of the Board of Directors during my tenure as president, and was ready to turn over the gavel to Mike Sporakowski. Although I was anxious about presenting a paper to such a large group, I was excited about addressing the NCFR membership on issues related to gender.

I knew the Feminism and Family Studies Section had planned an event in my honor, but I was overwhelmed completely by the outpouring of care and support from you, my true colleagues. Having organized events before, I could imagine the amount of behind the scenes work that made this special session happen. For that, I thank Katherine Allen, Sharon Dwyer, Karen Wilcox, Polly Fassinger, Stephen Marks, Maureen Perry-Jenkins, Connie Shehan, and Karen Polonko for their labor of love. I am aware fully how each person who remained after the business meeting gave up an evening with colleagues and friends to pay tribute to me. I was touched deeply and am grateful to each and every one of you. I was pleased too by the opportunity to visualize our 10-year history through the exhibit designed and developed by Karen and Sharon. What a wonderful way to honor permanently our decade of achievements in NCFR.

Since my life has returned to normal (i.e., the phone calls, faxes, e-mail messages, and snail mail from NCFR has dribbled to nearly nothing), I have had many opportunities to savor the personal messages from each of you, and to cherish your entries in my special remembrance book. I also have received support and congratulations from F&FS members who were unable to attend the

meeting. I was delighted to be able to add their good wishes to the others.

The F&FS Section of NCFR is a passion for me. It is my professional, and in many ways, my personal home. I have always felt it to be a place of friendship and support; these feelings were only strengthened by your acknowledgment. I have had tremendous opportunities within NCFR, and have been privileged to serve as one of its leaders. The origin of these opportunities and privileges, however, is right here in this Section. At each step outward from it, I felt both as if the Section was propelling me forward, and also that it came along with me. In all ways, it was a source of strength and encouragement, a refuge, and a shield.

Together we have forged a new path in NCFR. I thank you for your efforts in making that path a smooth and protected one, and for selflessly asserting that I am only traveler. I know you will join with me to insure that the F&FS Section and its members continue to change NCFR and the way we learn about, teach about, and intervene with families. You have given and will not doubt continue to give me many cherished memories. I thank you.
Alexis Walker

1996-1998 Feminism & Family Studies Section
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Section Chair & Program Chr.....Leigh Leslie
Vice Chair & Awards Chr..... Elizabeth Norrell
Secretary/Treasurer.....Shelley MacDermid
Newsletter Editor.....Carmen Knudson-Martin
Teaching Coordinator.....Joan Jurich
Representative at Large.....Kate Conway-Turner
S/NP Representatives.....Karen Wilcox
Renate Houts
Past Chair & Nominating Chr.....Katherine Allen
Mentoring Committee Chair.....Sandi Stith

Report from the CHAIR

As I am writing this I am anxiously waiting to receive the paper proposals for next year's conference from the national office. I am excited about a conference theme that seems so perfect for showcasing feminist work. I trust there will be a lot of exciting proposals. Let me also thank in advance all of you who will review proposals for the conference. I realize by the time you are reading this you will probably have already completed the reviews, but I want you to know your contribution is invaluable in putting together a top notch program.

I want also to remind you all of the approaching deadline for submissions for the section's paper and proposal awards for students and new professionals. Please consider submitting or encouraging your students and beginning colleagues to submit.

We have several committees at work in this interim time between conferences - while the fun, socializing and learning happens during the conference, the work goes on year round. If you are interested in serving on a committee or have ideas or input you would like to share with the committee, I would encourage you to contact either myself or the appropriate committee chair and let us know of your interest, concern, or feedback.

