

FEB10

CELEBRATING
25 YEARS!
CSW
update

Joan Wallach Scott

RENOWNED HISTORIAN WILL SPEAK ON “FEMINISM'S DIFFERENCE PROBLEM” AT CSW'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT



Historian Joan Wallach Scott, Harold F. Linder Professor at the School of Social Science in the Institute for Advanced

Study in Princeton, New Jersey, will be giving the keynote at CSW's anniversary party on February 22. According to Kathleen McHugh, CSW Director, “From her groundbreaking book,

Gender and the Politics of History, to her more recent book on *The Politics of the Veil*, Joan Scott has consistently engaged the daunting intellectual challenges of the moment, from theorizing feminist history responsive to post-structuralist critique to the limits of secularism in relation to the public sphere. We are delighted to have her as our keynote speaker to celebrate CSW's twenty-fifth anniversary, discursively but with real cake!”

Entitled “Feminism's Difference Problem,” Scott's talk will address the tension within feminism (throughout its second-wave history) between the need/desire for a universal “woman” as the subject of the political movement and the differences among women that trouble and challenge universal thinking. She will focus on the most recent eruption of that tension between those feminists who endorse

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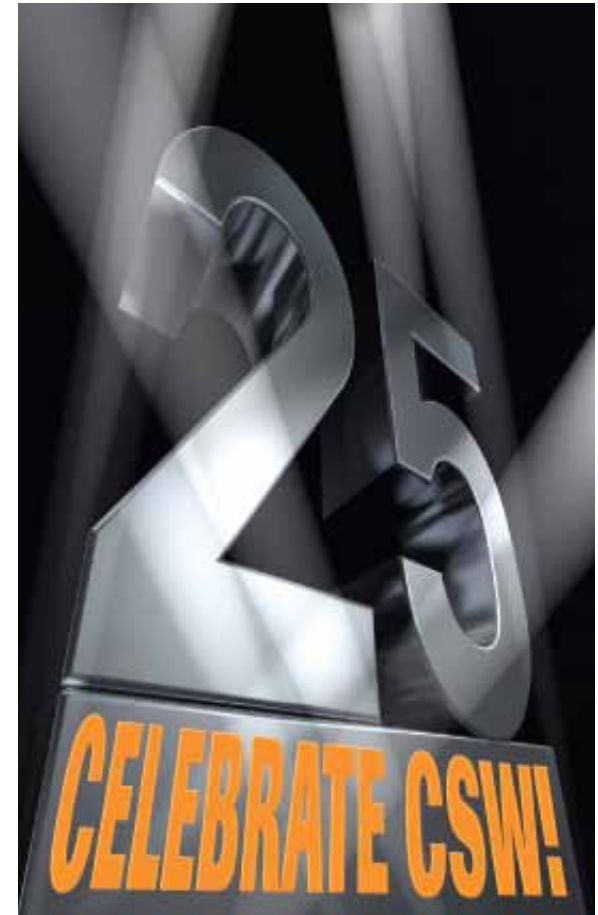
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secularism and who insist that religion is inevitably oppressive and patriarchal and those who challenge the categorical oppositions—religion/secularism, tradition/modernity, patriarchy/women's emancipation—arguing that feminism and religion can be compatible. This tension has emerged most visibly in discussions about Islam and gender equality.

Scott is the author of the essential article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," which was published in 1986 in the *American Historical Review*. In it, she argues that the study of gender must go beyond the study of women and that gender analysis must encompass gender's role in constituting social relationships more broadly and in signifying other relationships of power. "Scott's framing of gender as a category of historical analysis was foundational to the work of so many historians, particularly those conducting research on women's history," says April de Stefano, CSW Assistant Director. "Her 1986 article is still widely read by graduate students in history today—a testament to the important legacy of her insights." It's

clear that many scholars at UCLA have been influenced by Scott's work but Denise Roman, CSW Research Scholar, notes that she owes an additional debt of gratitude to Scott, "I was lucky to have Professor Scott as external reviewer for my doctoral dissertation, which I defended at York University, Canada, in 2001. Those were tough days for the airline companies, since people were afraid to travel because of 9/11. But not Prof Scott, who flew all the way to Toronto, to sit in my advisory committee. The moment she saw me, she said, 'You've got a book here!' I am grateful for her invaluable feedback to my dissertation and for encouraging my publication endeavors."

