

# The Pauline Jewett Institute of Women's and Gender Studies



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## Launch of the New Graduate Studies Program

September 2011 will mark the start of the Pauline Jewett Institute of Women's and Gender Studies exciting new graduate program! The Right Honorable Herb Grey, Dr. Roseann O'Reilly Runte, Dr. Ruth Bell, Dr. Peter Ricketts, Dr. John Shepherd, and Dr John Osborne were among the many honoured guests who helped celebrate its launch. The Master of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies provides the opportunity for students from a variety of disciplines to pursue women's and gender studies at a graduate level. This master's degree draws on the strength of the Women's and Gender Studies undergraduate program and offers an interdisciplinary and transnational approach in exploring key feminist issues. The graduate program further enhances students' research skills and understanding of gender relations and women's lives. The 'capital advantage' of this interdisciplinary program is that it allows students to create networks across campus, with national NGOs, with government agencies and other organizations.



## “This is an exciting opportunity for Women’s and Gender Studies”

The Director of Women’s and Gender Studies, Dr. Katharine Kelly, graciously thanks Margaret and Kenneth Torrence for their generous scholarship donation and Carleton’s President, Dr. Roseann O’Reilly Runte, for her support of our graduate programme and graduate students. Scholarships are critical elements to graduate student success to supporting excellent graduate work. Donations for the new Women’s and Gender Studies graduate scholarships can be made through University Advancement.

While formally the program marks the culmination of a three-year-long review process, it owes its’ success to more than two decades of work and commitment by feminists from across campus. The legacy of these women’s work has contributed to an open and creative learning environment for students. It also is an important continuation of the growth of the Undergraduate program over the past five years.

Professor Kelly and the rest of the faculty are excited about this new opportunity and are looking forward to this new and exciting phase in the Institute’s history. As Professor Gurli Woods commented, at fall convocation, “In two years we will be seeing the first MA students graduating with a master’s degree in Women’s and Gender Studies from Carleton University!”

Students who are interested in applying to the new graduate program and would like to know more information and the requirements visit:

<http://www2.carleton.ca/womensstudies/prospective-students/graduate/>





# Congratulations Graduates!

## June 2010

Alessandra Altobelli  
Jessica Azevedo  
Leah Becchina  
Kira-Lynn Ferderber  
Jennifer Goldsmith  
Kathleen Kuracina  
Yvonne Langen\*  
Laura McLaughlin  
Leila Mian  
Anastasia Szakowski  
Shyla Taylor  
Caitlin Traynor

\* Winner of the H. M. Tory Award

## November 2010

May Abu-Jaber  
Renee Chan  
Dawn Harris  
Crystal Kuhn  
Courtney Moore



# Senate Medal Scholarship Recipients

Dawn Harris, a graduate of Women's and Gender Studies, is interviewed after graduating with a Senate Medal Scholarship.



## Why did you decide to major in women's and gender studies?

Women's issues and social justice have been a passion for a long time, starting with some of the first university courses I took in the late 1980's. Prior to that, I was very unaware of feminist issues related to equality and oppression(s). With my eyes newly opened, I embraced feminism because it helped make sense of my world and experiences. I developed a thirst for knowledge and experiences that furthered its aims and eventually this became the focus of my work as well. In my role as Executive Director of Harmony House, a second stage shelter for women and children fleeing violence, I witnessed first hand how the conflation of intersectional oppressions impacted women's lives and the personal, cultural and systemic barriers that exacerbated women's attempts at leading self-fulfilling lives. Much of my work involved public and political advocacy, yet I found I lacked the theoretical understandings to do this effectively. For this reason, and because women's justice is my passion, I majored in Women's and Gender Studies.

## How has your degree in women's and gender studies impacted your life thus far?

First and foremost it has provided me with a much broader perspective on the complexity and diversity of women's experiences, as well as a theoretical framework for understanding and exploring the issues. This degree has also taught me that there is so much more that I don't know but would like to know ... this is just the beginning of a life-long learning quest. On a personal level, I have learned how to think and write critically and have developed more confidence about my abilities. It has also fueled my passion for social justice and advocacy work and provided the tools for doing it. I hope it has taught my daughters that it's never too late to follow your dreams.

