

PEMBROKE CENTER

Associates Newsletter

Covering the Bases: Brown Women in Sports

If you ask female CEOs around the country, the majority have participated in team sports and they credit that with their performance in the boardroom,” said Sharon Cohen ’89, founder and executive of Figure Skating in Harlem, as she underscored the importance of sports for women and girls. The conversation was part of the Pembroke Center Associates commencement forum, “Covering the Bases: Brown Women in Sports,” sponsored in association with the Women’s Leadership Council.

“Accessibility of sports is a really important topic because we assume, in middle-class society, that everyone plays sports...but, the fact of the matter is that there are many sports that are elitist and still serve a very non-diverse population. The sport that I fell in love with and participated in – figure skating – is one of those sports that is not diverse at all,” said Cohen. “About 25 years ago, I was working at CBS News and was invited to meet some girls in East Harlem who wanted to figure skate. What I saw was that when you provide the opportunity, when you provide the safe space and the blank sheet of ice, young women grow toward health. They benefit in the same ways that kids from more affluent communities benefit from sports.”

“In ice-skating we fall down all the time, so we learn how to get up, and resilience is a big lesson,” added Cohen. “These are life-lessons, or as I like to call them, ‘life-saving lessons.’ By providing access,



PHOTO CREDIT: HANK RANDALL

(L-R) Sarah Low '83, Jasmine Waddell '99, Laura Johnson '90, Sharon Cohen '89

you are really transforming lives, and in that way, I believe sport can be a vehicle for social change. All these years later we’ve seen a thousand girls come through our program and the results consistently show greater self confidence, better physical health, and that they are less likely to become pregnant before adulthood, so there are long-term health benefits. Psychologically, there are fewer incidents of depression and anxiety. You wouldn’t necessarily link it immediately, but sports participation in girls also leads to greater test scores and greater academic performance.”

But, in addition to the many benefits, sports can be a fraught space for girls and women, especially in the area of sexuality and stigma. “For women, the relationship between sexuality and sports has really evolved over the last 130 years. Initially, when women moved into sports in ways that were publicly visible, the anxiety was about heterosexuality – that by becoming involved in a domain that was traditionally viewed as masculine that women were going to take on masculine characteristics – including an excessive heterosexual drive,” explained Laura

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From the Director

As Brown University enters the year of 250+, I am delighted to carry forward the Pembroke Center's mission of and dedication to rigorous and critical thinking in all matters regarding women, gender, and difference most broadly conceived. In this vein, the Center will actively pursue research initiatives at Brown and beyond to support the critical work that furthers its mission.

The Pembroke Seminar has been a vital component of the Center's intellectual work. Next year the Seminar's theme will be "Aesthetics and the Question of Beauty," led by Marc Redfield, Professor of Comparative Literature and English. The seminar has generated enormous interest, promising to bring together a sizable group of scholars: three outstanding postdoctoral fellows, Brown faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, and a number of national and international visiting scholars.

In the following four years, the Pembroke Seminar will focus on the critical and historical legacies of World War I, as a way to honor the 100th anniversary of that war. Along these lines, the Center plans to call upon some of Brown's recent stellar hires and invite them to participate in the Pembroke Center's intellectual life. Following Professor Redfield's seminar on beauty, Professor Joan Copjec (Modern Culture and Media) will start off the "war series" with a seminar titled "Fatigue." Our new Nancy Duke Lewis Professor Bonnie Honig (Political Science) will lead a seminar titled "Theaters of War" the following year.

The Pembroke Center's Feminist Theory Archive and Christine Dunlap Farnham Archive are moving ahead with a very successful fund-raising campaign, as well as with a conference series titled "The Orders of Knowledge." On September 19, 2014 the Center will host a symposium dedicated to the question of the colonial archive. Our speakers will be Ruth Ben-Ghiat (NYU), Natalie Davis (University of Toronto), Itohan Osayimwese (Brown), and Ann Stoler (New School).

The Pembroke Center's seed grant program supporting transnational research has awarded grants to faculty research teams from anthropology, history, Africana studies, political science, modern culture and media, history of art and architecture, and urban studies. We look forward to profiling these projects in a future issue. In addition, we will further efforts toward internationalizing our programs, visiting scholars, and collaborations. The joint program with Nanjing University in China will be strengthened, and I hope to make the first steps toward building institutional links in India and the Middle East.

I very much look forward to exciting new programs and initiatives during the coming years and feel honored by the confidence placed in me to be the Pembroke Center's new director.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg
Director

PEMBROKE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH ON WOMEN

Brown University - Box 1958, Providence, RI 02912

PHONE: (401) 863-3650 FAX: (401) 863-3650 EMAIL: Pembroke_Center@brown.edu
www.brown.edu/pembrokecenter



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Johnson, Lecturer in Studies of Women, Gender and Sexuality and a member of the Faculty of Education at Harvard University. “It wasn’t until around the 1930s, for a variety of reasons, that public attention began to shift to associate women’s athletics with lesbianism. That is when you began to see a real social stigma emerging around lesbianism publicly and the attachment of that stigma to women’s sports.”

“You see this tension playing out today,” Johnson reported. “I’ve been told by women that when they are being recruited, some coaches will say to them, ‘It is safe to come to our school and play for us because we don’t have any lesbians on our team.’ This of course is probably not accurate as well as being extremely offensive. Then they will go to another school whose coaches will say, ‘You should come to us because we are inclusive and we embrace all sexualities and you’ll be safe here.’”

