

The Gender Studies Project

W h o I a m

April 2004

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Note From the Director

May, 2004

Hello, everyone! It has been a busy spring! We sponsored our first Annual Riegsecker Lecture on Tuesday, March 2, 2004 at 7pm in F110. We were privileged to have Marcia Ann Gillespie speak on "Sexism and Racism." She is the former Editor in Chief of *Essence* and *Time* magazine named her "One of the Fifty Faces for America's Future." She was voted the March of Dimes' "Outstanding Woman in Publishing" for her efforts in inspiring all humankind to combat hatred and violence. She has written extensively on issues of gender and race. Ms. Gillespie's presentation stimulated a great deal of conversation on our campus. She will be a tough act for next year's lecturer to follow!

We have also sponsored numerous other events this spring including the Senior Women's Dinner, the Ten Shekel Shirt Concert, several alternate chapels—a Panel on Women and the Criminal Justice System; coordinated with Rebecca Sheetz, adjunct professor in Sociology and Social Work; Katie Koestner - "No-Yes;" and the One in Four Alternate Chapel for men only coordinated by Doug Wood; for more information, see <http://www.nomoreape.org/mensprog/starting.htm>, and Pennsylvania's Best 50 Business Women Program.

In April we were able to give some financial assistance to seven students who were members of International Justice Mission so they could attend a workshop held at the YWCA in Harrisburg on the topic of "A culturally sensitive framework for working with Bosnian refugees in the wake of atrocities: A focus on mass systemic rape." Feedback from those who attended was very positive and we look forward to hearing about their experiences through some sort of open forum next fall.

Our website is also very close to being able to be seen by the public. As soon as it's available we will notify you via the listserve.

Stephanie and I have begun planning for the fall. We have numerous items we hope to achieve. For example, we hope to build the membership on our advisory council to include more student, faculty and staff members so watch for our pizza and planning party announcement in early September and come prepared with ideas and suggestions!! Second, we want to solicit more student, faculty, and staff contributions to our newsletter, which could include book recommendations, movie recommendations, etc. In addition, we are already planning other events, but as always, welcome the input from others here on campus!!

I hope you have an energizing or relaxing summer (whichever you desire)!

Debra Berke

Associate Professor of Family Science and Women's Studies
Director, Messiah College's Gender Studies Project

First Annual Riegsecker Lecture

Named after our benefactors, Nancy and Marlin Riegsecker, who are responsible for the existence and operation of the Gender Studies Project, the Riegsecker Lecture allows us to bring a well known and accomplished person to speak at Messiah about gender issues. For our first lecture we invited Ms. Marcia Gillespie to speak and the topic of her lecture: *Sexism and Racism*.

Students and faculty first met Gillespie at dinner, before her lecture, where she engaged everyone in interesting conversation about where the nation was moving and voiced some of her own concerns. She carries herself in a friendly manner and showed a genuine interest in the other dinner guests.

At her lecture, Gillespie's strength of character and conviction came out as she discussed many different examples to support her main point, that every person can and should make a difference in our society. Gillespie pointed out the many benefits of living in our society, such as the accessibility to college education, and that our society has come a long way from her younger days, however, societies can regress. Despite the many benefits of living in our society, there are many injustices as well. The "face" of poverty is still women and children. Education and the economy have failed in these areas, according to Gillespie. Women act like the worst man they ever met to get ahead and racism, in the form of terrorism, still runs rampant through ignorance and laziness as well as violence.

"Injustice is injustice."

However, Gillespie, while alerting the audience to these problems, did not leave them without steps to take. There is a need to change the status quo and Gillespie encouraged everyone to do that by moving outside of what is comfortable for them. By confronting disagreement and engaging in constructive

conflict, we can learn. She asked the crowd to get into another person's shoes, to think of how a poor, ethnic, or homosexual person would feel on Messiah campus. She also encouraged men, as well as women, to understand 'womens issues' and how they affect everyone.

We, as a society, can learn from our history and not repeat the mistakes of the past. We should take pride in our country and no longer take for granted the rights we have. Gillespie suggested rereading the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Finally, Gillespie emphasized the need to raise the bar for our leaders and for ourselves; to act and not just talk. In her conclusion, Gillespie once again reminded the crowd that the power to change things was in their hands.

Gillespie then answered questions from the audience and discussed many different issues including homosexual marriage, expressing a viewpoint different from most of Messiah affiliates and also raised the idea that we as a country cannot let this issue distract us from other "more important" issues. She also discussed abortion, discussing the idea that what we do with children after they are born should dictate if we allow abortion or not, since so many children are simply born into poverty or bad situations. She discussed the increased equality among men and women, and how men should define their masculinity outside of the traditional roles and on themselves instead. After addressing these numerous challenging issues, Gillespie stayed to speak with students for over an hour after her lecture.

