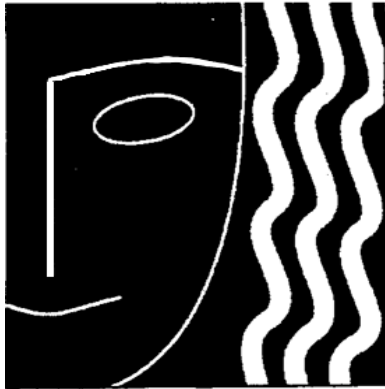


# MATRIX

A PUBLICATION SPONSORED BY THE WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM



WOMEN'S STUDIES  
RESEARCH AND  
RESOURCE CENTER  
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY  
FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

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From the Director

## Welcome To The New Millennium

We have survived Y2K, and the end of the world prophesies (of course, I am writing this in December of 1999. If you are not reading it, I was wrong). We are very much alive, more than well, and, as befits this university, ever on the move.

This is still George Mason, a place Heraclitus could have easily called home. At the Center we are moving toward becoming more integrated within and integral to the academic and campus life of the University. In welcoming Cheryl Bartholomew to our faculty this fall (see feature on page 6), we brought the HORIZONS! camp to the Center, established a closer relationship with the Psychology department and created new ties with New Century College. We are now searching for an Associate Professor working at the intersections of sex, race, and gender. We have not specified a particular discipline for this position but we have specified that this person will be working with Women's Studies and African American Studies. We see this as a first step in strengthening the ties between our programs and as a major step in developing our students' awareness of the relationship between issues of sex, race, and gender. This is a faculty position and so we are searching for someone with outstanding research and teaching credentials, but this is also a Women's Studies position and that means that we are looking for someone who will make a difference in the life of the university. Check your email for search updates.

Last semester we were asked to provide a list of program goals including methods of evaluation for the SACS report. After some discussions with the Executive Committee I sent a draft of our list to you.

This is one of those time when technology made good conversation possible. It was also one of those times when the strength, diversity, and commitment of this faculty was in full play. A copy of the statement we provided for the SACS committee follows on page 5. It reflects your ideas, concerns and interests. It is a final copy in name only. I see it as both a challenge and as the basis for further discussions. It is a challenge in at least two senses:

(1) we must see whether and how we meet these goals;

(2) we must determine where changes in our program may be necessary.

### Goals and Questions for the Future

In settling on these goals we attended to the fact that we are a minor in which only two courses are prescribed. Can we expect the two core courses to meet all of these goals? Should we pare down the goals or require more courses? Should we distinguish between goals of the core courses and goals met by different combinations of electives? A more general question was raised by one of our faculty who asked about the way in which we were using the terms feminist and women. Are they interchangeable? Are we, by using the term feminist so prominently, turning away students who disavow feminism despite their interest in women's issues? Do you have to be a feminist to be a Women's Studies minor? These are some of the questions to keep in mind as you read the goals. Let us know what other questions/concerns they raise for you. Email, call, write, make a date to talk. However you choose to do it, let's keep the conversation going as we begin the first semester of the twenty-first century.

Ⓜ Debra Bergoffen

## Matrix Editorial Board

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## Editor's Insight

The word *matrix* is Latin for womb. As the articles for this first issue of the 21st century were laid out it became clear why this publication is so named. The directors of this publication and the authors who have contributed to this issue are nourishing and giving life to Women's Studies at GMU. It is not an easy task to cross disciplines and seek out the best from each discipline for the development of one program, but it is happening and this publication represents a part of that effort.

It has been my pleasure to become part of this publication as the new Managing Editor and to work with its dynamic and dedicated Board of Directors. It is my hope as a GMU graduate student concentrating in professional writing and editing to give the best of my discipline to this project. As editor, I welcome your comments and ideas.

Sharon J. Ritchey  
email [sharon@ritchey.org](mailto:sharon@ritchey.org)

## Linking Opportunities With People

Internships and volunteer experiences are integral parts of many courses of study at GMU and provide students, faculty, and the community with a resource to combine academic study with real life experiences. With minimal research and effort, interested parties can find internship and volunteer opportunities directly related to Women's Studies.

