

FAILURE IS IMPOSSIBLE!



Susan B. Anthony

Feminism and Family Studies Section Newsletter
National Council on Family Relations
Number 9, March 1998

Report from the Chair

When I started to write this column—my first as chair of the F&FS Section—I sat for some time *before a blank screen, wondering how to begin.* As I stared out my window, hoping for inspiration, images from past NCFR meetings came to mind—particularly memories related to our section. I remember Linda Thompson and Alexis Walker, waiting in a hotel hallway to hear whether the proposal to start this section would be approved by the NCFR Board. Obviously, the answer was yes—and the rest, as some say, is herstory—our story. And I remember the many stimulating sessions and keynote speakers that F&FS has sponsored, providing feminist perspectives to our scholarly understanding of families. For me, as for so many of you, being involved with the F&FS Section has become an integral part of being involved with NCFR.

I also remember the excitement—yes, excitement!—of our business meetings, which are invariably fun and provide a sense of connection with colleagues. That sense of connection and purpose has provided the underpinnings of our section from its beginnings, and has nurtured us, both individually and collectively. I'm honored that you elected me as section chair, and I look forward to working with the new officers and all of you who have volunteered to help in numerous ways. I'm very interested in hearing from you—your ideas and input are part of what makes our section so vital.

At our business meeting in the fall, the new section officers were announced. Congratulations to all of them! Please notice the list, elsewhere in

this newsletter, of the FFSS Executive Committee, which includes the officers and committee chairs, with e-mail addresses.

1997-1999 Feminism & Family Studies Section Executive Committee

Section Chair & Program Chair..... Donna L. Sollie
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Vice-Chair & Awards Chair.....Shelley MacDermid
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Teaching Coordinator.....Joan Jurich
(jurichj@cfs.purdue.edu)
Past Chair & Nominating Chair.....Leigh Leslie
(ll11@umail.umd.edu)

Congratulations to our 1997 award winners! The winning paper was by Leslie King and Madonna Harrington Meyer, titled "The politics of reproductive benefits: U.S. insurance coverage of contraceptive and infertility treatments." The winning proposal was by Terri Karis, titled "White racial identity construction: Experiences of white women in heterosexual black/white interracial relationships." Thanks to Beth Norell and the members of the Awards Committee for their diligent work in reviewing 15 papers and 9

proposals. Reviewers included: Heather Helms-Enkson, Shelley MacDermid, Jane Gilgun, Cathy Solheim, and Kate Conway-Turner (proposals); Karen Seccombe, Alexis Walker, Connie Shehan, Suzanne Smith, and Linda Wark (papers).

Let me remind students and new professionals about our paper and proposal awards, and encourage you to submit your work. There is an announcement in the newsletter with more details. I would also like to encourage you to submit materials to Joan Jurich for the teaching resources packet. She is particularly interested in receiving names, e-mail and school addresses, and titles of courses for the syllabi to be submitted. Also, if you would like to volunteer to be on the Teaching Committee, get in touch with Joan. We are proposing to use the money we make from the teaching packet for our endowment fund. Let me take this opportunity to thank Joan and Lee Ann DeReus for their exemplary work on putting together the proposal for this packet.

Many of you will have already been hard at work for the section by the time you read this newsletter, through your participation in the abstract review process. Thanks in advance to all of you who reviewed abstracts. I will be contacting people about serving as session discussants, presiders, or recorders for our conference sessions. If you weren't at our business meeting, but would like to serve in some capacity at the conference in Milwaukee, please get in touch with me soon.

You may remember our discussion during the business meeting concerning the Glenn review of marriage and family textbooks in Family Relations. We decided to send a letter from the section, and our letter was printed in the January, 1998 issue of FR. Thanks to Katherine Allen, Mark Fine, Naomi Lacy, Leigh Leslie, and Karen Seccombe for their work on this letter.

I want to remind all the student/new professionals that you have two representatives whom you are free to contact with your questions, ideas, concerns, or feedback. They are Beth C. Catlett (catlett.3@osu.edu) and

Kaitilin O'Shea (oshea@fas.harvard.edu). They'd love to hear from you!

I began this column with a reference to memories from past NCFR meetings, and I'd like to end it with some comments about Leigh Leslie. I know that I speak for the many F&FS colleagues who have had the opportunity to work with Leigh since the fledgling days of the section's formation. Leigh has served as section chair, vice-chair, awards chair, and mentoring committee chair--with unflagging energy, attention to detail, and visions of growth. In her role as chair, Leigh has worked to sustain the supportive atmosphere that is a vital part of the section, forged connections with other sections, and emphasized the critical importance of the scholarly contributions that feminist perspectives can bring to our understanding of relationships and families. I admire her intellectual rigor, her dedication to doing work that makes a difference, and the diligence that characterizes her commitment to feminist goals. Her sense of purpose is infused with both humor and excitement, so working with Leigh is just plain fun. On behalf of the F&FS Section, our warmest gratitude to you, Leigh, for playing such a vital role throughout the life of the section.