## What were your initial intentions when you decided to complete your degree, and did you achieve the goal you originally set for yourself?

I did a double major in Psychology and Women's & Gender Studies with the intention of going on to do a Master's in Counseling. For years I believed that I would like to do one-on-one counselling work with women. During my last year, however, I started to realize that what interested me even more was the idea of doing broad picture social change work through policy development and advocacy. It is important for me, though, that my future work be grounded in women's actual experiences so I ultimately hope to find work that combines both interests.

## What have you been doing since you graduated?

Graduation was less than two weeks ago, and my first post-graduation event was a wonderful party of friends and family, from far and near. Two days after my graduation, I started working as a Junior Policy Analyst with the Status of Women where I am working on the broad spectrum Violence Against Women file.

## How do you plan on taking your women's and gender studies learning into the work force?

Although my new job at Status of Women is a relatively short-term contract, I know that my degree was essential for getting this position (and was required for many of the other jobs I applied for over the past few months), and feel that this opportunity is the beginning of my desired career direction in relation to policy, advocacy and women's justice.

## What is the senate medal and what does it mean to you?

The Senate Medal is awarded for outstanding academic achievement. At first I had no idea that medals were even awarded, and then after hearing that I was getting one, I did some sleuthing to find out what it is based on. Carleton's website says it is awarded to those who finish in the top 3% of their program and who have a GPA above 10.6. Getting this medal has been like a hammer on my neurotic head ... hammering home that I am capable of doing more than I ever dreamed I could and that things are going to work out just fine.

## How did you hear about winning the Senate Medal? How did you react when you received the news?

I was having a relaxing Friday evening at home and the phone rang at 10:15 p.m. It was my good friend and fellow student, Katie (also a medalist), saying, "Tell me your name is Dawn Marie Harris." I questioningly said yes, and she yelled, "You're getting a medal!" I was stunned. I didn't even know what that meant. I didn't believe her and went to the computer to check the convocation website which is where she saw my name. I was shaking with excitement and disbelief all at the same time. Then I immediately called my daughters who were ecstatic as they have been my biggest source of support and encouragement despite the challenges for them in having me attend school over the past three years.

## Do you have any intention of coming back to Carleton University to enroll in the new women's and gender studies graduate program or any other graduate program?

I am currently working on my graduate school application for Carleton's School of Social Work and will probably take some Women's Studies electives as well. Surprising to me considering how challenging I found the third year theory course, I would like to do more feminist theory courses. So, yes, I hope to be back! Carleton has opened doors for me that I believed had been closed forever. I am excited about my future in ways I didn't think possible before.

Another Senate Medalist - Mallory Delarge - is graduating with a BA Combined Honours major in Human Rights and Law and a minor in Women's and Gender

# 2010 Scholarship Winners

## Ruth Bell Centennial Scholarship

The scholarship will be awarded annually, beginning this year, to a third or fourth-year female undergraduate student with high academic standing enrolled in women's and gender studies. It will be given alternately at Carleton and the University of Ottawa.

## Harriet Emma Empey Memorial Scholarship

Awarded annually to an outstanding student proceeding from one year to another in the Bachelor of Arts program at Carleton University with a major or minor in Women's and Gender Studies. Donor: G. Elaine Empey and the Bufton Family. Endowed in 2001.

## Niamh O'Shea

I am a third year Human Rights and Women and Gender Studies undergraduate student. Although I have

always been interested in social justice, and in particular, issues pertaining to women, I did not realize that one could study this subject in a scholarly setting until after I began studying at Carleton in September 2008. By chance, I registered for a seminar on Canadian Women and Literature taught by Sandra Campbell in my first year and decided to change my major to include gender studies, a choice that I am so grateful to have made!

Academically, I am interested in the relationship between human rights and international law, and have recently become interested in decolonial feminist theory. Both on campus and outside of Carleton, I am involved in a variety of organizations that allow me to explore my passions, which include service learning and acting in solidarity with organizations engaging in social justice. I volunteer at Cornerstone's MacLaren location of supportive housing, and was fortunate enough to attend Oxfam's Gender Justice Summit this summer in Toronto. I will also have the honor of being a student leader on the Student Experience Office's Alternative Spring Break to Guatemala this February, where we will be working with students on improving their English skills and repairing school grounds.