The first place for students and faculty to begin is on campus with a visit to the Center of Service and Leadership (CSL). The CSL's knowledgeable staff is ready to link people to opportunities. The CSL mission is "to promote positive change and civic responsibility by combining academic study, leadership development and direct community service." According to Heather Hare, the program's assistant director, there are many opportunities for students and faculty who are looking to work either with women's groups or on women's issues. The CSL has an information sheet listing volunteer opportunities for women's services. Hare encourages people to contact the center for more information.

Here is a brief list of local agencies with volunteer opportunities.

**Alexandria Office on Women** (703) 838-5030. Volunteers are needed to work on various programs that effect the lives of women in the community.

**The Young Women's Project** (202) 393-0461. A multi-cultural organization created by and for women in their teens, twenties, and thirties, it is dedicated to the empowerment of women through education and action.

**The Women's Center** (703) 281-4928. This group provides immediate and affordable counseling to women and their families. Volunteers assist with fundraisers, program development, and various office duties. (M)

## The Second Biennial Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) Conference

The University of Minnesota in Minneapolis was the sponsor of the second Biennial Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) Conference from October 7-9, 1999. Over 600 scholars, writers, and activists, traveled to the twin cities to hear featured speakers including Dorothy Allison, Judith Butler, Evelyn Fox-Keller, Jane Gallop, Deborah Cameron, Judith Halverstam, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Dale Spender, and Shirley Wilson Logan. Speakers addressed issues of feminism and rhetoric as they impact women and men within and beyond the university. The more than 150 panels included literary readings, discussions of philosophers' works and performance pieces, as well as presentations on classroom issues and activism. Keynote speeches addressed topics as diverse as the history of language, the politics of common sense, Austin Powers and the construction of masculinity, and the use of gender as a metaphor in the biological sciences.

In addition to the academic presentations, the conference featured a book sale by Amazon Bookstore, the oldest feminist bookstore in North America. Other local women's businesses and organizations were also present. Exhibitors included the Minnesota Women's Press, Inc., which prints a biweekly women's newspaper; Voices from the Gaps, an online project focused on North American women writers of color; and the Women's Prison Book Project, which brings books free of charge to women in prison. The conference has an online component hosted by TWUMOO, a distance-learning initiative of Texas Women's University. (M)

Photos from the conference, speeches by keynote speakers and discussion of the problems and questions raised by the conference are available in the website <http://moo.twu.edu:7000>

## Rethinking Recognition

*A talk presented by Dr. Nancy Fraser*

Last September, Women's Studies and Cultural Studies co-hosted a speaking visit by Dr. Nancy Fraser, a Professor of Political Science in the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research.

Fraser's talk, "Rethinking Recognition: Overcoming Displacement and Reification in Cultural Politics", addressed the shift from the economic determinism of earlier social movements, sometimes called "vulgar Marxism", to the cultural determinism of today, which Fraser dubs "vulgar culturalism." She argued that struggles for recognition based on group identity are evident at both ends of the political spectrum, from the Christian Right's claim of anti-Christian oppression to the push to criminalize discrimination against gay and lesbian Americans. Fraser argued that organizing rights-based political work around the legitimation of currently existing and named social groups can reinforce divisions between them, rather than promote respectful relations across groups. As a result of the emphasis on group identities, those with multiple group affiliations are often forced to choose among established groups or to negotiate between what are sometimes conflicting group interests. In other words, identity-based struggles for rights tend to polarize differences among groups, resulting in new forms of exclusion.

Another drawback to the "identity politics" approach is that it can promote authoritarianism by necessitating the suppression of intra-group differences. Identity politics also "freezes" possible categories and identities in the current historical moment. Fraser argued that although some forms of identity politics have genuinely liberatory aspirations, this new identity politics is complicated by the need for marginalized groups to resist available representations of themselves and create and display their own self-representations. Attempts to gain political recognition for marginal

groups also tend to separate problems with the distribution of resources from social problems. Fraser warned that the lack of positive representations of marginalized groups may be seen as "free floating" rather than related to social and cultural institutions. Some social critics suggest that revaluing the culture of marginal groups would solve economic problems such as low wages and lack of access to education by eliminating discrimination. However, Fraser argues, since markets create differential distribution regardless of culture, such an approach can only displace the problem of unequal distribution and not address it effectively.