Donna Sollie

Call for Syllabi and Teaching Resources

The Feminist Teaching Committee is seeking materials from family studies courses that are taught from a feminist perspective. These materials, including syllabi, class projects, or bibliographies will be included in a packet of teaching materials that will be available for purchase by NCFR members. If you have taught a course or a portion of a course from feminist perspectives and would like to submit them to the packet, please send by April 1 your name, address, e-mail, and a description of the type of material you would like to submit to Joan Jurich, 1267 Child Development and Family Studies, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1267, e-mail: jurichj@cfs.purdue.edu.

HONORING LINDA THOMPSON

I love Linda Thompson.

We have been friends for over 20 years. Our friendship first developed during graduate school, not over academic concerns, but while watching Saturday Night Live-back when it was funny-and over 3-hour breakfasts at the Penn State Diner.

After I left Penn State, having not yet finished my dissertation, Linda analyzed my data, mailed the printouts to me, and told me what to say when writing up the results. Linda used to be a "quantitative" person.

Our friendship continued as we embarked on our academic careers, Linda at Virginia Tech and I at the University of Oklahoma. Linda asked me to collaborate with her on a paper to be titled, "The Dyad as the Unit of Analysis." What we remember most about that paper is not its content, but that it was written during the hottest summer in Oklahoma's history. At my kitchen table, over pizza and wine, as the temperature reached and sustained 114 degrees, we hammered out the table that is the essence of that paper.

We roomed together annually at NCFR meetings, timing our respective flight arrivals as closely as possible. The first to arrive waited for the other, and we made our way to the hotel together. Once at the hotel, our first excursion was to a grocery store for provisions, so that we could AFFORD to be there. We hardly ever left our room. We used the time to visit, to commiserate about the things in academic life we were unprepared for, and to pursue our joint work. We stayed in the room for days. House cleaners would pound on the door: "When are you coming out? I need to clean the room. I need to make the beds. I need to give you clean towels!" We weren't persuaded.

We left our room for only two reasons: to present our papers, which we agonized over, and to visit a local art museum. In my office today, I have a collage of postcards Linda sent to me from museums we visited together. Added to the collection are cards from her travels to museums where, she noted, she wished I'd accompanied

her. Some 20 years later, when I look up from my desk and see these colorful, witty reminders of our friendship, it makes me smile. I continue to be saddened that my obligation to attend more and more meetings at the annual conference took away both these meaningful excursions and the annual, intense visits we shared.

During our early years as NCFR members, we talked often of how much friendlier, sensible, meaningful, and fun the organization would be if it included an identifiable feminist group. Prior to one annual meeting, I learned through the N.O.W. (National Organization for Women) Times, that a woman in Virginia, Karen Polonko, had helped to expose a physician who performed abortions on women who weren't pregnant. Around the same time, I noted that Karen was presenting a poster at the same session in San Francisco where Linda and I were to present. We reasoned that any woman who could expose such a despicable fraud should be able to help us gather together a group of self-identified feminists in NCFR.

I don't know how many current Feminism and Family Studies members know Karen, who is on the faculty in sociology at Old Dominion University. Let's just say that she makes a high-energy person like me look slow, and a reserved person like Linda seem almost comatose. At the poster session, our energy was directed toward locating Karen, who turned out to be very near us in the arrangement of papers. Linda had to leave briefly, and when she returned, Karen and I, situated near the center of the room, were actively fending off individuals who wanted to learn about our research and enthusiastically plotting a feminist-inspired change in NCFR. Linda later said, "There they were, in the center of the room, working themselves into a frenzy."

This section is the outcome of that frenzied enthusiasm and Linda's calm and steady commitment to feminism. The Feminism and Family Studies Section is a refuge in NCFR. A place of comfort. A place for connection. A place for renewal. A place for friendship. It began that way, and it continues that way.

And now, Linda embarks on a new phase that releases her from NCFR and academic life. Some

may have thought of this as a loss, but the words of Carolyn Heilbrun, an author who has been a particularly compelling voice for Linda, helps us to think of it otherwise. In the September issue of the *Women's Review of Books*, Heilbrun (1997, p. 4) reviewed a new biography of Virginia Woolf by Hermione Lee (1997). In the biography, Lee described Woolf's reaction to the death of her friend, Katherine Mansfield: Woolf was haunted by Katherine Mansfield's death " . . . as we are haunted by people we have loved, but with whom we have not completed our conversation." Heilbrun wrote: "[W]e will never complete our conversation with (Virginia) Woolf. We want her back . . . able to explain in the decades that might have remained to her what she meant by this, by that. We want to read what she would have gone on to write . . ."

