



# Women's Words

Strength in Diversity • Volume 10 No. 2 Spring 2001

## The state of feminist research

By H. Leslie Steeves  
University of Oregon

This short essay focuses on two interrelated concerns. One relates to the interdisciplinary nature of feminist scholarship. It is very hard to master all the literature necessary to do good work, work that both contributes to feminist theory and addresses practical problems. Second, perhaps in part because of this challenge, feminist scholarship has turned increasingly to a focus on representations, and therefore some have argued it may lose its political edge.

With regard to the first concern, of course, journalism and communication is an interdisciplinary field. Yet the organization of the university, decisions about resource allocation for units, and the need for disciplinary experts to assess the performances of units and individuals all work together to discourage interdisciplinary work. Anyone affiliated with women's studies, ethnic studies, international studies or environmental studies programs knows how hard it is to compete for resources and faculty time. Geographic area studies programs like African studies and Latin American studies face the same problems. Those who combine interdisciplinary interests, as do feminist communication

See **FEMINIST**, page 10



Steeves presented a version of this essay at AEJMC's 2000 national convention. Portions of this essay are taken from a forthcoming book chapter by Steeves and Janet Wasko, "Feminist theory and political economy: Toward a friendly alliance," in *Sex and Money: Intersections of Feminism and Political Economy in Media*, ed. by Eileen Meehan and Ellen Riordan, University of Minnesota Press.

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Kathleen L. Endres, Editor, The University of Akron

# Feminist Forum

I'm moving. I'm giving up all the charms of old house living—the drafts, the creaks, the astronomical heating bills, the endless upkeep.

But in order to put the house up for sale, I've had to (gasp) clean!

This is no small task for someone who doesn't believe in throwing anything out. I merely squirrel everything away—meaningless files, memos, letters, clippings, books, reminders, bric a brac and anything that does not move and may sometime, somewhere or someplace be helpful.

In the midst of my cleaning frenzy, I found myself spending a lot of time in closets—scrounging through boxes choked full of my past.

I've discovered that cleaning closets can be a journey to self discovery.

Inside my daughter's bedroom closet, I found four boxes jammed with my tenure and promotion files. I dragged the boxes out for a little look before they were transported to a storage unit the realtor insisted I rent.

At first, I was quite impressed with how truly organized these files were. I'm a pile-it-until-it-falls-over kind of person so getting these files in order represented a real sacrifice of my creative, albeit messy, nature.

As I went through all those notebooks, I was amazed at everything I'd done in those five years of indentured servitude, euphemistically referred to as tenure period.

Then I got angry.

Why should anyone have to go through the terror, the stress, the strain, the uncertainty of the tenure process as practiced by universities today? Is there no humanity in higher education?

If you've been reading Bev Merrick's sojourn through the tenure process, you know the answer to those questions—there is no humanity in the tenure process. In this issue, Bev provides part two of her tenure process (see page 6).

As I searched further into other closets, I

found even greater truths.

Inside by son's bedroom closet beneath some stinky socks, I found a box of mementos from Toledo.

My mother died five years ago in Toledo. After her funeral, I brought back photo albums, address books, scrapbooks, letters, notes, textbooks that she had so carefully put away. At the time, I couldn't bear looking at the contents. Five years later, I read the notations in the books, the notes scribbled on the back of baby pictures and the memories pasted in scrapbooks—and I smiled, remembering all the good times.

Then I looked over at my boxes of tenure and promotion stuff. I wondered, after I'm gone, will my children look at my tenure and promotion treasure boxes with the same fondness I was experiencing with my mother's materials?

Both boxes contain what two women worked very hard to achieve.

My mom worked as a secretary for 25 years in a factory. She was a very good secretary and the notes from her bosses attest to that. Newspaper clippings showed how this special woman—my mom—spent lots of time sharing her heritage with the community.

And what will my children think about my tenure and promotion treasure box?

I'm not sure.

That's why, after I took my tenure and promotion boxes to the storage unit, I started to put together my own treasure box for my children. I call it my "work in progress." It's not going to include a single journal article or conference paper. It's going to include the important stuff of my life—things I would never entrust to a storage unit.