Fraser proposed an alternative approach to rights that provides possibilities for overcoming the limitations of identity politics. Rather than reifying various articulated group identities by seeking legal rights for named social groups, Fraser proposed that we look at the multiple barriers to equal participation in democracy. She argued that focusing on impediments to full political participation avoids shoring up the existing social categories that force everyone outside the dominant norm to choose fragments of identity and identification. Fraser's approach also allows for and demands intervention beyond law and public policy by insisting that barriers be dealt with on their own ground, whether cultural, economic or political in the traditional sense. In examining the various barriers faced by individuals in the struggle for enfranchisement, Fraser emphasized that it would be necessary to address the problem of inequitable resource distribution as well as the social forces which devalue certain groups. (M)

## A "Judging" of Women's Studies

*An interview by Molly Dragiewicz*

The Honorable Rosemarie Annunziata is President of the Women's Advisory Board at George Mason University. The board was established in 1995 to advise and assist in the development of programs to improve women's educational and employment opportunities. The group supports the Women's Studies Research and Resource Center and encourages women to enter into nontraditional fields.

Annunziata sits on the Virginia Court of Appeals and is a member of the Family Law Bar, the National Association of Judges, and the Washington College Dean's Advisory Committee. She is also actively involved with alternative dispute resolution and efforts to deal with the children of incarcerated mothers.

Annunziata values Women's Studies as a resource for students and community members because it provides an opportunity to learn about the history of women's struggles for social change and political enfranchisement. She noted that a knowledge of women's history is essential to understanding women's situations today. Annunziata's own experience as a nontraditional student, beginning law school when she had two young children, illustrates some of the ways that gender influences our choices and circumstances. Annunziata pursued a law degree in the interest of applying her communication, analytical and community mobilization skills, as well as with the hope of having a flexible career that would allow her to continue caring for her children.

Annunziata attended law school at night at a time when there weren't many women studying law. At the time of her graduation in 1978, there were no female judges in the state of Virginia, and only a few exceptional women practicing law. Annunziata was glad to be able to see the radical changes in women's circumstances that took place while she attended school and began to practice law and recognizes the continued need for work to advance equity in the U.S. and abroad. (M)

# Women's Studies Faculty News

**Cheryl Bartholomew** and co-author Jan Beauregard have a book contract with Waveland Press for *Gender Sensitive, Psychotherapy: Theory and Practice*. She will also be offering the HORIZONS! Summer Camp for gifted and talented students at GMU this summer.

**Debra B. Bergoffen** has published the following:

"I Never Imagined Myself a Philosopher", *Portraits of American Continental Philosophers*, ed. James Watson; and "Marriage and the Feminine Protest", *Hypathia*.

Presentations:

"On Not Being a Woman: Simone de Beauvoir and the Ambiguity of Desire" Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy

"Irigaray and The Other (of) Descartes", International Philosopher's Seminar

**Jane Turner Censer** published an article, "Reimagining the North-South Reunion: Southern Women Novelists and the Intersectional Romance, 1865-1900" in *Southern Culture*. This is part of a larger study, "The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895," funded by a 1998-1999 NEH Fellowship for College Teachers. She also served on the nominating committee of the Southern Historical Association this year and is a member of the Executive Council of the Southern Association for Women Historians.

**Rose Cherubin** presented a paper, "Can Zeno's Arguments Touch Aristotle's Account of Motion?", at the annual conference of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy.

**Ruth Fischer's** publications include "The Community Service Link: Learning-Centeredness in Action" in *inventio*; "Advancing Writing at GMU: Responding to Community Needs, Encouraging Faculty Interests" (co-authored with Christopher Thaiss) forthcoming in, *Coming of Age: The Advanced Writing Curriculum*. Edited by Linda Shamoon, Rebecca Moore Howard, Sandra Jamieson, and Robert Schweigler.

Presentations:

"First-Year Composition Outcomes and the National Writing Project" at the 1999 Annual Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English.

"The Outcomes Statement: Theory and Technology," The Interests of the WPA, Council of Writing Program Administrators Annual Conference.

"The Community Service Link: From Personality to Program." A Learning Community Program in Transition: Multiple Possibilities for WAC. Fourth National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference.

**Nancy Weiss Hanrahan** presented a paper entitled "The Nature of Structure and the Form of Difference: Temporal Conceptions in Critical Theory" as part of a distinguished panel on Critical Theory at the American Sociological Association annual meeting in Chicago.

She has also been selected to be the Organizer of the Theory and Culture Network of the ASA Culture Section. Her book, *Surprise: A Dynamic Critical Theory of Culture*, has been accepted by Praeger publishers for publication next fall.