I was heartened when I read this passage. It made me think of Linda and her decision to leave academic life. She may no longer share our occupation, but she is not lost to us. We will continue to have conversations with her, and, most fortunately, we will read, savor, and learn from what she will go on to write.

Alexis Walker
Oregon State University

New Focus Group

We are trying to create a "lesbian" or "lesbian, gay, and bisexual" (to be debated) focus group within the FFS section of NCFR. Though the focus is on lesbian, or LGB issues from a feminist perspective, people of all sexual orientations and genders are warmly welcomed. Really. Approval for this group will be requested at our annual business meeting during the Milwaukee NCFR conference. For more information, or to sign our petition for membership, please contact Batya Hyman at batya.hyman@asu.edu or Ramona Oswald at oswa0012@tc.umn.edu.

the spirit walks in
through the door
of the flesh's house

the rooms leading off
from the hall
burn with color

the spirit feels
the door behind her close

and the sinister hall
is thick with the one word
Choose

the poet walks
in through the door
of the scholar's house

the rooms leading off
from the hall
buzz with language

the poet
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and the sinister hall
is dark with the one word
Choose

Eds. Note: This poem by Lucille Clifton is from her collection, *Quilting: Poems 1987-1990*. It was selected and read by Linda Thompson at the FFSS celebration in Linda's honor.

Nominations Needed by May 1st

The Nominations Committee is beginning its work of preparing a slate of candidates for the 2000 officer election. Offices to be held from 2000 to 2002 are: Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary-Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, Student/New Professional Representatives (2). Members are encouraged to submit nominations for any or all of the offices. Self nominations are welcomed. Send to Leigh Leslie, Dept. of Family Studies, 1204J Mary Mount Hall, Univ. of Maryland, College Park, MD 20904; or e-mail: LL11@u.umd.edu

SECTION SUMMARIES

Fatherhood and Motherhood in a Diverse and Changing World Arlington, VA Nov. 1997

Listening Past the Quiet: Voices of Unheard Women

Submitted by Donna Hendrickson Christensen

This exciting session drew approximately 45 conference attendees. The research focused on four disenfranchised groups of women.

In the paper "Hiding the Multiplicity of Child/Adolescent Sexual Abuse", Mary Crowley examined the emotional and situational contexts in which multiple experiences of sexual abuse occur. The 88 women in this sample reported complex patterns of sexual abuse, varying on the closeness of the relationship, duration, number of abusers, age of onset, and severity of abuse. Interview data from 17 women with multiple abusers explored the women's understanding of their complex abuse histories and family responses to the abuse. The data revealed mixed messages sent by family members. The abuse was minimized, yet too heinous to mention. This research challenges assumptions about the isolated and limited scope of sexual abuse of children and adolescents.

Kathryn Feltey, Laura Nichols, Susan Warner, and Lynn Metzger presented the results of their multimethod study of a transitional housing program in their paper "Evaluating Transitional Programming for Homeless Families: A Presentation in Four Voices." The results were presented in a dialogue in four voices: program staff, present program participants, past program participants, and researchers. The goal was to demonstrate the complexity of the research process and to show how multiple perspectives can inform the findings, particularly the voices who are often lost.

Julianne Servovich, Judy Kimberly, and Kathryn Green presented data from ethnographic

interviews with 13 adult HIV-positive women in their paper "Perceived Family Member Reaction to Women's Disclosure of HIV-Positive Information." Using a constant comparative method, the authors found six general categories of reactions to the 97 episodes of HIV disclosure. Responses included intellectual or cognitive reactions, such as information seeking or giving advice; physical reactions, such as hugging or crying; spiritual reactions, such as praying or blaming their God; relational reactions, such as questioning or confirming the relationship; instrumental reactions, such as offering assistance; and emotional reactions, such as blame, reassurance, fear, and anger.

The final paper, "Challenging Assumptions: Contemporary Muslim Women and the Family" by Marsha Carolan, Guiti Bagherinia, Rumaya Jahari, Jackie Himelright, and Monica Mouton, presented the results of focus groups and couple interviews designed to understand Muslim women's family experience. The data indicated that Muslim women were more interested in the notion of fairness and respect than equality in their marriages. In addition, mate selection was centered more on qualities of religious devotion and educational motivation, qualities highly prized by both men and women, rather than on appearance or status. Finally, the women said that Islam guided their daily life, and they were satisfied with their religious beliefs and customs.