“Big changes are also going to come from the acceptance of male homosexual athletes,” observed Johnson. “That’s going to change the world of women’s sports as well. In a world where Michael Sam is drafted into the National Football League, you are changing the vision of masculinity, which is going to change things for women athletes as well.”

“Figure skating has a large gay male population, and it is a safe space for gay male athletes,” added Cohen. “But for the women who participate...it is not safe to be a lesbian. As society evolves, I think people’s sexual orientation vis-à-vis sports becomes less important and hopefully all sports open up to all people.”

Jasmine Waddell ’99, Resident Dean of Freshman at Harvard University, Trustee on the Corporation of Brown University, and a member of the Pembroke Center

“THE RESULTS CONSISTENTLY SHOW GREATER SELF CONFIDENCE, BETTER PHYSICAL HEALTH...”

Associates Council, moderated the forum and asked the panelists about their experiences of sexism in sports. “Cleopatra fished with a fly,” responded Sarah Low ’83 a professional fly-fishing guide and author. “In 1496 the first English writing on fly-fishing was from a woman, a nun in England. The most famous fly-caster, probably in the world, is Joan Wulff, who is now eighty-seven years old and in the world of fly-fishing is a rock star – and yet, fly-fishing is

absolutely a man’s world – it was, and it still is.”

“Twenty years ago women were stepping into fishing gear that was designed and built for men. After a while, the manufacturers started realizing that they should appeal to the women as well, so they added color and lace and floral patterns to fishing vests and waders. Women pushed back and said, ‘We are just as serious about fishing as men are and we want the technical gear – it doesn’t have to be pretty, but it has to match our curvier bodies.’ Slowly the industry has responded.”

Low reported facing a related challenge from her publisher about her book on fly-fishing. The editor was concerned that she had too many quotes from women in the text. “I did think it would be smart to market the book to women anglers,” said Low. “Women are the largest growing segment of the fly-fishing population.” The publisher also chose to deviate from the norm of having a photo of the author on the cover and instead used a photo of a man fishing. Low remains convinced that there is an underserved market of women anglers.

Panelists discussed the interplay between increased participation, competition, and early specialization. “Title IX was instituted in 1972, where we had 300,000 high school girls participating in sports, and now we have 3.2 million,” said Johnson. “Even those sports that used to be accessible to a wider socioeconomic class are becoming increasingly expensive,” said Johnson. Cohen argued for the value of participating, noting that few will make it to the elite status of professional sports. Although an Olympic medal eluded her, she developed the confidence to rely on her own hard work and set goals. “I have this inner athlete that gets right back up, no matter what happens,” said Cohen.

To view the video of the program please visit: <http://www.brown.edu/research/pembroke-center/videos>

Pembroke Center 2014 Student Prizes



Established by Ruth Simmons, president of Brown University from 2001 to 2012, this Pembroke Center prize recognizes an outstanding honors thesis related to women or gender. **Saudi Garcia '14**, an anthropology concentrator, has received the prize this year.

Garcia's thesis, titled "The Dominican Second Generation Diasporic Experience: History, Community, and Connection," critically examines conventional diaspora theoretical frameworks that focus on the first generation of labor migrants. She suggests that important innovations are possible if one extends this model to include the second generation of U.S.-born Dominicans. This research examines the life narratives, identities, and experiences of seventeen U.S.-born Dominican teenage girls in Providence, Rhode Island, and New York City, New York. Garcia's analysis examines the themes of history and memory; community, identity, and transnationalism; and youths' construction of social belonging to understand the aspirations of Dominican teens in the United States, as well as changing significance of returning to their parents' communities in the Dominican Republic.

Garcia has been accepted as a corps member for City Year in the South Bronx, where she will be tutoring, mentoring, and supporting struggling students. Garcia is also applying to graduate school in anthropology with the support of the Institute for the Recruitment of Teachers program, which seeks to address the lack of diversity in the nation's teaching faculties.



Named for Joan Wallach Scott, the founding director of the Pembroke Center and the Harold F. Linder Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study, this prize rewards an outstanding honors thesis in gender and sexuality studies. **Darcy Pinkerton '14**, a double concentrator in gender and sexuality studies and Africana studies, has received recognition this year for her thesis "Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Sexual Consent in the Female Sexuality Workshop (FemSex)."

Pinkerton's thesis examines the uses of sexual consent in contemporary campus-based feminist activism and advocacy, focusing on a sex education workshop at Brown University. She explores the analytical and political ramifications of how these young feminists discursively and materially use consent to create a feminist ethics of sex and sexuality.



The Pembroke Center annually awards the Marie J. Langlois Dissertation Prize for an outstanding dissertation in the area of feminist studies. The Pembroke Center has awarded this year's prize to **Maggie Hennefeld**, a graduate student in modern culture and media, for her dissertation, "Specters of Slapstick and Silent Film Comediennes."

Hennefeld's dissertation explores the historical co-emergence of ideas of laughter and cinema as a medium. She focuses on early silent slapstick films that depict female metamorphosis: from magical butterfly women to shape-shifting suffragette activists to spontaneously combusting and self-dismembering kitchen maids. Hennefeld's research reopens heated, early-twentieth-century debates about the social value of laughter – disciplinary ridicule *versus* non-instrumental jubilee – by raising questions about why spectators laugh at images of violence exercised on women's bodies.

Hennefeld has accepted the position of Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at the Jackman Humanities Institute at the University of Toronto for next year. In the fall of 2015, she will assume the position of Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota.

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