**Lorna Irvine** presented a paper on Carol Shields' work at the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States in Pittsburgh. She also joined the editorial board of the *American Review of Canadian Studies* and published a book review in *Quaker Studies*

**Laura Mann** presented a performance of her recital "In A Woman's Voice, Music for a the New Millennium" for the Tenacre Foundation in Princeton, New Jersey. Dr. Mann was also a featured artist at First Night Alexandria, performing three recital segments at the Lyceum Theatre.

**Rose Pascarell** made a presentation at the National Communication Association with Anita Taylor and Jamey Piland, "Politics and Pedagogy for Teaching Gender and Violence: Expanding the Confines of Traditional Practice."

**Janine M. Ricouart** presented her work on France Daigle entitled: "Frances Daigle: Multiple Voices, Multiple Choices." at an international conference organized by the Association of Canadian Studies in the United States (ACSUS). The essay will be published this year in a book edited by Paula Gilbert and Roseanna Dufault called *Doing Gender*.

**Linda Seligman** is the editor of a volume entitled *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Mediating Identities, Marketing Ware*, which is in press at Stanford University Press. Cases include women traders from India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Morocco, Hungary, Ghana, Peru, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Bolivia.

Presentations:

"Two Way Streets: Reasoning and Rioting in Urban Design in Cuzco, Peru" in the session "Legal Discourse in Latin America: Timeless Practices or Dynamic Process," for the American Anthropological Association Meetings.

*continued on page 5*

## Women's Studies Faculty News *continued from page 4*

**Anita Taylor** will be returning to the University this semester from a year of faculty exchange work at the Evergreen State College In Olympia, Washington. *Hearing Many Voices*, her book co-edited with M. J. Hardman of the University of Florida, a compilation of studies of voices of women not usually heard, representing many cultures and languages is forthcoming from Hampton Press.

**Mary Lee Vance** had a chapter published in the book *Voices From Another Place*. The book is a collection of works from Korean-born adult adoptees. Her chapter, "Who Do I Resemble," reflects a few of the times when she either resembled others or wanted to look like others. The chapter candidly looks at how both her race and disability have greatly influenced who she is today.

**Margaret R. Yocum** completed an exhibit and exhibit catalogue entitled "Working the Woods."

**Terry Myers Zawacki's** essay "Telling Stories: The Subject is Never Just Me" will appear in *Stories Told in School*, from University of Michigan Press. This article concerns intersections of composition and feminist theories vis-a-vis personal writing and the impact on our practice.

## Women's Studies Program Student Learning Goals

*(continued from page 1)*

1. Know the history of the women's movement in the United States. Identify the similarities and differences between this movement and women's movements in other countries with respect to issues of concern and strategies for change.

2. Understand the basic concepts and categories of feminist scholarship, e.g. sex, gender, sexuality, class, patriarchy, feminism.

3. Understand the ways in which feminist scholarship has influenced the academic disciplines and generated a reexamination of social, political, cultural and economic practices.

4. Examine contemporary American phenomena from a feminist perspective, e.g. anorexia, pornography, domestic violence, research priorities in the sciences, economic inequality, balancing the demands of work and family.

5. Examine the ways in which our concepts of gender are reflected in the ways in which different types of work are rewarded and valued.

6. Determine/analyze the ways in which public policies effect women's lives, e.g. welfare, health, immigration, education, minimum wage.

7. Familiarize students with women's portrayal in the arts, e.g. literature, the visual arts, folklore, mythology.

8. Familiarize students with women's accomplishments in the arts, sciences, humanities, business, and the professions

### Other Program Goals

1. Provide support for women and men at GMU who are concerned with women's issues.

2. Create a community for students, faculty, administrators and staff who are concerned with women's quality of life on and off campus.

3. Sponsor events that focus on women's issues, e.g. Take Back The Night and The Women's Leadership Conference.

4. Encourage volunteer work in area groups working for

women, e.g. domestic violence shelters, rape hot lines.