Receiving both the Harriet Emma Empey Memorial and Ruth Bell Centennial scholarships has been an incredible honour. When I received the letters congratulating me, I was overcome with feelings of absolute shock, elation, and extreme gratitude. These scholarships have gone a long way in assuring my ability to focus on my studies this year, and have also played a large role in encouraging me to dream of what I might accomplish beyond my undergraduate degree. At this time, I would either like to pursue a

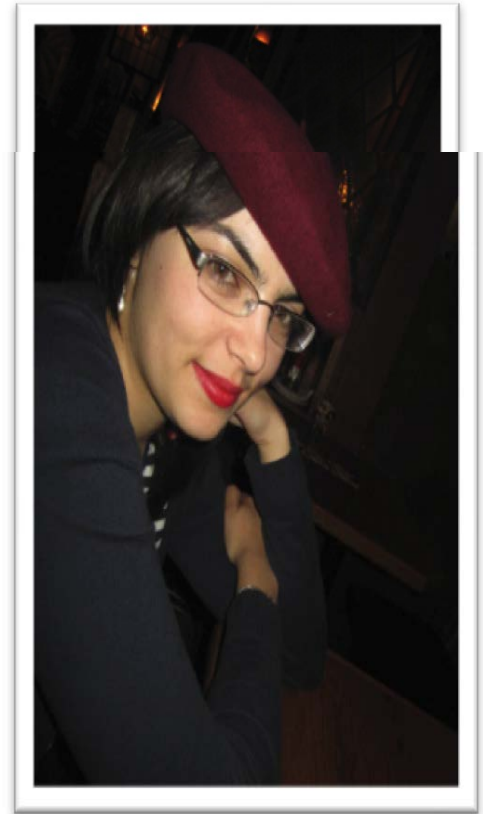


Masters in Conflict Studies with an emphasis on gender in conflict, or concentrate in Social Justice in Law School. I aspire to use the law in order to advocate for individuals who are often marginalized within our society, either through working with a non-governmental organization or as a lawyer. Thank you so much for affording me the opportunity to continue to pursue my interests, both in scholarly and non-scholarly settings, and I sincerely hope that I can live up to the great honour with which I have been presented!

## Milena Stanoeva

I was extremely proud and touched to have been awarded the Harriet Emma Empey Memorial Scholarship this year. I take a lot of pride in my academic work, so it was extremely important to me that the Women's and Gender Studies department chose me for this honour.

I am a third year student double-majoring in Honours Communication Studies and Women's and Gender Studies. I hope to pursue a career in publishing or political communication. I look forward to doing more exciting work in my Women's and Gender Studies classes.



## Stacey Hyde

The 2010 Pauline Jewett Institute of Women's and Gender Studies Scholarship Recipient is Stacey Hyde. This is awarded annually, on the recommendation of the Director of the Pauline Institute of Women's and Gender Studies to an outstanding student proceeding from third to fourth year in the BA (Honours) in Women's and Gender Studies program at Carleton University. Stacey is currently finishing her studies taking courses on a Letter of Permission at the University of Alberta.

## Meet Corrie Level Scott



Each year we profile faculty, staff, and other members of our unit. This year we are introducing some of our new contract instructors. Corrie Level Scott is a new Contract Instructor in the Institute. She is teaching a course on Masculinity in the fall semester and an exciting new course on Gender and War in the winter term. Corrie was first introduced to Women's and Gender Studies in the third year of her undergraduate degree at Western University. She found the course exciting and it was the first time in her life that she felt a strong pull to be a professor. Now, she is on her way to completing her Ph.D. in French Literature and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto and is working as a contract Instructor for the Institute.

She has taught a range of courses from French Language classes to Quebec Culture and Literature classes and found that she loves teaching a variety of disciplines because it brings a different perspective to each. This love has come to the courses she is teaching for the Institute. She spoke about her course "Masculinities", a course that Scott acknowledges some people are hesitant to teach because there has been so much focus already given

to men. But, she argues that we have much to gain by including a course about masculinities in Women's & Gender Studies. Scott's hope is that by studying contextualized examples of a wide range of masculinities, as well as the many conceptual dilemmas and practical consequences of embodied, performed and political notions of manhood, students will begin to question otherwise taken-for-granted ideas about what it means to be a man.

