

Pembroke Center FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH ON WOMEN

BROWN UNIVERSITY

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER, 1983

1984–85 Post-Doctoral Fellowships

The 1984–85 theme for the *Cultural Constructions of the Female* research project is *Production, Reproduction, and Constructions of Sexual Difference*. Research will ask how social organizations of production and reproduction are related to categories of masculine and feminine. What productive roles are available to women and how do those roles both reflect and define cultural positions of the female? How are the categories of production and biological reproduction articulated in a given cultural system? What forms of social and cultural reproduction are performed by women? By asking such questions, what insights can we gain into theories of sexual divisions of labor? What can be learned in all cases by cross-cultural comparisons?

Post-doctoral fellows in residence participate in a weekly seminar, present at least one public paper during the year, and pursue individual research. Research projects should address theoretical issues related to cultural constructions of the female and should consider cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives on the question. Candidates will be asked to propose a research project related to the 1984–85 theme of *Production, Reproduction, and Constructions of Sexual Difference*. The post-doctoral fellowships are open to anyone in the humanities or social sciences who does not hold a tenured position in an American college or university. The stipend is \$19,300. Applications are due December 16, 1983. Selections will be announced by March 1. For application forms, write to:

Joan W. Scott, Director
Pembroke Center for Teaching &
Research on Women
Box 1958
Brown University
Providence, RI 02912

Cultural Constructions of the Female RESEARCH PROJECT

The first research project undertaken by the new Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women is a three-year study of *Cultural Constructions of the Female*. The study is funded by the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities and is directed by historian Joan W. Scott. The project addresses two considerations, one scholarly, the other social. As scholars, we are struck by the need for ever more rigorous examinations of cultural attitudes toward women, a need generated by rich debates within the field of women's studies and by discussion developing between women's studies scholars and their colleagues who work on other subjects. As participants in American society, we are struck by the need to understand the endurance of certain cultural definitions of women despite recent major demographic, economic, and social changes. We think it is necessary, as well, to develop tools that can help analyze the powerful role that notions of womanhood play in current political debates.

The project brings together scholars from a number of disciplines to study the formation, impact, and transformation of cultural conceptions of male and female. The question of how culture constructs gender is, of course, a complex one and one that transcends conventional disciplines. Indeed, it is increasingly evident that while women's studies research is stretching existing disciplinary limits, there are still too few opportunities for regular discussion of substantive research or of questions of theory and method across disciplinary lines. The Brown project is attempting to provide that opportunity in a project that asks how different societies and groups within the same society define gender and how those definitions are related to other cultural, social, economic, and political factors.

In a broader context, we expect the project to contribute to a better understanding of systems of discrimination against women. The last 15 years have demonstrated the limits of legislative and economic reform for eradicating deep-rooted biases based on sex and race. In addition, it has become clear that Western feminist theories are limited in their ability to interpret the experiences of women in the Third World. We hope to develop modes of inquiry which use cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary approaches and which bring together Western, minority, and Third World scholars. Working together we can begin to offer complex answers to difficult questions and contribute not only understanding about how gender inequities operate in societies, but insight into how equity might be achieved.

During each of its three years the project assembles an interdisciplinary research group of four post-doctoral fellows, visiting scholars, selected Brown faculty and students, and interested visitors. The group meets in a weekly seminar to discuss common readings as well as the participants' work in progress. Fellows use their time with the project to undertake independent research, usually related to book-length studies. Visiting scholars each deliver a public lecture, conduct a seminar, and meet informally with participants. The products of the seminar will be available in the individual published work of the participants as well as in the publications of the Pembroke Center.

Seminar Participants, 1982-83

POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWS

James Ault, Jr.

Ph.D. Sociology, Brandeis University
Project: *Anti-Feminism, Past and Present: The Social Bases of the Principled Defense of Tradition in Family and Personal Life*

The study examines the social bases of popular support for that principled defense of tradition harnessed so effectively in recent years by the "New Right." Research focuses on contemporary anti-feminism in America and also draws on comparative historical and cross-cultural evidence to gain a broader interpretive context.