No doubt many people were prompted to think about the challenging issues that Gillespie raised and perhaps a new angle that she presented. As Gillespie said, she remains an optimist, we must also remain optimistic that as a community we will confront, learn, and get involved to change our community for the better.

Postmodernism Among the Amish

On March 4, 2004, the Sider Institute invited Dr. Susan Biesecker-Mast (Associate Professor of Communication at Bluffton College) to deliver its annual Schrag Lectures. Dr. Biesecker-Mast spoke on “The Visible Church in a Visual Culture” in the afternoon and “The Liberating Church in a Post-Liberal Culture” in the evening. The Gender Studies Project had the opportunity to interview Dr. Biesecker-Mast and learn about her very different and interesting areas of research.

Susan Biesecker-Mast was born in Chicago where she attended a large public high school. She completed her undergraduate work at University of Wisconsin—Madison and proceeded to start her masters program at Colorado State University. She transferred to the University of Pittsburgh, attracted by its strong program in rhetoric as well as its interdisciplinary program in cultural studies, to complete her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Communication. Her original dissertation centered on Helen of Troy in the context of women in ancient Greek writings. But with the sudden emergence of the Hill-Thomas hearings as well as the publication of three best-selling feminist books (by Naomi Wolf, Susan Faludi, and Gloria Steinem), Biesecker-Mast began a new dissertation to explore the rhetoric of a possible third wave of the women’s movement in the United States. During her graduate work, Biesecker-Mast met and married Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Associate Professor of Communication at Bluffton College) who introduced her to the Mennonite community and the Anabaptist tradition. She was baptized into the Mennonite church in 1992.

As Biesecker-Mast made frequent trips to visit her new in-laws in Holmes County, Ohio, she became interested in the growth of tourism in Ohio’s Amish Country. Since about 1996 her

research has focused on why tourists are attracted to Amish Country. She approaches her research from the perspective of visual rhetoric which is a sub-discipline in Communication that studies how visual features of our culture shape our understandings of ourselves and our culture. She has been especially interested in the apparent disjuncture between the plain style of the Amish and the sometimes ornate visual rhetoric of the tourism industry in Ohio’s Amish Country. In answer to the question, why are white, middle class Americans attracted to the seeming simplicity of Amish life, Biesecker-Mast argues that it is related to late 20th century anxieties concerning changes in gender roles, consumer culture, and America’s place in global politics. According to Biesecker-Mast, tourism in Ohio’s Amish Country offers middle-American visitors the opportunity to make a nostalgic return to a fictional moment in which American life was simpler even as they enjoy the comforts and pleasures of 21st century consumer culture. Still, she further argues, tourists are also challenged by the presence, activities, and appearance of the Amish.

Biesecker-Mast expects to complete work on a book-length manuscript on this research during summer 2004. She hopes that this research in combination with the book she co-edited with her husband, *Anabaptists and Postmodernity* (2000), and her various other essays make a convincing case for the contemporary relevance of Anabaptism in the 21st century. A talented woman with a variety of interests, Susan Biesecker-Mast could easily extend her study of tourism in Holmes County or move on to one of the other several topics that catch her interest. In either event, interesting information is certain to follow.

Looking for Resources?

Check out these new additions to the library

Eat my words: reading women’s lives through the cookbooks they wrote TX644.T47 2002

True vine: a young Black man’s journey of faith, hope, and clarity F 548.9 .N4 F68

Open wide the freedom gates: a memoir E 185.97 .H444 A3 2003

Longing to tell: Black women talk about sexuality and intimacy E 185.625 .L66 2003

Book Clubs: women and the uses of reading in everyday life LC 6651.L65 2003

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On February 25th, the department of sociology and social work at hosted a lecture by sociologist Kathryn Edin entitled “What Social Policy Makers Would Like to Know: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage.” Her lecture was the reward of years of research and diligence that is yet another step in her process of lifelong learning.

Kathy Edin grew up in a small town in North Minnesota. She attended North Park College in Chicago where she studied social work as an undergraduate. After graduation, she worked as a liaison between the Lutheran Church and the Department of Family and Child services; preparing sexual abused victims to testify against their violators. It was at then that she began to understand that the current government social systems did not do their job effectively. After this position, Edin started graduate school at North Western University by teaching *Minority Cultures* to welfare recipients where she sometimes felt like they had more to teach her than she could teach them. She eventually left with her Ph.D. and the motivation to change the system. She also prepared *Survival Strategies*, her dissertation from North Western, to be published.

Survival Strategies centered on a study of 400 women, where Edin compared welfare recipients with low-wage workers and the methods they use to meet all of their needs. Neither the welfare recipients nor the low-wage workers could meet all their needs through welfare or their job alone. The ways they got the additional funds were varied, sometimes from boyfriends or the father of their children; about 9% of the activities women participated in were illegal to obtain the needed funds. Interestingly Edin found a “Mom Mentality” among many of the women. They exhibited a strong moral hierarchy, a desire to obtain the American Dream, and to be a good mother; hardly an indifferent approach to their position. If they had engaged in an illegal activity they could often recount the exact circumstances that required it and the only acceptable motivation was to provide for their children. Edin learned in this study that the real problem for these women was economic. If the women worked higher-paying jobs they lost assistance and actually earned less, keeping them tied to their current positions.