During the second semester, Scott will teach "Gender and War." The purpose of the course is to dispel the misconception that war is gender neutral. In fact, Scott highlights that this subject is not one-dimensional when it comes to learning about gender. The waging of war often depends on masculinity and femininity to mobilize populations, to create soldiers and to legitimize violence. Images of women in need of protection, for example, are often used to rally troops and populations, but strong female icons like GI Jane and Rosie the Riveter are also prominent in wartime propaganda. The gendered politics of the 'war on terror' will also be explored. Scott feels this is an appropriate time to introduce the course because of the growing literature accumulated around topics of gender and war as well as its obvious relevance in today's turbulent world.

Scott, busy juggling work, family, and education, says, "It's a good thing I love what I do because that's all I do!" She considers herself lucky because she is in a very exciting place right now. At home, she is thrilled with an eighteen-month-old son, she is expecting to graduate with her PhD this summer, and she is also grateful for her great colleagues at Carleton and their support.



## Florence Bird Lecture: Bonnie Devine

The Pauline Jewett Institute for Women's and Gender Studies was pleased to host its twenty-first Florence Bird Lecture on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Named in honour of former Senator Florence Bird who served as the Chair of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women from 1967 to 1970, this lecture has become one of Carleton's major annual lecture series.<sup>1</sup> This year's speaker was Bonnie Devine, a member of the Serpent River First Nation of Northern Ontario (Ojibwa), an artist, curator, writer and educator. Devine holds fine art degrees from the Ontario College of Art and Design and York University. She is an Associate Professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design and Interim Director of OCAD's Aboriginal Visual Culture Program. She lives and works in Toronto, Ontario. Her lecture was "Claiming and Naming: A question of land and identity."

Ms. Devine spoke of the central role that stories play in Indigenous cultures and that in her talk she would share stories to open up awareness and create connections. Devine tells her stories orally and through her artwork. She began her talk by sharing stories about the name of places and their connections to our everyday lives and to Aboriginal peoples. Devine states that such naming 'announces our presence throughout Canada'. She explained how the names of Ontario's regions are influenced by Indigenous cultures. For example, Ottawa is a modification of Odawa, the Algonquin word for "this place".

As an artist and a storyteller, Devine explained how stories are also a part of art. For example, after she had defended her Master's thesis she built a canoe out of the paper her thesis was printed on; she did this with the help of Aboriginal Elder and teacher William Commanda, a canoe builder, who shared with her the traditional method of building a canoe. This celebration of her accomplishment and her linking her life to her Aboriginal heritage led to the creation of a powerful image and message. She also shared stories, both personal and historical, to bring her audience to a new awareness of the Aboriginal experiences when faced with colonization. She told the audience how the town she grew up in had been deserted as a result of the closing of a uranium mine, and how the environment had been harmed, making the land toxic. She explained the settlements of different tribes across the northern United States and Canada and then explored the issue of treaties. She called attention to the fact that "we are all treaty people" because treaties are between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. As such we all share a responsibility for ensuring just outcomes.



# Padmini Swaminathan

## Gender Mainstreaming in India



Dr. Padmini Swaminathan, a Visiting Scholar supported by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, spoke at Carleton University on “Gender Mainstreaming and Gendered Development in India”. Dr. Swaminathan began her talk by providing some background for the audience on the Indian Women’s movement and it’s almost three decades of work on issues of importance to Indian women. Their work is grounded in an understanding of the differences within India, especially the caste hierarchies and regional variations, which produce multiple subjectivities. She noted that there is a growing awareness of, and need for, Women’s Studies programs in India. The Indian Association of Women’s Studies is seeking to develop a national curriculum for Women’s Studies programs.