All of us at CSW are very pleased that Scott will be speaking at this very special anniversary event.



CSW'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT WILL BE HELD FROM 4 TO 7 PM AT THE UCLA FACULTY CENTER ON FEBRUARY 22.

Fat and Identity Politics

A REVIEW OF PAUL CAMPOS'S RECENT TALK IN THE GENDER AND BODY SIZE SERIES

...this is the part that never ever gets acknowledged by people who know better, even though they will acknowledge it and then renounce that they have acknowledged it moments later. We can't make people thin, okay? There's no empirical proposition in medicine that is better established than this. There is no known way to produce significant long-term weight loss in a statistically significant population. We just don't know how to do it. And that includes weight-loss surgery or stomach amputation. That does not produce significant long-term weight loss among most people who undergo it. Certainly what absolutely fails completely in terms of significant long-term weight loss is haranguing people about their weight, and telling them that if they ate right and exercised more they would be thin. For the vast majority of people, that description is a complete failure. It's hopefully relatively rare in medicine, in particular, and social policy in general, to keep pursuing an intervention which is demonstrably a failure, over and over again. Now I'm sure many of you are familiar with the definition of insanity—it's doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. That's just another word for dieting.

– Paul Campos

MOST OF US HAVE HEARD IT BEFORE: “Fat is a Feminist Issue.” Ever since Susie Orbach wrote her book of this title (published in 1978), prominent feminist scholars, including Naomi Wolf, Susan Bordo, and Kim Chernin, have had much to say about what Chernin has described as “the tyranny of slenderness”. This tradition of feminist critique has depicted fat hatred as a problem of patriarchy. Recently, however, academic discussions of body weight have been dominated by health policy concerns over the so-called obesity epidemic. Although these concerns insist that slenderness is necessary for health, they have surprisingly seen very little critique from feminist scholars. Moreover, while feminist

scholars have spilt much ink on the pressures on average size women to be as thin as emaciated fashion models, there has been very little feminist work on the experiences of *very fat* women. The CSW Winter 2010 Faculty Curator lecture series, “Gender and Body Size,” curated by Professor Abigail Saguy, Department of Sociology at UCLA, is responding to this void in public and academic discourse, by hosting three speakers with expertise ranging from the epidemiology of body size to “fat activism.”

The first of three talks in the CSW Gender and Body Size lecture series was given on January 20th by Paul Campos, Professor of Law at the University of Colorado, and the author of *The Obesity Myth: Why America’s Obsession with Weight is Hazardous to Your Health* (Gotham, 2004). Campos’ talk, titled “Fat and Identity Politics,” was well attended, with all seats taken and a few dozen audience members opting to stand. Campos drew comparisons between the issues of sexual orientation and body size, arguing that the idea that gay individuals can (and should) become straight is not dissimilar from our culture’s general

belief that fat individuals can (and should) become thin. Yet, while “conversion therapy” for gay individuals has been thoroughly debunked and openly denounced by the modern medical community, weight loss for “overweight” and “obese” individuals is instead largely embraced by both the medical community and the general public, despite strong evidence that it is quite possible to be both fat and healthy and that significant long-term weight loss is incredibly rare.

Campos introduced himself by explaining to the audience that, because his body mass index (BMI) is around 26, he is medically “overweight.” He then verbalized what most of his audience was already thinking—that despite being in the *medical* category of “overweight,” he is not actually “fat,” which is a *social* category. “But...” he reminded us, “...if I were a *woman* with this BMI, I *would* be fat!” This illustration helped to reveal the gendered nature of our culture’s ideas about body size. Importantly, Campos admitted that his status as a “socially” (though not medically) thin man, has allowed him to speak and write about body size with greater authority—something he feels he would be



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less able to do if he were a fat woman.