- Shelly MacDermid is chairing a committee to review the structure of our two awards in light of the increased endowment received from NCFR. Her e-mail address is shelley@vm.cc.purdue.edu

-Sandi Stith is chairing a committee to reevaluate the mentoring program. Her e-mail address is [sstith@vt.edu](mailto:ssith@vt.edu)

-Joan Jurich is chairing the teaching committee. Her address is jurichj@cdfs.cfs.purdue.edu

We have had a change in the executive committee since the meeting in November. We discovered that Kate Conway-Turner, one of the newly elected S/NP reps, was not, in fact, a new professional but instead a veteran feminist scholar. None of us, including Kate, are quite sure how the mistake happened in the slating process. She thought she was being slated for a

representative at large position. We discovered this problem following our annual business meeting in Portland so I was not able to bring the issue before the membership for your consideration. However, the executive committee did meet and discussed this dilemma at our planning meeting. We decided that we really need to get an additional student/new professional on the committee to insure that s/np members are fully represented. However, we asked Kate to continue to serve on the executive committee as a representative at large - we can always use people who are willing to work. I have contacted the national office to find out who placed next in the balloting last year for the S/NP representative. Renate Houts, of the Dept. of Psychology at Kent State University has agreed to serve in this capacity for the next two years and we welcome her to the executive committee. We want all student/new professionals to know that you have two representatives whom you are free to contact with your questions, ideas, concerns, or feedback throughout the year. They are Karen Wilcox (kwilcox@vt.edu) of Virginia Tech and Renate Houts (rhouts@phoenix.kent.edu) of Kent State.

Please know also, that I am always interested in hearing from any member. It takes the input of all of us to make this the successful and vital (and just a whole lot of fun) section that it is.

Leigh Leslie

(Leigh_A_Leslie_@umail.umd.edu)

CELEBRATE WOMEN and Support Feminist Research at the Same Time!!

Don't forget our beautiful new greeting cards! For only \$10 you can receive 5 cards with original designs. Each card has a small inscription informing the recipient that a contribution has been made to the Jessie Bernard Endowment. These are a perfect way to celebrate milestones or simply correspond with your friends and colleagues. Cards may be obtained from F&FS executive members. You can also e-mail or write Shelley MacDermid at 1267 CDFS Bldg. , Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1267. Shelley@vm.cc.purdue.edu

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Feminist Investigations on Women's Vulnerability and Survival.

Elizabeth B. Farnsworth, Recorder
Efarns@aol.com

This NCFR conference session was co-sponsored by the Feminism and Family Studies Section and the Religion and Family Life Section in Portland, OR, on Saturday November 18, 1995. Donna Hendickson Christensen served as presider and Karen R. Blaisure was discussant. Each of the four papers presented emphasized the empowerment of women.

Elizabeth W. Lindsey's research with formerly homeless women challenged the audience to reflect upon three fundamental aspects of feminist methods articulated by Thompson (1992): agenda, epistemology, and ethics. Desiring that participants "leave the [research] experience with a positive sense of their own strengths," Lindsey's research focused on women's strengths and knowledge in restabilizing their families. Epistemological issues surrounding the work, the way the researcher was identified in the study, the complexity of multiple realities in the data, and the nature of the relationship between the researcher and participants were also discussed. Reflexive journals and collaboration with colleagues were conscious strategies for managing ethical and epistemological issues arising from the study.

Karen H. Rosen identified interpersonal, situational, and familial vulnerabilities to becoming a battered women based on grounded theory from qualitative research with 22 women. She described an "insidious process of entrapment" in abusive relationships whereby women subsume their own personal and safety needs to the continuance of their relationships. Interpersonal vulnerability was conceptualized as the degree to which a person views herself as valuable independent of her relationships. Situational vulnerability involves stressful life circumstances or life-stage pressure to be in a

relationship. Familial vulnerabilities involve exposure to violence, rigid power imbalances, and identification with caretaker roles in family of origin. Rosen described ways to use knowledge obtained from the data to empower young women: increase women's consciousness of entitlement to safe and just relationships, assist them in developing skills to define and maintain clear boundaries, and promote development of interdependence as well as vigilance.