I'm going to put it—along with my mother's box—somewhere safe, back in a closet, beneath some stinky socks.



Women's Words

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Letters for the Feminist Forum should be sent to the same address, indicating Feminist Forum on the outside envelope or in the e-mail copy. Electronic copy, either via disk or e-mail, is preferred.

The deadline for the spring issue is April 15.

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ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION  
(AEJMC)

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

# CALL FOR PAPERS

Annual Meeting • August 5-8, 2000 • Washington, D.C.

The Commission on the Status of Women invites submissions of research papers for competitive paper sessions at the AEJMC 2001 annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

The Commission seeks scholarship related to issues of gender and communication. We welcome research papers that use a variety of approaches and research methods, including, but not limited to, critical, empirical, ethnographic, historical, legal, and semiotic. It is expected that the research will demonstrate a familiarity with feminist communication theory where appropriate. We especially encourage submissions by students. Authors of accepted papers must be able to present their papers at the conference.

**Submission guidelines:**

- ▶ Submit six copies of the paper, including a 75-word abstract on a separate page.
- ▶ Suggested paper length is 25 pages of 12-point type, excluding notes, references, and figures or illustrations.
- ▶ Identify author(s) on a separate page with mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address of author to whom correspondence should be directed
- ▶ Paper title should appear on all pages as a running head.
- ▶ Submissions cannot be under consideration for presentation at other conferences or publication by hard copy or electronic journals.
- ▶ Submissions must be postmarked by April 1, 2001.

**Send submissions and direct questions to:**



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**SUBMISSIONS MUST BE POSTMARKED BY APRIL 1, 2001**



**Commission creates  
Donna Allen Award**

The Commission on the Status of Women announces the creation of the Donna Allen Award for feminist activism in journalism and mass communication.

Terry Lueck, Commission co-chair, said the award will recognize an individual who continues the activism for which Donna Allen, founder of the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, was known.

With the creation of this award, the Commission rededicates itself to



activism, Lueck said.

The Commission will host a fundraiser for the award at its "Wild Women 2001" session at the AEJMC convention in Washington, D.C.

Commission members don't have to wait until the convention to make a contribution, Lueck said.

Tax-deductible donations may be made now to the Donna Allen Award Fund, AEJMC, 234 Outlet Point Blvd., Suite A, Columbia, SC 29210-5667. Be sure to indicate Donna Allen Award on the check.

The Freedom Forum has already made a \$5000 donation to the fund.

**Feminist Media Studies  
invites submissions on HIV**

Feminist Media Studies needs submissions for a special issue on women, HIV, globalization and media.

The editors especially want articles on the relationship between women and gender as analytic categories; the relationship between media, activism and public policy; feminist

methodological and analytic frames; and comparative approaches examining different national, regional and/or cultural contexts.

Send complete manuscripts to Cindy Patton, Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts, Emory University, Atlanta, GA. 30322 by April 16. For further information, contact Patton at cpatton@emory.edu or Meredith Raimondo at mraimond@barnard.edu.

**Join the Commission on the  
Status of Women listserv**

The Commission invites you to join its listserv, CSW-L. A forum to express ideas and concerns, the listserv is especially important now as the Commission plans

its advocacy agenda for the next century. CSW-L is the listserv for anyone who is interested in issues related to women and journalism education.

To subscribe, send an e-mail message to: listserv@pete.uri.edu. Type in the message box: subscribe CSW-L <your full name> and send the message. Instructions will be sent by e-mail.

**New book focuses  
on American West**

The Nevada Humanities Council and the University of Nevada Press are soliciting manuscripts for a new book, *Print Cultures in the American West*, which will be published in 2002.

The publishers want contributions from a variety of disciplines and encourage submissions on the nature of authorship in the West and historical and contemporary readers and reading communities.

Submissions on ethnic and foreign-language publishing; periodical and newspaper publishing; labor, capital and technology in the print trades; print cultures in specific places, and the relationship between western and eastern print cultures are also sought.

Manuscripts should be no longer than 25 pages, double spaced. Submit three copies of the manuscript.

Author information (name, address, phone number and e-mail) should appear only on the cover sheet.

Deadline for submissions is April 1.