Speaking of “fat”, Campos challenged his audience to consider “getting over the F-word”. He asked us to contemplate whether the word “fat” could be used as a more neutral physical descriptor, stripped of its negative moral connotations. He argued that, to him, the term “fat” is vastly preferable to the words “overweight” or “obesity,” which, by definition, are imbued with assumptions about health, as well as morality. Because of this, these words are medicalizing and stigmatizing to individuals with fat bodies. It was striking to consider using the word “fat” in a neutral way—many members of the audience laughed with discomfort when Campos suggested the idea. Driving home the widespread discomfort with the word, Campos reflected on his experience studying the Monica Lewinski scandal (in which news commentators often remarked at Lewinski’s “zaftig” body): “I noticed in the context of the Clinton-Lewinski thing that people flinched a lot less at “semen stained-dress” than they did with [the word] “fat.” I felt *myself* flinch at the

imagined thought of describing a woman as “fat.” (*How impolite! How cruel!*) I flinched again when I realized that as a feminist scholar studying issues of body size, I need to get more comfortable with the term “fat”!

Campos is not the only person who has decided to embrace the word. In his discussion of identity politics, Campos explained that numerous “fat activists” *proudly* reclaim “fat,” much like gay activists reclaimed “gay” in the 1970s (when the term “homosexual” was used by the medical community, defining same-sex attraction as a mental disorder). Campos’ striking comparisons between body size and sexual orientation continued: gay and fat people have both been told that their “condition” is a “choice,” both have (often willingly) been subjected to highly invasive medical procedures and other radical interventions aimed at “curing” their condition, and in both, the “cures” almost uniformly fail.

By asking his audience to consider these similarities across body size and sexual

orientation, Campos illuminated the failed logic behind our own (culturally reinforced) assumptions about dieting and weight loss. “Why,” he asked, “is choosing to *leave fat people alone* considered radical to the point of unacceptability?” It was a thrilling and moving—but also overwhelming—call to radicalism. Reflecting, I found myself noting that the choice to simply leave *our own bodies* alone feels similarly radical and brave. With passionate scholars like Campos (and upcoming speaker Marilyn Wann, an outspoken “fat activist”!), the task of accepting and embracing “fat”—in others and ourselves—is becoming much easier.

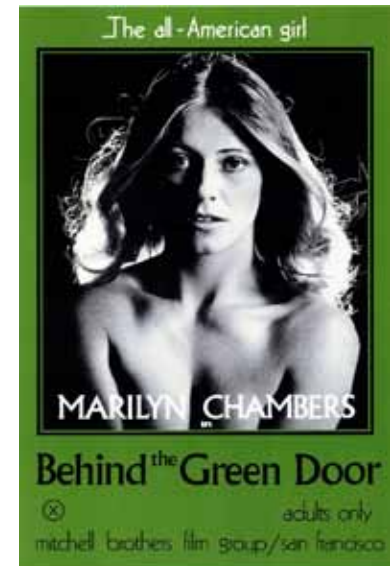
Kjerstin Elmen-Gruys is a graduate student in the UCLA Department of Sociology. Her dissertation project compares body size standards in the medical realm (i.e., ideal height/weight standards) with those in the fashion industry (i.e., clothing size standards), asking how these divergent standards have changed over time, how they are produced, and how they are understood by people in their everyday lives. Her other research interests include sociology of gender, sociology of work, and cultural sociology.

Porn, Pedagogy, and the Passing of an Icon

Three days after my students and I discussed the hardcore pornographic film *Behind the Green Door* (Mitchell and Mitchell, 1972), its enigmatic star, Marilyn Chambers, passed away. Chambers' passing garnered brief nods from news media, but for the most part, her death faded quickly from national attention. For me, however, Chambers' death seemed to linger, and in some ways, still does. Her death served as a summons for me to think anew, as a scholar whose work often overlaps with the field of porn studies and

as a teacher, about where pornography has been, where it is, and where it's going. Given that I was teaching a course on pornography, this summons could not have been timelier.