Judith C. Ingalls-O'Keeffe and Mary Y. Morgan examined traditional cultural ideologies about women's lives reinforced by religious stories and offered a reinterpretation of the Biblical story of Ruth from a critical science perspective (Lather, 1986). Traditional interpretations of this Biblical story reinforce dualism of the roles of males and females: males as dominant heads of families and societies; females as submissive dependents. Ingalls-O'Keeffe and Morgan provided new understandings of the story of Ruth, illuminating the solidarity between Ruth and Naomi and the bonds women employ to ensure survival. Through reclaiming and re-telling cultural stories, contemporary women are empowered and provided new understandings of life options.

Janice A. Ewing's qualitative study examined gender issues among a heterosexual sample of men and women belonging to a conservative religious group in Southern California. Reviewing the basic principles of feminism, Ewing stated that many voices are needed to foster a more complete understanding of gender relations in contemporary society. Using in-depth interviews to "get close" to the experience of the participants, she found that it was difficult for the sample to question gender contradictions and complexities and that their perspectives of gender were oversimplified and mystified. She encouraged family professionals to provide education about diversity and spaces for conversation about gender.

Collectively, these scholars provided a serious examination of the experiences of women revealing broader cultural contexts that limit and distort the experiences of individuals. They provided research perspectives that are both

responsive and responsible to women. *Karen Blaisure*, as discussant, described these papers as courageously promoting social change for women. She described the papers in this session as “accounts of women researchers and participants reclaiming home, safety, cultural stories, and intellectual space. She concluded her comments by reading from Young (1990) that there is “no question that [can] not be asked” and encouraged the audience to neither accept nor simply dismiss any concepts or symbols, rather to encourage and support questions and analysis toward more complete understanding of gender relations.

References

Lather, P. (1986). Research as praxis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56, 257-277.

Thompson, L. (1992). Feminist methodology for family studies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, 3-18.

Young, P. (1990). *Feminist theology/Christian theology: In search of method*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Professional Issues for Gays and Lesbians in Family Studies: A Life Course Perspective

Karen Wilcox, Recorder

Joseph Hopper introduced the panel and explained its origin. The “Impassioned Teaching” session presented at the 1993 NCFR conference began as a forum for discussion and affirmation of gay and lesbian persons visible in NCFR, as well as the gay and lesbian people who are studied. The following year, in an symposium entitled “Family Members of Gays and Lesbians: Identifying Issues for Research, Practice, and Education,” presenters shared their experiences both as family members and as researchers. These sessions served as a foundation for exploring issues regarding gay and lesbian identities and families in future conferences, as we have seen this year.

Kelly Hall presented a paper written by *Kathryn M. Feltey*. Feltey explored the tension surrounding the realities of the conflict of having to perform her academic duties in an “acceptable” manner so as to secure her position and receive tenure, and needing to be true to herself and

acknowledge her personal life as part of her full identity as a scholar. A dilemma for lesbian academics is isolation, by department and by discipline, as well as through the action of others. She suggested that lesbian scholars are quietly, without fanfare, making their presence known and shared her frustration that the rules of sociology dictate an objective, impersonal, detached approach with little room for exceptions. She stated that “making connections between who I am and what I do has been part of her effort to contribute to the challenge of future change.

Batya Hyman presented her paper in the form of a letter to graduate students who are planning to seek academic jobs, which she wrote after her first six months in a tenure track position. “Is ‘Out’ Now ‘In’?: Notes for the First Year” was a personal account of her journey of making decisions about life as a scholar. She spoke of finding herself both exhilarated and terrified as she imagined herself moving into her office, standing in front of her classes, and attending faculty meetings. She felt the opportunity and challenge inherent in entering her job as an out lesbian. She shared her experience about making decisions about coming out to potential employers and how far to come out when you begin your professional career. She challenged the audience to search for places where all members of the community can find space to grow and influence others.