Kaja Silverman

Ph.D. English, Brown University
Project: *Women in Cinema: Body and Voice*

The study advances a theory of female subjectivity by focusing on the status of the female body and voice within classic cinema and a range of experimental films. It explores the ways in which cinema contributes to the construction of sexual difference and it seeks to identify the ways in which film technology and the operations of ideology intersect.



Anne Norton

Ph.D. Political Science, University of Chicago
Project: *The Ideological Significance of Femininity and Maternity in American Political Culture*

The project examines the representations of "woman" and "mother" in American political culture, revealing the complex interplay of symbolic associations and social, political, and economic institutions. Analysis of the content and context of these representations shows the ideological uses of the feminine within American culture. Cross-culture comparisons help distinguish universal from specific uses of the feminine images.



BROWN FACULTY FELLOWS

Mary Ann Doane

Assistant Professor of English & Semiotics

Project: *The Woman's Film: Possession and Address*

The project is an analysis of the ways in which the "women's films" of the 1940's address the female viewer. The study takes as its premise the idea that patriarchal ideology operates most effectively at the level of its organization of vision, and that one can document a sexual politics of vision which conflates the opposition seeing/being seen with that of male/female. As a result, these films contain contradictions stemming from oppositions of objectivity and subjectivity in the construction of female identity.



Anne Fausto-Sterling

Associate Professor of Biology and Medicine

Project: *Scientific Constructions of the Female*

The study examines scientific research about gender difference and shows how such research at once influences and is influenced by cultural and political ideas. By examining political and scientific writings on women, the project locates contemporary debates on sexual difference within the broader context of the history of modern biology.



VISITING SCHOLARS

Mary O'Brien

Sociology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Project: *The Tyranny of the Abstract: The Feminist Struggle for Creative Politics*

Suzanne Relyea

French Literature, University of Massachusetts, Boston

Project: *Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and the New French Feminisms*

Alice Jardine

French Literature, Harvard University

Project: *Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts: The Political Difference of Julia Kristeva*

Kay Warren

Anthropology and Women's Studies, Princeton University

Project: *When Cosmologies Lie: Gender and Politics in the Andes*

Cheryl Gilkes

Sociology, Boston University and Bunting Institute, Radcliffe

Project: *Afro-American Women's History as a Critique and a Counter-Culture*

Jill Lewis

Humanities and Art, Hampshire College
Project: *Feminism and Motherhood*

Donald Mathews

History, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and

Jane Mathews

History and Women's Studies, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Project: *ERA and the Myth of Female Solidarity*

Gender Representation and Politics and The History of Women

Joan Wallach Scott

The study of the uses of gender in political discourse – of the various evocations of the feminine and masculine – adds a new dimension to the historical study of women and politics. Indeed, it may provide the conceptual tool that will help integrate information about women in the past into so-called “mainstream” political history and transform that history in the process.

For the most part, historical studies of women and politics have taken one of two approaches. The first seeks to demonstrate that women were found “in public,” that they were agents of change, acting to “make history.” Identifying women as political actors corrects their invisibility in the historical record, denies the notion that public-private distinctions have always existed, and reveals a record of political struggles by and about women. A variant on this approach examines the interior organization of women’s political movements as a way of documenting the existence of a distinctively female culture. The second approach deals with political attitudes towards women, tracing, as Susan Moller Okin does for example, the specific references to women in Western political thought.¹ Sometimes this approach focuses on the historical incompatibility of feminist movements on the one hand, and the structure and ideology of “progressive” or “revolutionary” organizations and movements on the other. It poses such issues as: are we justified in calling democratic a revolution that explicitly denies women their rights? And it calls into question the assumption of a necessary relationship between political revolution and an improvement in the status of women.

For all the rich information these approaches have produced and for all the new perspectives they bring to bear on our received understanding of history, they have not managed to change the way most people write and teach that history. Evidence about women is still supplementary or parallel to the narrative that centers on (white) male agency in politics.