The course, "Pornography in Contemporary U.S. Culture," was offered as a senior capstone seminar by the Department of Women's Studies. As the instructor, I approached the course with the explicit purpose of offering Women's Studies students a perspective on pornography that they rarely encounter in our curriculum at UCLA, a perspective firmly rooted in both media studies and sexuality



studies, but also contextualized within the field of Women's Studies itself.

Pornography in the classroom is nothing new—it has been taught by instructors across a wide range of fields, including Women's Studies, and within a variety of universities for quite some time. Despite this, there is still a great deal of concern surrounding discussing pornography in the classroom, particularly if those discussions involve actually viewing pornographic images. As a graduate student instructor, I was cautioned by quite a few of my colleagues against treading this path. "Not until you have a job and tenure," I heard on several occasions, a warning also quite common within the field of porn studies itself. This is probably good advice to heed but, then again, Women's Studies graduate students aren't exactly known for following the path of least resistance. Nonetheless, these cautions prompted me to think carefully about the design and content of the course. How will undergraduate students respond to explicit images? Do the potential pedagogical benefits of showing pornographic images in a class about pornography outweigh the risks? Is it worth it?

On one hand, pornography is discussed as if it were an unstoppable behemoth, always threatening to take over the cultural landscape, described as unavoidable and overwhelming. Print and television news media paint a grim picture—our inboxes are overflowing with porn spam, the Internet is a veritable minefield of sexually explicit content, Cable programming is increasingly more salacious, and companies such as Playboy, Wicked, and Vivid have made porn actors into household names. On the other hand, when it comes to students viewing pornographic images in the classroom, the general consensus seems to be that they can't handle it—undergraduates are simply not emotionally and intellectually ready to encounter such images. These two notions, often simultaneously held, seem to me wholly incompatible.

If pornography is as ubiquitous as many make it out to be, then undergraduates are already handling it; it is already part of the fabric of their lives in some way or another. The argument that undergraduates are not emotionally or intellectually ready to view these images seems more an argument *for* pornography in the classroom than against it.

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If porn's takeover has been greatly exaggerated, then students may be forming opinions regarding a mode of representation, one with significant legal, political, and cultural stakes, without direct engagement with the media in question. This may be especially true for Women's Studies students, many of whom

are presented with arguments regarding pornography in their coursework, with little to no direct engagement with examples of the representations discussed. Students typically have to rely on descriptions of images and these descriptions tend to vary widely according to the viewpoints of the authors.

Engaging directly with porn representations allows students to form their own interpretations and do so from the perspective of a viewer. The students' responses to the media presented in my class ran the gamut of reactions, including amusement, disgust, excitement, and boredom. While each student in the class took the course seriously, thinking carefully about the representations and issues under discussion, and producing solid written work, they were not dispassionate observers and didn't pretend to be. Their reactions reflected not only their individual, honest responses, but also reflected the experience of viewing these images in a group setting.

The group dynamic is perhaps the most important and underappreciated aspect of pornography in the classroom. It provides an opportunity to engage in a viewing experience that has largely come and gone.

The 1970s "porno-chic" era of *Behind the Green Door*, as well as *Boys in the Sand* (Poole, 1971), *Deep Throat* (Damiano, 1972), *The Devil in Miss Jones* (Damiano, 1973), and *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (Metzger, 1976), was notable for the "assertive publicness of its exhibition."¹ *Deep Throat*, in particular, remains one of the most successful independent films of all time—people of all stripes went to see it, and they went to see it with partners, friends, and family. As Linda Williams suggests, what was so important about *Deep Throat* had less to do with what was going on on-screen, and more to do with the viewing experience itself and the conversations it engendered. She argues, "The most significant show offered up by *Deep Throat*...was taking place in the audience: our social presence to one another at a public screening of graphic, unsimulated sex; our willingness not only to screen sex but to be seen screening it."² With the rise of video and web-based pornography, however, viewership has, in large part, retreated back to the domain of the private.

1. Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008), 127.

2. *Screening Sex*, 142.