In his paper “Admittedly One Voice: The Continuum of Diversity in Gay and Lesbian Experience,” *Larry A. Kurdek* responded to being frequently asked how gay and lesbian psychologists would deal with information regarding their sexual orientation in the workplace. He offered five guidelines: Academia is not protected from either heterosexist biases or anti-gay and lesbian sentiments. Disclosure involves risk and should be done with prudence. Like it or not, gay and lesbian students will seek you out. Unwillingness to disclose does not necessarily imply internalized homophobia or low self esteem. There are multiple pathways to being an activist for gay and lesbian rights. Kurdek stated that his major sphere of influence is that of a behind-the-scenes-not-in-your-face researcher

whose work helps to dispel myths. His other sphere of influence is very personal; "friends, family members, students, and colleagues who know me realize the stories of my life are at their basis stories that run the gamut of human emotions and experiences."

Janet M. Wright's paper, "A Lesbian Instructor Comes Out: The Personal is Pedagogy," identified three possible targets of receivers of the act of coming out in classes. She also gave suggestions for departments to help "contribute to an atmosphere of acceptance rather than ignoring the struggle." Adopt a resolution on sexual orientation. Project a positive image of gays and lesbians in posters, decorations, pamphlets, and handouts. Use examples of gay and lesbian couples in role plays and practice classes. Recognize and discuss the potential ramifications of a colleague coming out to students. Heterosexual faculty can come out as strong supporters of gay/lesbian rights by discussing their own participation with gay/lesbian issues and experiences with family members and friends.

The discussant, *Kaitlin O'Shea* entitled her comments "The Journey Forward: Lighting the Future With Our Presence." She discussed the centrality of heterosexuality in our culture and the creation of the closet. She suggested that within the structure of academe the questions of when, how, and where to disclose is a function of the discourse of academe, and in societies in general, not the entire responsibility of the individuals. She challenged NCFR to be inclusive in the meaning of the word 'families' and to "make a dent" in how we view "the meaning of life."

How Do Family Therapists Confront Marital Equality?

This session of the Family Therapy Section was presented by F&FS Sections members *Carmen Knudson-Martin* and *Anne Rankin Mahoney*. The presenters suggested the criteria of mutual benefit and accommodation against which couples and their therapists can evaluate their level of marital equality. They identified social influences that at once promote change in

gender relations (changing gender ideals and both women and men working outside the home) and inhibit change (socialization to traditional gender expectations and a male-dominant society). According to Knudson-Martin and Mahoney many couples respond to the dilemma created by these contradictory changes by creating a *myth of equality* in which inequalities in benefit and accommodation in the relationship are described as "fair" or "equal" and remain unaddressed. The presenters suggested ways marital therapists can inadvertently collude with the myth of equality and offered ways therapists can help couples construct equal relationships equality.

Excerpts from...

WHY FEMINISTS NEED TENURE

Annette Koldny, The Women's Review of Books, Vol. XIII, No 5/ February 1996

"In the decades between 1971 and 1991 the percentage of doctorates awarded to women climbed from 14 to 37 per cent...even so the spectacular growth in percentages of women earning PhDs did not translate into proportionately more women within professorial ranks...many of these women PhDs never seek careers in academe; when they do, promotion and tenure reviews still reject them more often than they do men. As a result, **women outnumber men at only one rank: lecturer...** A 1995 Department of Education survey of over 800 colleges and universities reveals that ...full-time faculty members remain overwhelmingly white and male:

	MEN	WOMEN
White	58.9%	27.9%
Black	2.6%	2.3%
Asian	4.0%	1.3%
Hispanic	1.7%	0.8%
Native American	0.3%	0.2%

A HEARTY THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING PERSONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE SALE OF FFS GREETING CARDS:

**Elaine A. Anderson
Beth Silken Catlett
Pam Choice
Guy Cunningham
Shelley MacDermid
Hilary Rose**

Book Review

EINSTEIN'S WIFE: Work and Marriage in the Lives of Five Great Twentieth-Century Women

**by Andrea Gabor (1995).
New York: Viking**

The author of this book, Andrea Gabor, is a successful journalist who is married with two young children. Noting her own juggling act, she set out to find models of successful women who had managed to make significant contributions in their work and to be married. Though not intended as a piece of scholarly research, Gabor's account of the obstacles and struggles encountered by the gifted women who are the subjects of the book as they attempted to balance their marriages and their professions is insightful.