5. Encourage interdisciplinary and collaborative learning, teaching, and research.

6. Recognize and support the research and teaching of Women's Studies faculty and affiliates.

7. Formulate strategies for a more equitable society.

### Evaluation Methods

1. Senior exit interviews.

2. Papers/ projects evaluations .

3. Surveys (M)



## Cheryl Bartholomew: GMU'S First Full-Time Women's Studies Faculty Member

The Women's Studies Department is pleased to introduce its first full-time faculty member Dr. Cheryl Bartholomew. She agreed to be interviewed for the *Matrix*. Her candor and vision for the future of Women's Studies at GMU can only serve to foster greater study and interest in the discipline. But aside from her impressive credentials as an author, speaker, and developer of the much lauded HORIZONS: 2000 Career and Lifepanning Curriculum for Grades 5 to 12, Dr. Bartholomew demonstrates a passion for her work and an affable personality suited to inspire her students and peers.

Dr. Bartholomew began teaching at GMU in 1989, and was appointed as the first full-time Women's Studies faculty member in the fall of 1999. In addition to countless achievements, one of the most influential programs created by Dr. Bartholomew is the HORIZONS:2000 "Career and Lifepanning Curriculum". The program is being taught in schools and universities throughout the United States, the Girl Scouts, Peace Corps, Probation Houses, Women's Shelters, and many other contexts. It has also been implemented in five foreign countries. And though this program has won several awards, Dr. Bartholomew has continued her work and research. In 1998, she developed the HORIZONS! Summer Camp, at George Mason University, for Gifted and talented students. She explains,

Gifted and talented students are 'at risk' since they have asynchronistic development and their intelligence may be valued less than their appearance and athletic prowess by other students and the culture. I feel it is critical to support gifted and talented students since they have the intelligence and potential ability to become the future leaders of our country." This year's camp is July 10-14, 2000, on the GMU campus, for rising 5th, 6th and 7th graders. For information, the HORIZONS:2000

In welcoming her to the program, the *Matrix* editorial board wanted to learn about her thoughts about Women's Studies and the GMU program. She gave a detailed answer first defining her hopes for what the program can do and then expressing her admiration for the Women's Studies faculty.

For Dr. Bartholomew, the discipline is a way to create awareness of women's history, a way to describe the psychosocial development of females, a way to expose students to feminist theory and pedagogy, and a way to help students understand contemporary issues confronting girls and women in society today. She hopes the program will raise awareness of the cultural messages that cause



Cheryl Bartholomew  
GMU'S First Full-Time Women's Studies Faculty Member

females to become physically, emotionally and psychologically ill, describe concerns typical to women of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, and create an open dialogue about how the culture impacts negatively on females and fosters unhealthy relationships between men and women. She wants to encourage students to examine contemporary concerns of females, understand their origins, and design creative solutions and initiatives to remedy or eradicate these problems.

As the only full-time Women's Study faculty member she says that she is not lonely in this position. In fact she says, "I feel I am fully supported, encouraged and appreciated by my colleagues and I have developed extremely meaningful relationships with my students." She further lauds the programs when describing the faculty.

The Women's Studies faculty at GMU is comprised of extremely intelligent, culturally aware, scholarly diverse, dedicated, visionaries who understand and are deeply committed to helping females with personal, academic, professional and social-cultural problems. Women's Studies faculty not only are dedicated to creating awareness of Women's concerns, but also help females to achieve their potential in a culture that does not fully support that ideal.

Dr. Bartholomew is in a position to make positive changes in the program. She says that a major goal of the Women's Studies program at GMU is to change the academic, political, and social culture in order to facilitate healthy relationships between females and males and create an equitable society that encourages all people to achieve their personal and professional goals and aspirations. This may seem to be a lofty goal but she is making positive strides.

In her new position she has the opportunity to design five new courses and collaboratively conduct research with students and professionals within and outside of the discipline. She has also had the chance to expose interested groups to her work and GMU's program through invitations to make professional presentations in academic programs.

In addition to her new courses, she would like the Women's Studies program at GMU to develop more programs that are inclusive of and beneficial to the student body and faculty. She says,

I feel there needs to be more promotion about what WMST is all about and how it can meet the diverse needs of the GMU population. I have found that many colleagues would like to become involved with WMST but we need to have a specific venue to use their interests and expertise. I would also like to develop a Masters in Gender Issues since I feel that women and men both need to know how the culture negatively impacts on them and their personal and professional relationships.

Dr. Bartholomew feels that these goals can be met at GMU by the community coming to work together to understand our own problems and each others' issues. She feels that by working collaboratively, we can develop and implement a gender fair society in which all people can realize their goals and ambitions.