The focus of the talk was empowerment and gender mainstreaming. These concepts are in common use and Dr. Swaminathan noted that funding agencies and the government frequently use these terms to describe their activities and to indicate that women are ‘on the agenda’. However, in practice, these activities have achieved little in terms of empowering women. Indeed, much of the work focuses on men and presumes that women will automatically benefit. All too often, women’s concerns are ignored or not addressed. This means that the unique challenges women face when trying to access programs for support go unrecognized and unmet. The result is that women are left out and left behind. This does not mean, she argued, that gender mainstreaming is not viable. Rather, in order to achieve successful gender mainstreaming, focused efforts are required. As an example of successful gender mainstreaming, Dr. Swaminathan spoke about an NGO program funded by a Dutch NGO that has been able to ‘empower women through collective action’. This NGO has successfully mainstreamed gender into rural and remote communities – gaining recognition of women as farmers and food producers. This required intensive work for more than 7 years to achieve. It required getting government agencies, training programs and men within the community to recognize the critical role women were already playing and how barriers were having a negative impact on not just women but the wider community. Her point was clear – gender mainstreaming works when gender and gender-related issues are identified and addressed directly. When they are ignored, projects fail. But, the failure is in the program design NOT in gender mainstreaming as a path to empowering women.

## Joint Chair: Pamela Walker

The Pauline Jewett Institute for Women’s and Gender Studies is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Pamela Walker as the Joint Chair in Women’s Studies. Carleton University and the University of Ottawa jointly administer the Joint Chair program.

Dr. Walker is a full professor in the Department of History and is also the Director of the Centre for Initiatives in Education. She was interested in becoming the Joint Chair in Women’s Studies because of the distinctive opportunities it offered. Her new job is designed to enhance students’ interest in women’s and gender issues through events that highlight gender-related topics and research. This semester Dr. Walker organized a panel discussion called *Prostitution and the Criminal Code*, which surrounded the controversial decision by the Superior Courts to strike down prostitution laws in the criminal code. She will be working on another program for the winter term to be held at the University of Ottawa.



# Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies

The following are examples of topics that a student has been exposed to in WGST 1808 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies. Dr. Christine Ekholst invited interesting guest speakers to her class to speak about their academic interests.

## “Hierarchy in the LGBTQ Community”

Guest Speaker: Emerich Daroya



On Monday, October 4th, 2010, Emerich Daroya spoke to Carleton's WGST 1808: Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies class with his guest lecture on the hierarchies in the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning) community. Daroya has a degree in Political Science and Sociology from York University and is now working towards his MA in Sociology, here at Carleton. His research is focused on sexuality studies, queer theory, critical race theory, and intersectionality.

Daroya problematizes the white, male hegemony that exists within the LGBTQ community and how it creates a racialized desire in which men of colour are eroticized. He illustrated this idea of hierarchy in the LGBTQ community through his studies of Asian men – who he argues are being portrayed as

submissive, a feature that is often eroticized. His research seeks to establish there is a hierarchy within the LGBTQ community. A hierarchy with white men at the top and racialized others falling below them. He argues that this is much like the hierarchy that is present in the heteronormative society. People tend to think that the LGBTQ community should be more understanding of diversity because of the discrimination that exists against these groups. However, his lecture demonstrated that there is discrimination in all types of communities.

### STUDENTS RESPOND:

Andrea Boulter, a student in WGST 1808, reflected this sentiment saying she was surprised at racism and discrimination being present in the LGBTQ community. She also noted that she did not expect to learn this type of information when she began her studies in Women's & Gender Studies. Andrea says that she finds this applicable to everyday life.

# Feminism in Québec

## Guest Speaker: Sarah Spear



Sarah Spear, a TA for WGST 1808, spoke on suffrage activism in Quebec. Her talk touched on themes of Nationalism, Catholicism, and Maternalism. Spear explained how these three themes intersected in the early nineteenth hundreds in the discourse surrounding the debate about women not being allowed to vote.

Women's suffrage was opposed by the Roman Catholic Church, which had a strong influence in Quebec. The Church argued that women being allowed to vote was unnatural and that granting them the right to vote would mean that women would be stepping out of their "natural" roles – as mothers and maternal influences. This argument was an accepted basis for refusing women the vote. Yet, historically, it was inaccurate. Women in Quebec had the vote for more than 50 years from 1791 to 1849. At that time there were no legal restrictions based on gender. In 1849, the vote was taken away from women on the basis that their interests were well (indeed best) represented by their fathers and husbands. This position was enshrined in the Quebec Civil Code in 1866 which formally subordination of women to men.