Classroom viewership, while certainly markedly different from a public theater, is a form of "be[ing] seen screening it." Viewing pornography in the classroom requires each participant to think about themselves in relation to the other people sitting next to them, to think about themselves as part of a larger audience, and to own their presence in that audience. It requires a taking of responsibility, unlike the private viewership engaged in by so many people and shared with so few. Most importantly, shared spectatorship provokes conversation. As much as I hope my students found what I had to say and what the authors we read had to say about the issue of pornography compelling and instructive, I would speculate that the most significant work this course did was invite dialogue amongst the students themselves, and with the people in their life. As astute as many students' comments in class were, I found myself, as an instructor, more intrigued by the conversations I witnessed spilling into the hallway after class. Students also recounted a multitude of discussions they had with

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roommates, friends, and partners about what we were watching in class. I suspect there is a certain safety in engaging others in conversation about something you viewed for a class, rather than having to fess up to watching something on your own. These discussions often led to broader issues that extended beyond just the topic of sexual representation itself.

The conversation that emerged during the 1970s around pornography, an era in which Marilyn Chambers and *Behind the Green Door* were such an important part, may have come and gone, but the experience of viewing pornographic images in a collective space may be worth reinvigorating. Watching these images as part of a community encourages people to experience and express a broad range of emotions and have them validated. Students did not hesitate to laugh when they found something funny, to utter sounds of displeasure or rear back in their chairs when they found something disgusting or shocking, or yawn or sigh when the images failed to hold their attention. These vocalizations became a

part of the shared space of the classroom. One person's laughter inevitably led to others. It would be easy to dismiss this as simply a by-product of a group-think mentality, but I think it's altogether something different. Yes, pornography is meant to be, and sometimes actually is, arousing. But, it can also be quite funny; sometimes intentionally, sometimes not. Intentional humor and unintentional, laughter-inducing bad dialogue aside, there is something about sex that is... well...funny. Rather than dismissing the giggles that undergraduates occasionally emit when the subject of sex arises in the classroom, we might have to confront the fact that they may know something we've long since forgotten—that while sex can, at times, be profound, or dangerous, or even spiritual, for the most part, it's just not worth taking so seriously. We can recognize the violence, loss, heartbreak, terror, confusion, sadness, and pain that can accompany sex, and still not lose sight of this.

Approaching pornography with a bit more levity, even while recognizing

its potential dangers and limitations, is particularly important in a Women's Studies context. It is common to hear scholars in porn studies bemoan any rehashing of the feminist "sex wars" around the issue of pornography; this is particularly true for scholars trained in film and media studies.³ The field is urged to "move on" and it largely has. The need to "move on" is one I wholeheartedly support, and even invoke in the course description for my class—where I disagree is in regards to how to go about this. In the context of Women's Studies, as well as Gender Studies, Sexuality Studies, Feminist Studies, and their various combinations, the "sex wars" are part and parcel of the formation of our field. The development and consolidation of many Women's Studies courses and programs in the US occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, during the height of these battles; it is unreasonable to think that these debates are not woven into the fabric of our curriculums, mission

3. For an excellent discussion of the "sex wars" and this era of US. feminist theorizing and activism, see Jane F. Gerhard's *Desiring Revolution: Second-wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

statements, and teaching philosophies on some level. In a Women's Studies teaching context then, it seems crucial to me that in order to "move on" from these debates, we must ultimately pass through them.

Perhaps the reason why this issue has dropped out of our classrooms is because the debates were often so ugly, so divisive. Indeed, many Women's Studies and related programs have avoided the issue altogether, resulting in the graduation of undergraduate majors and minors who are unfamiliar with this critical moment in feminist scholarly and political history. A startling number of the graduating seniors in my class had never heard of the "sex wars," the 1982 Barnard Conference, or Catherine MacKinnon. Whatever "ceasefire" was called, one of the stipulations seems to have been a tacit agreement to just not talk about it anymore.