In her faculty role, Dr. Bartholomew will be teaching and providing guidance to faculty and students. When asked what course of study she would suggest for a student interested in the Women's Study program she said that WMST 200 Introduction to Women's Studies was a good place to start. She also suggested that students enroll in communication, sociology, psychology, or anthropology to gain a better understanding of people and the way their behavior and relationships are affected by the culture in which they live.

For spring 2000, she will be teaching WMST 200, Introduction to Women's Studies, NCLC 475 Women and Resilience, and PSYCH 362 Psychology of Women.

On a more personal note she says that academically and professionally she is most proud of her relationships with and positive impact on her students, the application of her research to create a gender fair society, and the survival skills that have enabled her to endure and continue to be productive.

In the year 2000 she hopes to accomplish the development of five new courses, three research projects associated with the HORIZONS! Summer Camp, the completion of a textbook, *Gender Issues in Counseling and Psychotherapy: Theory and Practice*, with Waveland Press, professional presentations in geographically diverse contexts at home and abroad (specifically Costa Rica), creation of WMST programs to meet the needs and use the talents of GMU faculty, students, and staff, and the development of a Site Placement

Program for student interns.

*Matrix* wanted to give Dr. Bartholomew an opportunity to address the GMU Women's Studies faculty affiliates and the entire GMU community about herself and the program. And in her true sense of community she said,

I plan to reach out to the GMU academic community to help make the WMST program more visible and accessible, share my teaching and research expertise in disparate academic contexts, collaborate with faculty and students to design and develop research programs, enroll in computer technology courses to enhance my technical knowledge and skills, join GMU and community based committees devoted to enriching the academic, athletic, social and personal quality of life for their constituents.

*Editor's note: in working with Dr. Bartholomew for this piece we've learned that she has a fondness for chocolate and athletics and will soon begin flying lessons.* (M)

## Mark Your Planner With Upcoming Women's Studies Events



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## 2nd Annual Women's Scholars Lecture

### Girls in Demand: Sex Preference in Adoption

From a talk by Barbara Melosh

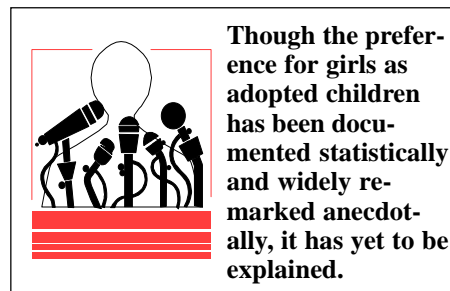
On November 16, 1999, Barbara Melosh presented the Second Annual Women's Scholars lecture titled "Girls In Demand: Sex Preference in Adoption." The Women's Studies Program established this lecture series as a way to bring attention to the feminist scholarship of colleagues at George Mason University. The award is made annually by the Women's Studies Executive Committee, based on nominations from Women's Studies faculty. According to Debra Bergoffen, Director of the Women's Studies Program, "We have a tendency to take the outstanding work of our own faculty for granted. This lecture series was our way of saying that you don't have to leave home to be appreciated, recognized and honored."

Melosh, a professor of English and History, has been a longstanding member of the Women's Studies Program, a member of the American Studies faculty during that program's existence, and a current member of the Cultural Studies faculty. Her lecture draws on material from her book in progress, entitled *Strangers and Kin: A History of Adoption in the United States*. Melosh provided *Matrix* with an abstract of her talk which follows.

Preference for girls is one of the distinctive features of adoptive parenthood, widely noted by social workers and other observers. Such a preference stands in striking contrast to sex preference among biological parents. Reviewing 40 years of studies, sociologist Judith Williamson's 1976 study of sex preference in the United States demonstrated a persistent preference for sons, especially among men, in response to contemplating biological parenthood. Though the preference for girls as adopted children has been documented statistically and widely remarked anecdotally, it has yet to be explained.

This talk explores sex preference in adoption through case records of

adoptive families and birth mothers at the Children's Bureau of Delaware (CBD), a voluntary agency that has made adoptive placements since the 1920s. These rich records offer new evidence about the meaning of sex preference for adoptive parents, social workers, and birth parents. The agency used a standard application form that included sex preference during the



entire time under study. In interviews and home visits, social workers explored prospective adoptive parents' life histories, marital relationships, medical status, social lives, religious commitments, and motivations for adoption. Social workers at CBD used "process recording," a method of documenting client contact and counseling in detailed narrative accounts.