First wave Quebec Feminists organized to regain the vote and sought to promote gender equality through various forms of activism including public speaking, radio programmes and an annual march to the National Assembly. Almost 100 years after they lost the right to vote Quebec women regained the vote in 1940 - also more than 20 years after women had won the right to vote in the other provinces.

During the 1960s Quebec Feminists turned to other issues. The 'Quiet Revolution' had successfully challenged the powerful role the church had in civil society and over state activities and decisions. The secularization of Quebec society was a key element in women fight to gain control over many aspects of their lives including reproductive rights and employment opportunities.

A key pivot point in Feminist struggles emerged during the 1980 referendum to separate Quebec from the rest of Canada. Women played important roles on both sides of this critical debate. This led to significant fractures in Quebec's feminist movement. Women opposed separation were termed 'Yvettes'. They were portrayed as domesticated and as conforming to a patriarchal society. Given the long struggle of second wave feminists for women's right to work outside the home – this description of their political position was considered insulting.

# Aboriginal Women in Canada and the Indian Act

Guest Speaker: Brittany Gregg-Wallace



Brittany Gregg-Wallace spoke to the first year introductory class about the gendered nature of the Indian Act. The Indian Act was passed in 1876. It was designed to control and transform Indigenous societies to serve the needs of the Canadian government. Gregg-Wallace notes that there are a number of terms that are often used interchangeably to describe the First Peoples of Canada including: Indian, Native, First Nations, Indigenous and Aboriginal. However, a core feature of the Act was to use the term 'Indian' and to define who would and would not be recognized as having Indian status.

To understand the impact of the Indian Act on women, we need to know about women's status in First Nations communities prior to contact with the Europeans. Gregg-Wallace noted that before the arrival of Europeans, women's roles varied greatly in different First Nations communities. However, generally speaking women were highly valued and played important roles in their communities. With the arrival of Europeans colonialism and patriarchy eroded Aboriginal women's status in society. The implementation of the Indian Act furthered this process. One key aspect of the Act for women was that it tied Indian status to the male line. This meant that only men could pass on status to their children. Indian women who married non-status men could not only not pass Indian status onto their children,

they also lost their status and, as a result, were often forced to leave their communities. For many women this meant the loss of family, friends and traditions.

The Act continues to impact on First Nations women today. One example came from the film *Club Native* that Gregg-Wallace showed during her talk. This film follows the stories of four women from Kahnawake, a Mohawk reserve outside Montreal. The women spoke of their community, their upbringing and their desires to continue their traditions and culture. These women wanted to stay in their community but faced very difficult decisions because of the pressures they felt to marry Native men. The impact of the Act continues to impact on the descendants of who lost status. These women's children and grandchildren are NOT recognized as First Nations people.

The devaluing of First Nations women that colonialism brought and that has been enshrined in the Indian Act has had far reaching consequences. First Nations women are all too often not valued by either their own or the colonizing communities. One telling example is the scant attention that the over 600 missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada have received in Canada. The Sisters in Spirit Campaign is one way that First Nations Women are seeking to be valued – they are calling for the both recognition they First Nation's Women are missing and for these disappearances to be investigated.

Gregg-Wallace concluded her presentation by arguing that “through colonialism, traditional Aboriginal societal structures were disrupted and later legislated to serve the interests of the settler society. To this day the impact of the discrimination against women can be seen in the continued inequality inherent in the Indian Act. Women continue to fight for equal status under an Act that was designed explicitly to undermine their traditional roles and eradicate their culture”.