After Edin’s book *Survival Strategies* was published she received another grant and this time she studied why these same type of women put motherhood before marriage, attempting to answer why so many had children and no husbands? The study included 8 Philadelphia neighborhoods over 5 years and the interviewing of 162 women. Edin and her family moved to one of the neighborhoods, East Camden, and conducted the research from there. For two years the team conducted informal research of meeting the women and learning about certain aspects of their lives. Over the next three years the team interviewed 162 women using unstructured questioning about 20 target areas, such as the mother’s relationship with the father and the children’s relationship with the father. Edin and her team then edited these tapes and transcripts and compared the interviews to reach their conclusions. The stories of these women and the team’s conclusions are being published in Edin’s latest book *Making Ends Meet* that is coming out this fall.

Edin set out with a desire to change the government welfare systems and now, thanks to her hard work and valuable research, she has been able to advise the government on necessary reforms. Her passion, devotion, and diligence are helping disadvantaged women everyday to improve their lives by understanding them and lobbying on their behalf. By working for these women Edin not only helps these women, but provides an example of how to be involved and demonstrate God’s love for others. We at Messiah were very lucky to have her as our guest.

The Gender Studies Project wants to see **Who I Am** used by the faculty, staff, and students to communicate the multiple gender-related events, discussions, resources, research and issues in our school, our nation, and the world. Please submit your poetry, personal experiences or opinion, suggestions and humor, that you would like to share with others to Stephanie Craft, Box 5247 or email GenderStudies@messiah.edu.

Come Visit Us! We are in Hoffman 315 or call...(717) 766-2511 Ext: 7214

Who I Am

Quote of the month

"As long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there to hold him down, so it means you cannot soar as you otherwise might."
- Marian Anderson

Poetry

*So I am
So I am a woman
So I am a man
So I tell you what to assume
So I tell you how to stride
I tell you how you to act
I tell you what conceit is*

*So I am
So I am an infant
So I am an adult
So I tell you keep no noise
So I tell you to crease you
hands
I tell you how to perform
I tell you what the world is
really like*

*So I am
So I am a quilt
So I am inimitable
So I tell myself what to think
So I tell you man
I'm telling you now
I'm telling you that you cannot
catch the wind in a jar
By Adriane Winters*

**Gender Studies
Listserv!** Subscribe at
listserv.messiah.edu to
the GenderStudies
listserv. Email us if you
have problems. Please

post any events related to gender

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Women in film: A content analysis of Academy Award

By Allison M. Simon

Based on the critiques of feminist film theorists, this study examined the portrayal of women in film over time. A content analysis of Academy Award winning films from 1939-2001 revealed that there were significantly fewer female characters than male characters overall, with minority females being particularly under-represented as compared to whites and the actual population. Females tended to be shown in low-status occupations with few changes overall, though occupational variety increased after 1970. Though large cultural trends seemed to be somewhat reflected in the portrayal of women in film across the decades, generally the data of this study were characterized by the startling consistency of female portrayal over time.

When analyzing the results of this study it was important to keep in mind that an "Academy Award winning film" represents a prestige designated by the film-making elite. Since the demographics and values of this minority of individuals has remained relatively consistent over time, it is possible that the small change overall in the portrayal of women in these films may reflect the values of the white, male majority of filmmakers and film elite rather than the overall American population. For the purposes of this study, however, the multitude of films had to be narrowed

down to a manageable size. I focused on Oscar-winning movies and roles held by women, and found that an Academy Award as one of the most prestigious film awards for members of the cinematic community. Therefore, the results of this study can be seen in part as a reflection of the roles available to actresses who hope to take part in an award-winning film. These films also carry a label of "excellence" that can influence the values of film viewers. Taken in this light, it is discouraging to see that despite the many social and cultural changes that have occurred over the last six decades, Academy Award winning films still tend to portray women as white, sexual beings with low-status occupations. Oscar-winning films tend to revolve around white males, and male characters outnumber female characters almost two to one. Also minority characters are significantly underrepresented when compared to the actual population. Hopefully as the number of women and minorities increases in the filmmaking industry, their status and roles in Academy Award winning films will increase as well.

Summer Events Calendar

June 3-5: National Conference for College Women Student Leaders

June 17-21: National Women's Studies Association Conference in Milwaukee

Sept. 3-5: Men, Women and the Church: A biblical approach to relationships in Durham, England

Until Mar. 2005: History of Women in Medicine, exhibit at the National Library of Medicine.