Even as they recorded their clients' responses, social workers were encouraged to reflect on their own relationships to clients as part of the process. Resembling classic ethnographic field notes, the case records offer an unprecedented richness of detail about adoptive parents.

This research documents the many different reasons prospective parents gave for their preferences, from the oft-remarked longing to dress up a little girl to the belief that girls were more loyal and devoted (and less troublesome) family members. It confirms earlier studies that show gender differences in sex preferences: prospective adoptive mothers and

fathers were often divided on the matter. And it suggests that in adoption, men may have had a weakened preference for sons (compared to the preference of men who imagined themselves as biological fathers), even as women became more strongly inclined toward daughters.

The records also reveal social workers' own views of adoption and their responses to clients' stated sex preferences. In addition to the rich qualitative evidence provided in the case records, a tabulation of placements by sex (in process) shows to what extent social workers honored the sex preferences of prospective parents. Viewed over time, the records also document the agency's changing policies and beliefs about adoption, including a marked shift on sex preference. From the 1920s to the 1950s, adoption workers expected clients to state a preference for one sex or the other; in case records, they explored the reasons for such preferences but did not view a strong preference as cause for concern in itself. Indeed, in some cases social workers themselves imposed sex as one condition for placement; for example, even when prospective parents declared no preference, the CBD avoided placing adoptive children in homes where they would have a sibling of the same sex. By the mid-1960s, however, social workers actively sought to dissuade clients from asserting sex preferences, instead lauding the "flexible" prospective parent open to any child.

Finally, the data offer new evidence about sex preference as a factor in relinquishment. A few records reveal that the birth mother changed her mind about adoption because of the sex of her newborn. As social workers came to recognize that the child's sex might make a difference in the mother's decision, they began to explore sex preference among birth mothers more

*continued on page 9*

## Women's Scholars Lecture

*continued from page 8*

actively. When I have conducted a more comprehensive review and count of these records, I'll be able to discern if there is any larger pattern of sex selection in relinquishment.

Because sex preference in adoption differs consistently and markedly from sex preference in biological families, it promises to enhance our understanding of gender in both adoptive and biological families. Widely accepted in the United States by law and custom, adoption is nonetheless still marked as different, and, to some degree, it is stigmatized. Adoption is "unnatural" because it separates two roles that are usually conjoined: biological and social parenthood. The surprising divergence of sex preference in adoptive and biological families underscores the strength and persistence of "blood" as the defining element of American kinship, and the importance accorded to male lineage. At the same time, it suggests the positive cultural valence of a domestic life figured as feminine: when both men and women imagine themselves as social parents exclusively, they think of themselves as the parents of daughters. (M)

# MATRIX

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## Upcoming Women's Studies Events

### March 2000: Women's History Month

#### Examinations of Popular Culture

George Mason University Feminist Cultural Studies Group  
Thursday, March 9, 5:00 p.m.  
Johnson Center Room 240 K

#### Women's Rap Session: Women's Issues at GMU

Moderator: Bridgett Johnson, Sophomore, Management Information Systems  
Tuesday, March 21, 7 p.m.  
Johnson Center 239 A

#### Women of Color: Taking a Stand in the New Millennium

George Mason University Chapter of Lambda Pi Chi  
Wednesday, March 22, 6 p.m.  
Johnson Center Assembly Room B

#### Marie Pantalon: The Lady Wore Pants!

Susan Buttrille presents a dramatic interpretation based on the story of a tenacious French woman who immigrated to California in the middle 1800's to become a gold miner.  
Monday, March 27, 7 p.m.,  
location to be announced

#### Women's History Month Keynote

Leading Lady to the State: Jaylalitha Jayaram and the Nexus of Media, Politics, and Religion in South India  
Preminda Jacob, Professor of Art History,  
University of Maryland Baltimore County  
Wednesday, March 29, 4:30 p.m. Johnson Center 240 K

#### Cultural Studies Colloquium Series

(Co-sponsored by Women's Studies, Cultural Studies, Philosophy and English)

Chris Weedon will speak on Feminism and Cultural Studies  
Thursday, April 20, 5:00 p.m to 7:00 p.m  
location to be announced.

She will also participate in a workshop on integrating feminist and cultural studies from 12:00 -1:30 p.m with Women's Studies faculty, affiliates, and students.