# Disability Studies

## Guest Speaker: Christine Kelly



Christine Kelly was a guest speaker in WGST 1808's class speaking on disability studies. Her work seeks to connect the intersectionality of third wave feminism to disability as a cultural category and lived experience. Intersectionality, connects disability with race, gender, class and sexuality as interlocking signifiers of the 'abnormal'. Under dominant definitions, disability is associated with 'a problem', medical, individual and charitable, and this 'problem' is held to mean that the person with a disability is incapable of achieving success in certain aspects of life. In this model, disability is a feature of an individual. Kelly provided an alternative definition of disability using the social model which suggests that social and physical barriers create disability. She explained that, for example, in a social model a situation where a person in a wheelchair encounters stairs that limits their ability to access a building or a room, the disability is the stairs and not the person's medical condition. This model allows us to reconsider how limitations are created socially and then are attributed to the individual. Kelly went on to discuss a feminist disability perspective which builds on and critiques the social model; feminist disability studies go beyond how the built environment and attitudes shape the meaning of disability to explore the notion that a disability is the paramount abnormal. The abnormal is critical in how we come to understand what is normal. Quite simply, the category normal has no meaning without reference to an abnormal 'other'. She explains that the delineation of 'abnormal' is a pervasive cultural category that 'structures reality for all people and shapes our cultural products'.

The label of disabled [abnormal] is read as extending into all dimensions of peoples' lives. Media, for example, often portray people with disabilities as asexual. They presume this based on their disability. Disability advocates are challenging such presumptions. One example that Kelly spoke to students about is the 'Holly Norris and the able-bodied project'. This project seeks to educate people about the implications of only presenting media images that represent able-bodied people. This project pokes fun at American Apparel advertisements that claim that the women displayed are the 'everyday woman'. The Holly Norris' project problematizes American Apparel advertisements by featuring photography of Jes Sachse, a woman with disabilities, to dispel the myth of the 'everyday woman'. If you would like to learn more about this project visit:

<http://hollynorris.ca/americanable#h39067524>.

# Learning about Mother and Child Health: The Role of the Red Cross

Guest Speaker: Christine Bloch



On Monday, October 25, Christine Bloch of the [Canadian] Red Cross spoke to the WGST 1808 class on the Red Cross' commitment to gender and community-based programming and on its' research on mother and child health issues around the world. The Red Cross' goal is to ensure equal access to health care for every woman, man, girl, and boy from all backgrounds. It uses targeted action focusing on empowerment and equality, and mainstreaming age, gender and diversity issues to achieve this.

A core concept in health is the 'continuum of care' where treatment, which Bloch explained starts at the beginning of a woman's pregnancy, continues through to the child's birth and then extends throughout people's lives. A pregnancy that ends in a healthy child and mother is key to health over the life course. In order to achieve this, people need to have easy access health care including referral to specialized care when required and health intervention especially during pregnancy. Access to health care involves more than just having medical available. Access can be limited because people, especially women are not able to make informed decisions about their own health and health care. Gender programming addresses this issue with both men and women. It encourages men to get involved and understand the constraints of gender inequality and it seeks to empower women to make decisions about their own health. In the Honduras, the Red Cross has a project that Bloch presented as an example of how women are encouraged to make decisions. In this country, women are often left out in the decision-making process around their body and the health of their children. By engaging them in the decision-making process they are empowered as they work to provide the best care possible for their children.

## The Hijabi Monologues



On Monday, September 27, 2010 the Pauline Jewett Institute of Women's and Gender Studies hosted the *Hijabi Monologues*- a volunteer-based theatrical performance that challenges the stereotypes about American Muslim women through storytelling. All the stories performed are based on real life experiences of young Muslim American women.

Performer Kamilah Pickett explained that the beauty of storytelling is that it gives the audience a snap shot of a person's life and that everyone is able to find value in that experience. She performed her own monologue called "Ten Things about Me" which humorously portrayed ten facts about her life. The reality that she was a Muslim woman, wearing a hijab, was not brought up until the last point where she described it as a piece of fabric that did not define her life. This monologue alone brought the entire concept of the Hijabi Monologues to the forefront: that storytelling can breakdown perceptions held of Muslim women and, as a result, people can see that underneath the hijab is a person no different from other young women. The question and answer period at the end of the monologues sparked a lively exchange between the performers and the audience. The two performers addressed questions such as why one would wear a hijab, to concerns about the responses from the more conservative Muslim community regarding the monologues' representation of them. With respect to this latter question, performer May Alhassen dismissed these concerns, saying that the Muslim community is very strong and can handle this subject matter. She went on to say that there was an interest in having this type of discussion because it was unavailable elsewhere. For more information about the Hijabi Monologues you can e-mail: [hijabi.monologues@gmail.com](mailto:hijabi.monologues@gmail.com)

# Gender and Religion WGST 3005

Women's and Gender Studies' selected topics 3005 vary every year. This semester Shelley Rabinovitch taught 'Gender and Religion'. She invited guest speakers to discuss their perspectives on their cultural and religious beliefs.