Analyses of gender representation may provide the necessary bridge between women’s history and political history. Political discourse, even when it does not deal directly with women, is embedded with masculine/feminine oppositions around which a range of other kinds of oppositions turn. The feminine sometimes evokes subversion, sometimes subordination, sometimes aristocratic indolence, sometimes – as in Utopian Socialist formulations – cooperation and affection, the antithesis of masculine competitive, materialist, capitalist values. The female figure

of liberty in the early years of the French Revolution drew on associations between women and maternity. Liberty embodied the community in its oppositional phase, a subordinate rising up against entrenched authority, the nascent order, the progenitor of the new regime. (Anne Norton’s work in the Pembroke Center seminar has important formulations about this issue.)²

Although there is no necessary correspondence between representations of gender and attitudes and policies towards women, there seem at certain moments to have been important connections. Thus, Barbara Taylor contrasts the greater role given to women in England Utopian socialism (a movement which represented feminine values positively) with the reduced role allowed women in marxist socialist movements (which stressed male producers as the generators of economic activity and political mobilization).³ Darline Levy and Harriet Applewhite point to a relationship between Jacobin assertions of political primacy in 1793 and a new law proscribing women’s political activity.⁴ (Levy and Applewhite have documented the extent and variety of that activity in their book, *Women in Revolutionary Paris 1789–95*, and subsequent articles.) The law both affected women’s political participation and expressed Jacobin intentions to centralize and legitimize their power. In the male/female oppositions invoked in the Convention to justify the new law, the masculine represented the central authority which had to contain and control popular democracy (female). Males were the guarantors of the new order against the subvertors and disruptors of it. They were the holders of power, consolidating their hold by acting against the marginal, uncontrollable, illegal exercisers of power (females). The dominant subdued the subordinate; useful, productive citizens were being represented as opposed to those whose only legitimate role was reproduction. Sexual difference

Joan Wallach Scott, Director of the Pembroke Center, has been leading the weekly research seminar on Cultural Constructions of the Female. This piece is a condensed version of several articles Professor Scott has written this year which address the seminar’s topic for 1982–83. Gender Representation and Politics. One of the articles on women’s history will appear in Past and Present in 1984. Author of The Glassworkers of Carmaux: French Craftsmen and Political Action in a Nineteenth-Century City (1974) and co-author, with Louise Tilly, of Women, Work and Family (1978), Scott is now at work on a book on representations of the feminine in the nineteenth-century French labor movement.

Mary Lou Ratté

Ph.D. History, University of Massachusetts

Project: *Progressive Heroines: Hindu Women and British Indian Society, 1880–1920*

The project looks at gender representation in Indian nationalist movements. It studies the ways in which western-educated men and women in British India articulated a nationalist vision. It examines how that vision substituted Hindu symbols of authority and power for those associated with British rule and what ramifications that had for male and female participants in the movement.



BROWN STUDENTS

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Mary Carpenter

Ph.D. candidate, English
British Women’s Visionary Narratives

Judith Wegner

Ph.D. candidate, Religious Studies
The Status of Women in Jewish Mishnaic Law

Susan Cayleff

Ph.D. candidate, American Civilization
Nineteenth-Century Reform Politics and the Reconceptualization of Gender Definitions

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Carol Cohen

American Civilization
Female Intimacy and Gender Identity in 19th-Century America

Laurie Derby

Development Studies Program
Women in Socialist Development: Case Studies of Cuba and Tanzania

Victoria Westhead

Semiotics
The Ideology of Familial Configurations and the Projection of Sexual Difference

operated in this example to represent a specific set of political intentions and political power. In turn, the legislation which embodied these intentions formalized the rules and terms of the sexual division of labor in French society.

A final intriguing example of the way a rhetorical use of sexual difference translated at a certain moment into actual law directed at women comes from France during the Restoration. As conservative politicians sought to redress the damage caused by the revolution, they demanded repeal of the divorce laws of 1792. The argument in 1816 of the deputy Bonald is revealing for the transition it makes *from* an analogy between familial and political authority to a causal connection between them:

Just as political democracy 'allows the people, the weak part of political society, to rise against the established power,' so divorce, 'veritable domestic democracy,' allows the wife, 'the weak part, to rebel against marital authority.' Thus, 'in order to keep the state out of the hands of the people, it is necessary to keep the family out of the hands of wives and children.'⁵

It would be a mistake to assume that analogies between family power and state power always operated in the same way or that representations of sexual difference always led to legislation which specifically applied to women. Clearly, the relationship is complex when we are dealing with women's political action, women's political rights, and metaphoric and symbolic representations of the feminine. The problem for empirical historical investigation, as for theoretical inquiry, is to understand the connections among these three disparate, yet related topics. For historians this will be accomplished initially, I think, by carefully constructed case studies of moments –

such as those already cited – when representations of gender, laws about women, and women's political participation are somehow all at issue.