Why the silence? Have the debates that emerged around sex and sexuality during this era been settled? Are these debates no longer interesting? Have we moved beyond "pleasure and danger" once and

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for all?⁴ Or, have we just ceded this ground to other fields, hoping that they will take care of this messy issue of sex and its representation? Women's Studies courses talk a lot about "sexuality" but, strangely, rarely talk about sex. I am always intrigued that entire weeks devoted to discussing sexuality in classrooms manage to avoid talking about sex altogether. One of the reasons why feminist discussions of pornography in the 1970s and 1980s were so divisive is because they forced frank conversations regarding sexual desires and practices, and these conversations revealed some startling assumptions and viewpoints that drove a wedge in between individuals and communities. Discussing pornography in the classroom provides a space for students and instructors to articulate these assumptions and viewpoints—and, again, to take responsibility for them. There is a strange *Seinfeldian* "not that there's anything wrong with that" mantra that sometimes

4. The anthology arising from presentations at the controversial 1982 The Scholar and the Feminist IX Conference, "Towards a Politics of Sexuality," held at Barnard College, is titled *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), edited by Carole S. Vance.

circulates amongst Women's Studies students; they view passing judgement as antithetical to gender scholarship and activism, particularly in the realm of sex and sexuality. Behind that mantra, however, often lies a different reality, one that needs to be interrogated in the rigorous manner that our curriculum engages other issues in.

The pro-porn/anti-porn dichotomy is a false one—it always was. In that sense, yes, we absolutely must move on and largely have. The issue of sexual representation, however, remains a critical one and needs to be engaged in directly. The belief that students are not ready to confront pornography in the classroom says more about those making the argument than it does about the students themselves. This argument may be merely a guise for the discomfort of faculty and administrators. Within Women's Studies, it may be a guise for the fear that if we reopen the door to pornography, the old disagreements and divisions will inevitably slink in along with it. It may also signal that we still haven't quite figured out how to address the

issue of sex in our curriculums. I certainly don't have it figured out, but this teaching experience has taught me that this conversation is one that students want to be having. If the eighteen students I had in my class last Spring Quarter are any indication, our undergraduates are not only capable of having this conversation but have much to offer it. I hope Women's Studies as a field continues to reinvigorate our commitment to discussions around sex and sexuality, including pornography; otherwise, we will only ensure that the conversation will go on without us.

Anna E. Ward is a PhD candidate in the Department of Women's Studies. Her dissertation project is entitled "The Uncertainty of Pleasure/The Pleasure of Uncertainty: Orgasm and the History of Ecstatic Expression,"

GIRLS' STUDIES

CSW RESEARCH SCHOLAR AND AUTHOR OF A NEW BOOK DISCUSSES HOW AN NEW FIELD OF RESEARCH SEEKS TO DOCUMENT AND AFFIRM THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF GIRLS

BY ELLINE LIPKIN

In the mid 1990s, specifically the summer of 1995, while living in New York City, I walked by a stack of newspapers. The lead story on the front page caught my eye: “When Typical Teen-Agers Are Awesome Elders; Super Supy Girls Are Those Who Pass the Traditions Down to the Younger Ones.” The image presented, of a pre-teen girl at summer camp, stopped me in my tracks. I remember wondering *What was this article about and what was it doing on the front page of the New York Times?*

The article was about a girls’ summer camp in upstate New York; it was about the

bonds and rituals that had become emotionally essential to the girls who attended every year; it was about the transitions and milestones and uncertainties the girls experienced as they made their way from their elementary to their high school years; it was about the nuances of girlhood—baffling, energizing, changing almost by the minute as these girls tried to figure out who they were and what they were doing. And it was in the *New York Times*. On the front page. Of the Sunday edition. Furthermore, I realized, this wasn’t just an isolated article. It was one of a four-part series. As I stood there taking this in, I felt stunned.



How could this be? was my immediate reaction. *Was this really considered “news”?* *Wasn’t this prime newspaper space reserved for Important Stories?* The more I read the more I felt an almost electrical reaction as I saw aspects of my own teen years described, and credence given to experiences that I knew would resonate for others, but would probably never be acknowledged beyond their peers. I felt a curious combination of being both shocked and moved.