## Bahá'í Religion and Women

### Guest Lecture

A member of the Bahá'í spoke on the Bahá'í and its' views on gender and equality from the perspective of a practitioner in the Institutes' third year course on Gender and Religion. The Bahá'í faith has no clergy; the faith/practice is taught through the readings of previous Bahá'í writings and understanding is achieved through personal reflection. The faith emerged in the mid-twentieth century in Persia (Iran) and its' founder was Bahá'u'lláh. The writings hold that throughout history God has appeared through many teachers, such as Jesus and Muhammad, who have guided and educated humanity to improve society. Each of these teachers has key messages and the key message of the Bahá'í faith is to create an equal global community by promoting unity and openness of religion. Bahá'u'lláh claimed, "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens."<sup>1</sup>



In order to achieve Bahá'u'lláh's goal, the Bahá'í faith promotes a variety of principles such as the full equality of men and women. Bahá'u'lláh stated that society could not improve as long as women were kept in a subordinate position, as it harms women's advancement and therefore the progress of humanity. To clarify this point, the speaker used an example from Bahá'u'lláh's teachings about a bird. Each wing of the bird represented a gender and the total bird represented society. If one wing had more power than the other, the bird could not fly, regardless of how much strength or feathers it possessed. In order to fly, it requires an equal power distribution.

Students raised questions about the Bahá'í faith challenging the speaker's version of the faith as being 'too good to be true' and asking her whether there was anything in its tenets that was problematic. The speaker revealed that the faith did not condone sex before marriage and that she thought that some people might see this as a difficulty. But, she also indicated that the Bahá'í faith accepted homosexuals but NOT homosexual acts, nor were homosexuals allowed to marry. Students pointed out that this position contradicted Bahá'u'lláh message of equality. The speaker felt that because of the Bahá'í faiths' idea of unity, that they would not tolerate homophobia and felt that homosexual individuals are simply expected to practice the same discipline as unwed heterosexuals. Her definition of homophobia rested on active attacks against individuals but did not include, as the students recognized, the more general prohibitions that are used to demark people as 'other'. For more information visit, <http://www.bahai.org/>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bahai.org/>



# Two-Spirit in Canada

## Guest Lecture by Tanya Doplar

Tanya Doplar, a First Nations, two-spirit warrior from the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy, spoke to the third year Women and Religion class. Doplar was given the spirit name Thunderbear not only because she was literally struck by lightning but also because when she speaks people tend to listen. This was apparent as she shared her history orally with the class, requesting that students close their electronic equipment and put down their pencils in order to better listen to her words.



Doplar expressed that today, identity is strongly connected to the established colonial gender roles; you are either “blue” or “pink,” male or female. This binary has not always existed especially

in many First Nations cultures where other-gendered people were honoured. It was believed that there were up to thirteen different genders, each possessing their own unique gifts to share. Such an understanding of gender was violently rejected as unacceptable by European colonizers and reinforced in residential schools (where it was equated with sin). For safety reasons, the acceptance and teaching of other-gendered people was hidden among Aboriginal communities. This history of colonialism has weakened traditional teachings and prevented other-genders from being celebrated.

However, the oral tradition in First Nations’ culture has allowed the knowledge about other-gendered people to survive. The term “two-spirit” was created at a Winnipeg Gay and Lesbian Conference in 1990 to name this diverse identity. Two-spirit individuals challenge the contemporary gender roles because they are the “middle people” that fit between the binaries. Two-spirit individuals do not associate with, nor fit into typical understandings of sexuality or sexual orientation. To be a two-spirit does not equate to being gay, bi-sexual, or transsexual, but rather recognizes that some individuals possess both masculine and feminine spirits within them. It is within this understanding of human diversity that Doplar and other two-spirit warriors are challenging and reclaiming their honoured place in their communities.