The study of gender representation in political discourse leads us to certain central issues of political history. It leads us to the political structures and political ideas that create and enforce relationships of power – relationships of power that shape and set the boundaries of public discourse and of all aspects of life. As such, it offers the conceptual link to political history that separate studies of women's actions or of ideas about women do not necessarily provide. To discover where women have been throughout history, it is necessary to explore what gender has had to do with the workings of power. Only then will we complete the process of restoring women to historical visibility and fundamentally changing conventional understandings of political history.

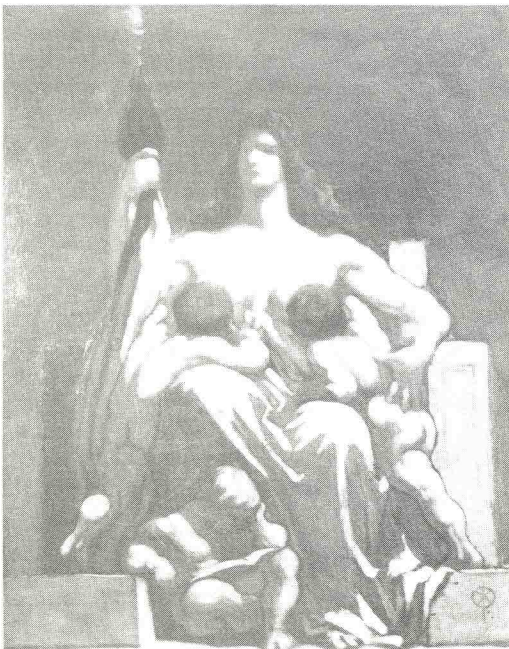
NOTES

1. Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, Princeton, 1979.
2. Anne Norton, "Maternal Metaphors in Politics: Three Studies," unpublished Pembroke Seminar paper, 1983.
3. Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 1983.
4. Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline Gay Levy, "Responses to the Political Activism of Women of the People in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1793," forthcoming in B. Harris and J. McNamara, *Women and the Structure of Society: Papers from the Fifth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women*, Durham, N.C. 1983.
5. Roderick Philipps, "Women and Family Breakdown in Eighteenth-Century France: Rouen 1780–1800," *Social History*, 2, May 1976, p. 217.

Affiliated Lectures 1982–83

The Pembroke Center and the Sarah Doyle Women's Center sponsor a number of programs during the academic year which complement the *Cultural Constructions of the Female* research project and which help bring the specialized focus of the research seminar to the broader university community. A number of the programs in 1982–83 were co-sponsored with other academic departments – French Studies and Comparative Literature – and with the Dean of the College and student groups. Lecturers included French theorist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva and French novelist and critic Monique Wittig. Other issues of theory and feminist criticism were addressed, in different ways, by Jane Gallop, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Carolyn Heilbrun. Historian Barbara Ehrenreich spoke on women in a changing capitalist economy and historian Linda Gordon on women's rights in the context of the New Right. The Sarah Doyle lecture series on Women and Labor brought historians Barbara Melosh, Susan Benson, and Valerie Quinney, and sociologist Ruth Milkman, who spoke respectively on women in nursing, in department store work, in the automobile industry, and in clerical jobs. The regular weekly series of noon-time Friday Forums included an analysis of women's labor force participation in Peru by educational sociologist Martha Maldonado van Zuiden; an examination of the cultural practices of the African-American family by Alice Brown-Collins, Assistant Professor of Afro-American Studies at Brown; and a discussion of Afro-Brazilian women by Brown student Tonita Lipscomb.

For announcements of the lectures and other programs sponsored by the Pembroke Center and the Sarah Doyle Center, write: Program Announcements, Pembroke Center, Box 1958, Brown University, Providence, R.I. 02912.