When I reread the series of articles as part of my research for Girls’ Studies, I was struck all over again, not just by the content matter covered—the poignancies, triumphs, and intricacies of these girls’ bonds—but because what the series communicated is that these girls’ lives mattered. Their concerns and their visions for their futures are news. The mere existence of the series stated that the public should care about how girls are shaped by popular culture and how the stamp of femininity is pressed upon them. It was a revelation to me to see this in a paper of national reputation in the mid 1990s, and I’m grateful that I don’t think this series would seem such a radical act now.

Unbeknownst to me at that time, the field of Girls’ Studies was just being born, usually the offspring of Departments of Gender and/or Women’s Studies. Energy gathered in the early 1990s around the riot grrrls movement and the American Association of University Women’s key reports about girls’ experiences in school (*Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* released in 1991 followed rapidly by *How Schools Shortchange Girls* in 1992). The release of key texts *In a Different Voice* by scholar Carol Gilligan (in 1993), *Reviving Ophelia* by psychologist Mary Pipher, (in 1994), and *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* by journalist Peggy Orenstein (in 1994) brought a fast rise in attention to the drop in self-esteem girls experience around the time of early adolescence. All of a sudden, in both the popular press and in the academic world, there was serious study about how girlhood was defined, what experiences most shaped girls and into what kind of mold. Suddenly looking at how ideas about femininity constructed—and constricted—girls became a topic of national importance. In the years since, concern about girls has swung a wide pendulum: some voices maintain their self-esteem is ever in peril, others

insist that girls have never been as strong and outspoken as they are now; some voices decry that girls are sexualized too soon, others claim it’s great that they feel ownership of their bodies in ways previously disallowed. And rather than being taught silence, girls’ voices are now heard shouting through the distance. Through zines, websites, lyrics, blogs, videos, among other outlets, girls now have greater visibility with expressing their concerns and having their points of view heard. Yet, in an ever more media-saturated world, these additional resources can also be places where girls feel yet more pressure to fulfill set expectations and to perform a certain type of femininity.

As a field, Girls’ Studies is very much still in its own girlhood. Mention of its mere existence can still astonish. When I have taught this topic, I see in my students’ reactions the same wonder and revelation that I felt when I picked up the *New York Times*’ article about camp. They are amazed that their lives are considered worthy of examination, that it is legitimate to recognize the forces pressing on them through their girlhood years and that, alongside other academic disciplines, this also matters. Alone, this stunning thought

brings a sense of validation and excitement into the classroom that is deeply energizing.

Girls' Studies has, however, hardly become a centralized, unified field. Much of the debate over gender differences between girls and boys has moved into discussion of differences around learning and the value of single-sex education. As this field develops it has experienced the growing pains any adolescent does—including debate about its necessity and identity, accompanied by often vitriolic assertions that promotion of girls means that boys are unfairly being left out of the equation. Proponents of Girls' Studies will often advocate that this is exactly why the field needs to exist—to counter the unspoken assumptions that use boys' experiences as the baseline in studies about youth or adolescence.

It is also a field that dips powerfully into public consciousness. Debate about girls plays out in popular newsmagazines, television shows, and school policies. As I carried my research books with me this past year—on planes or in coffee shops—it almost never failed that women would ask me what I was reading or why, and would then react with the same profound recognition that I first had. After I explained the rise of this new field,

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there was often a long pause as I could see a measure of emotion collecting behind the questions asked, or buried within the stories that burst forth about their daughters, or rising within a moment's recollection of a girlhood hurt, or a special bond, or an unexpected legacy whose impression lingers. The power felt in those moments was palpable, and often contained, again, the breathtaking realization that their girlhoods were considered worthy of study, of consideration, even just of mention. There is now deep concern about girls in the world. Seeing popular culture follow the

waves of "mean girls" crest to the catchphrase "girl power" and then ricochet off to new directions reflects how deeply American culture cares about its girls—and also how fraught that concern can be. Many programs have sprung up to bolster girls' self-esteem—sometimes trickily defined as well as, at moments, dubiously reinforced. Programs such as Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls have imitators nationally, and there have been a plethora of writing programs created to serve girls alone, such as WriteGirl, based in Los Angeles. Similarly, I was glad to discover how many organizations

now exist to promote girls in developing countries, often with the realization that helping a girl finish her schooling, (as one example), can significantly impact an entire family system, or even her whole village.