Gabor chose her subjects according to two criteria 1) significant accomplishments that would be remembered after their deaths and 2) an enduring marriage. She reports discovering that potential subjects for her book were very few. Most women of accomplishment did not have long term marriages, particularly at the beginning of the century. Her selections include a range of experiences over the course of the century and across multiple disciplines. While she set out to find models exemplifying better ways for women and men to handle the nexus between work and

family, what she found instead is a chronicle that shows how much more defining marriage is to the wife's work than the men's and how many social obstacles these women encountered as they pursued their professions.

Gabor's portraits of the experiences of these women and their marriages (two of which she describes as "successful") is a fascinating look into the interior worlds of these great women:

- Mileva Maric Einstein, a gifted physicist whose own career was subsumed in the service of her husband's
- Lee Krasner, a well-known artist whose career was interrupted in order to further the career of her husband, Jackson Pollock
- Maria Geoppert Mayer, who raised two children and won a Nobel prize before she could land a paying job
- Denise Scott Brown, the architect behind many major urban renewal projects who lived in the shadow of her husband and architect Robert Venturi
- Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Conner who describes to the author her commitment to family life as she rose to preeminence in the Justice System.

In presenting the lives of these extraordinary women, Gabor not only makes visible their unheralded experiences, but offers a glimpse of family life that addresses the concerns of women today from all walks of life. It is an interesting read that gets at the heart of the issues facing those of us to wish to promote the well-being and equality of women at the same time as we are interested in improving the quality of marital and family relationships.

Carmen Knudson-Martin

**Next publication deadline:
September 15, 1996**

**Send your articles, reports, ideas,
and/or comments to**

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ATTENTION: STUDENTS AND NEW PROFESSIONALS

***THE FEMINISM AND FAMILY STUDIES SECTION
OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON FAMILY RELATIONS***

ANNOUNCES 1996 AWARDS APPLICATIONS

The Feminism and Family Studies Section of the National Council on Family Relations is seeking applicants for TWO awards to be given at the November 1996 NCFR Annual Conference in Kansas City. Applicants do not need to be members of NCFR, but we welcome new members to our section and organization.

The Outstanding Research Proposal from a Feminist Perspective is given in honor of Jesse Bernard. Graduate students and new professionals (with up to five years post-doctoral work) are encouraged to apply for this award of \$500 to fund feminist research. Proposals will be encouraged for their potential contribution to feminist scholarship and the use of feminist frameworks and methods. Applications should include: a) an abstract of 100 words or less, b) a five page (maximum) proposal outlining the project's purpose, theoretical foundation, research methods, and potential contribution to feminist scholarship, and c) a half-page budget. A summary of the recipient's research results will be published in the Feminism and Family Studies Sections Newsletter, and the recipient will be asked to present a report of their project and findings at the 1996 NCFR Annual Conference. The award will be presented at this meeting.

The Outstanding Contribution to Feminist Scholarship Paper Award is accompanied by a gift of complimentary books from Westview Press. Applications for this award are open to all graduate students and new professionals (with up to five years post-doctoral work). Papers should demonstrate contribution to feminist scholarship and the use of feminist frameworks and methods. Applicants should be the sole author or first author of the paper; both published and unpublished papers will be considered. A summary of the paper will be published in the Feminism and Family Studies Newsletter, and the award will be presented at the 1996 NCFR Annual Conference.

Authors should identify themselves only in a cover letter so all entries can be reviewed anonymously. To apply, send six copies by April 10, 1996 to:

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