1983-84 Seminar

The theme for next year's seminar is *Values, Ethics, and the Meanings of Gender*. Research will consider gender as an evaluative category. How are ideas of "female" and "male" inscribed within the values and normative structures of society? Conversely, how do society's ethics and value systems contribute to a construction of gender? What insights do we gain into these processes by looking at definitions of gender which differ cross-culturally or according to class or ethnicity?

POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWS

Françoise Basch

History

Critics of the Family in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America

Janice Doane

English

The Figure of Woman in Contemporary Nostalgic Texts

Yasmine Ergas

Sociology

'In dreams begins responsibility.'
Changing Utopias, Collective Identities, and Feminist Movements, 1960-1980

Harriet Whitehead

Anthropology

Gender and Prestige in New Guinea

BROWN FACULTY FELLOWS

Melinda Rabb

Assistant Professor of English

Re-forming Women: Female Metamorphosis in Eighteenth-Century Satire

Naomi Schor

Associate Professor of French Literature
George Sand and Company

VISITING FACULTY AFFILIATE

Maria Luisa Nunes

Associate Professor of Portuguese,
University of Pittsburgh

The Pembroke Center

The Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women opened in the fall of 1981 as a regular academic center within Brown University. It brings together faculty and students from all disciplines who are interested in research and curricular development in the area of women's studies. The faculty associates of the Center include some 25 to 30 scholars at Brown who are engaged in research on women and issues of gender. Since 1982, the Center has offered an A.B. degree in women's studies. Although there is no graduate degree in the field, students can write theses on women's studies topics within established programs. Undergraduates have also produced impressive papers and honors theses, as well as an annual collection of scholarly and critical essays entitled *Pembroke: A Journal of Feminist Studies*.

A special undertaking of the Center is the Pembroke Archive Project. Its goal is to enlarge the library holdings on the history of women at Brown by collecting papers, memorabilia, and oral histories from alumnae. A Women's College was founded at Brown in 1891; it was renamed Pembroke College in 1928. In 1971, Pembroke was merged with Brown. The merger achieved complete coeducation, but it threatened also to obscure the history of women's education at Brown. The Archive Project has made that history visible and reminds students, faculty, alumni, and alumnae of the historical commitment of the university to women's education. Appropriately, the Center's Director, Joan Scott, holds the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair, named for the fifth dean of Pembroke College. The Chair, the Pembroke Center, and now the Pembroke Archive, all preserve in lasting institutions the rich female and feminist heritage of Pembroke College.

The Center sponsors colloquia, conferences, and other opportunities for scholarly exchange within Brown and among women's studies scholars in the area. It is currently developing future research projects which continue our special emphasis on cultural constructions and social change and which also address the need for curricular development for women's studies in graduate education.

The Sarah Doyle Women's Center

The Pembroke Center has as a coordinate organization the Sarah Doyle Women's Center. Since 1975, the Sarah Doyle Center has provided a variety of programs and resources for the Brown and local communities. Funded by the university, the Women's Center has extensive resource and referral information, a library, an art gallery, and counseling and support group services. It offers a full schedule of lectures, workshops, conferences, and other activities. It has a large volunteer and paid student staff and maintains close working relations with women's groups at Brown and in the community. By working together, the two centers seek to integrate as fully as possible their academic, social, and political concerns.

Elizabeth Weed

Director

Mary Renda

Staff Coordinator

Conference Planned for Spring 1985

In the third year of the research project on *Cultural Constructions of the Female*, the Pembroke Center will host a conference of scholars from the U.S. and abroad whose work explores the operations of culture and gender. The conference will highlight the work of the Fellows and Visiting Scholars in the three research seminars. It will review the accomplishments of the project and point to new directions in feminist cultural inquiry. Watch for publicity.

In future newsletters . . .

The next newsletter will begin a series reporting on the work of Brown faculty members who do research on women and gender or who are engaged in feminist theory and criticism.

Pembroke Center Advisory Board

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Princeton, New Jersey

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Brown University

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Elaine Marks
*Department of French and Women's
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University of Wisconsin*

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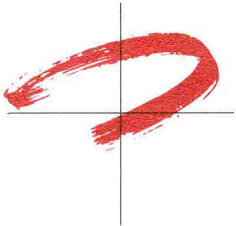
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