Debate is often quickly sparked around how girls outpace boys with grades, college admissions, or GPAs once there, hence the seeming lack of a “self-esteem problem” for girls anymore. Yet, when students are coaxed to look beyond these figures to look at how this success translates to later life empowerment, arguments often grow thin. And the concept of girlhood as a troubled time isn’t one that most students, female and male, want clouding near them. They are often quick to point out how pressured they feel, with no neutral ground on which to stand as they negotiate the conflicting messages they are given about girlhood—be athletic but not too tomboyish, or attractive but not too sexual, assertive but not transgressively angry, or, alarmingly still, intelligent but not too smart. Stories about injustice against girls because they are girls still abound in the news, and toy stores divide neatly along bifurcated gender lines.

Not long ago, after a move, I unpacked several boxes of childhood juvenilia. I was

amazed to open what felt like a time-warped pink cocoon. Much of what was buried inside seemed just as appropriate to give a girl today, a realization of which I wasn’t sure what to make. I found myself remembering Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, an old favorite, and turned instantly to the book’s closing lines, just as Nel recognizes how much she’s been missing her childhood friend, Sula. Morrison writes, “‘We was girls together,’ she said as though explaining something. ‘O Lord, Sula,’ she cried, ‘girl, girl, girlgirl.’” The emotion Nel expresses, in her ringing cry for the girlhood friendship she shared, is described as having no bottom or top, just “circles and circles of sorrow,” and stands in for the coiled mysteries of girlhood itself—some of triumph, some of pain, but a spiral towards womanhood, that, as Morrison says, has no end. *Girls’ Studies* explores the rise of this field and the concentric issues that surround and comprise girlhood—body image, sexuality, friendships, media influence and pressure, how girls’ voices are heard and expressed—as part of an overlapping expansion toward girls’ futures.

Elline Lipkin is a CSW Research Scholar, poet, and writer. Her new book, Girls’ Studies, was published in October 2009 by Seal Press. Her poems have appeared in Crab Orchard Review, Margie, North American Review, The Texas Review, and in The Poets’ Grimm: 20th Century Poems from Grimm Fairy Tales. She is also an editor at Girl with a Pen: Bridging Feminist Research and Popular Reality, <http://girlwpen.com/>.

Green Me Up, JJ!

CSW Research Scholar Jenny Price, who is the author of a book entitled *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* and is working on a new book entitled *13 Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.*, is writing a new “green advice” column for *LA Observed* website called “Green Me Up, JJ” about “how to act and think environmentally smart in our complicated 21st-century world.” She receives queries of all kinds including a question from Jason, a parent whose son wanted to join a baseball league 28 miles away but who

does not want to contribute to global warming, Amanda, who wanted to know how clean recyclable items need to be for them to go in the blue bin, and John Jr.’s Dad, who wanted to know which is the most eco-friendly car to drive. Price answers these questions with humor while providing answers to these questions all of us “greenies” have wanted to ask but didn’t know where to turn.

– Jaimie Baron

Patricija Petrač is a Bruin Angel!



CSW's Administrative Assistant Patricija Petrač was recently featured as a "Bruin Angel" in *UCLA Today*

because of her time spent volunteering for Philanthro Productions, an all-volunteer

nonprofit founded in 2007 by Andrew Geisse and Ian Lee, that organizes fundraising parties for charitable organizations, including Kiva, Invisible Children, and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Petrac, who was always involved in volunteering while she was an undergraduate at UCLA, first attended one of these parties last year and has since become the group's head of Human

Resources, devoting 10 to 30 hours a week to the group. She is particularly proud of her part in organizing an art auction and reception for *Upward Bound House*, which provides housing for the homeless. She has also helped Philanthro Productions become a more professional organization, starting a grant-writing component that will help sustain the organization in the future.

– Jaimie Baron

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