In her discussant remarks, Edith Lewis reflected four interlocking themes found in the papers: 1) complexity, challenging the simplistic notions of families' structures and processes; 2) the use of multiple investigative and analytic methods, employing diverse and appropriate methods of data collection; 3) addressing implications of the work for practitioners; and 4) recognizing the strengths among unheard women, presenting the authentic and complex realities of these women's lives.

Interrogating Heterosexism: Theoretical, Research, and Pedagogical Perspectives

Submitted by Maria Vandergriff Avery

This incredible session began with Charlotte Patterson's presentation entitled "Research on Sexual Orientation, Human Development, and Family Relations." She described how research on sexual orientation interrogates heterosexism. First, she pointed out that research in this area can be effective in "breaking the silences" that surround gay and lesbian issues. She then stated that research focusing on these issues also provides a way to empirically evaluate the existing cultural stereotypes about gays and lesbians. Another important research role in this area is to document prejudices, discrimination, and injustices that occur. Finally, Patterson argued that the inclusion of sexual orientation variables in research can advance the aims of scientific understanding by allowing researchers to develop a more extensive and inclusive theoretical understanding of human development.

Next, Batya Hymen discussed how she interrogates heterosexism in her own classroom and encouraged us to do the same. She defined the goals that she establishes for her students. She begins this process in her required course by encouraging students to examine their process of dealing with their own prejudices as well as systematic oppression. This is done by teaching students to look at the history of oppressed groups, to acknowledge the diversity within the groups, to understand the actual experience of oppression, and to think about what experiences are unique to a particular oppressed group. With the help of the "Privilege and Oppression Wheel" she then gets her students to explore the interlocking nature of oppressions. Next, students examine the benefits accrued to members of the dominant group. Ultimately, she has her students think about the actual consequences of oppression in the lives of individuals.

In the final presentation, Ramona F. Oswald and Paul Rosenblatt described their advisee-advisor relationship and how it has been shaped by heterosexism. Ramona began by defining what heterosexism is: "the social practice of inequality that recognizes and values heterosexuality as natural and normal while at the same time, denigrating and/or hiding homosexuality." Both described the lessons they have learned by working with each other, such as Paul realizing the importance of including more gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered perspectives in his classes. Ramona commented that one of the unique and exciting things about her relationship with Paul is that he supports her "without squashing" her. They ended their presentation by stressing the importance of the advisee/advisor relationship, and reminded us of the time and commitment it actually takes to form a good, productive one. Ramona left advisors with this thought: "Finally, advisors, please don't force us into your image. Support us, challenge us, and help us learn the tools we need to follow our own paths because we may be headed towards wonderful places you've never been."

Wanda Clark, the discussant, concluded the session by encouraging all of us to think about what heterosexism is and what it means in our own personal lives. She described several places we might find ourselves as we go through this process. These are acceptance, through which we try to normalize everyone's experience; resistance, in which we become angry and blame heterosexism on society without taking any personal responsibility; redefinition, in which we reevaluate our own values; and internalization, through which we work towards change.

1998 AWARDS APPLICATIONS

The Feminism and Family Studies section is seeking applicants for TWO awards to be given at the November 1998 NCFR Annual Conference in Milwaukee, WI. 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 Jessie Bernard. Graduate students and new professionals (with up to five years post-doctoral work) are encouraged to apply for this award of \$750 to fund feminist research. Proposals will be reviewed for their potential contribution to feminist scholarship about families 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 Section Newsletter, and the recipient will be asked to present a report of their project and findings at the 1999 NCFR Annual Conference. The award will be presented at the 1998 meeting; recipients will receive \$350 towards their travel to the 1998 Annual conference.

The Outstanding Contribution to Feminist Scholarship Paper Award is accompanied by a gift of complimentary books from Westview Press and a \$250 cash award. 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 about families and the use of feminist frameworks and methods, and should be accompanied by an abstract of no more than 150 words. Applicants should be the sole author or first author of the paper; both published and unpublished papers will be considered, although the paper should be at near-submission status. A summary of the paper will be published in the Feminism and Family Studies Newsletter, and the award will be presented at the 1998 NCFR Annual Conference. Recipients will receive \$350 towards their travel to the Annual conference.

Authors should identify themselves only in a cover letter so all entries can be reviewed anonymously -- all identifying references should be removed from the paper or proposal submission. Letters of support are not required. Only one submission per category will be accepted from any applicant. To apply, send six copies of the proposal or paper by April 10, 1998 to:

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Next Deadline: Sept. 15, 1998

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and/or comments to:

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