Send materials to Scott E. Casper, editor, Halcyon series, Department of History/308, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, NV 89557 (Phone: 775-784-6484; Fax: 775-784-6805; e-mail: casper@unr.nevada.



## CFP: *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*

Submissions are being accepted for a special issue of the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* titled *New Media and the Commercial Sphere*.

The interrelationships between society's commercial sphere and such new electronic media as the wired Internet, the wireless Web, interactive television and digital radio have not received enough scholarly attention. This issue aims to encourage research on a broad spectrum of topics relating to the process and effects of marketing and advertising on the emerging digital interactive media environment.

Possible topics include: the impact of the new media environment on traditional commercial media, the implications of electronic commerce for the media system, the influence of commercial Web content on traditional media, the process and implications of database/target marketing and textual and content analysis of advertising on new media.

Manuscripts should conform to the guidelines of the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. For a copy of the guidelines, see [www.beaweb.org/pubs1.html](http://www.beaweb.org/pubs1.html).

The deadline for submissions is Aug. 1.

Inquiries and five copies of the manuscript should be sent to: Matthew P. McAllister, Department of Communication Studies, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0311, 550/231-9830 (phone), 540-231-9817 (fax) or e-mail at [mattm@vt.edu](mailto:mattm@vt.edu).

## CFP: American Journalism Historians Association

The American Journalism Historians Association invites paper entries, panel proposals and abstracts of work in progress on any facet of media history, including electronic media, film, advertising and public relations.

Submissions for the Association's 20th convention, Oct. 4-6 in San Diego, Calif., must be postmarked by May 15.

Authors may submit only one research paper. Research entries should be completed papers not exceeding 25 pages. Four copies of each paper should be submitted, along with a self-addressed, stamped postcard for receipt notification. Each paper should include a cover sheet indicating paper's title, author's name and address, the author's position and institutional affiliation and four single page abstracts. Only the title should appear on the paper and abstract; the author's name should appear only on the cover page.

Authors should bring 25 copies of their papers to distribute at the conference.

Awards for outstanding research

## CFP: Advancement of Educational Research

Proposals are being accepted for the Association for the Advancement of Educational Research's fourth annual conference held Dec. 2-8 in Ponte Verde Beach, Fla.

Research can be submitted in one of five formats: research papers, discussion groups, symposia, round tables and poster sessions.

Individual papers selected for

include the Robert Lance Award for the best student paper, the William Snorgrass Award for the best paper on minority journalism, the Maurine Beasley Award for outstanding research paper on women's history, the outstanding faculty research paper and the best convention paper.

Panel proposals should include a brief description of the topic, names of the moderator and participants and a brief summary of each participant's presentation.

Research in progress should be submitted in abstract form (no more than 350 words) and should focus on significant research underway.

Send research papers to: Professor Ralph Frasca, Department of Mass Communication, Marymount University, 2807 Glebe Road, Arlington, VA 22207-4299.

Panel proposals should be sent to: Professor James McPherson, Whitworth College, 300 W. Hawthorne Road, MS 0307, Spokane, WA 99251.

Research in progress should be sent to: Professor Pat Washburn, E.W. Scripps School of Journalism, Ohio University, Athens, OH 45701-2979.

presentation will be published as book chapters in the *Annals of the National Academy and Association for the Advancement of Educational Research*, published by University Press of America.

The deadline for early consideration is April 1. The closing date for all proposals is May 30.

For submission guidelines and additional information, visit the association's web site at: [www.aacr.org](http://www.aacr.org).

# Playing the waiting game

## Half-way through the tenure process

By Beverly Merrick  
New Mexico State University

ENTER LAUGHING . . . I think . . .

The September vote by my peers was 6 to 0 - in favor of tenure. This sounds good, right? Yes - and no. Yes, for the obvious reason. And no, because I still have another eight months to wait before I know what will happen.

At New Mexico State University, the department's vote is just one step in the lengthy academic process leading to the tenure process. Next, the tenure package goes to a college committee. Then it weaves its way through the academic deans—all three of them. Finally, the package goes to the NMSU president.

Admittedly, the prospects look good; and short of a catastrophic event, I should become a tenured associate professor. Perhaps. College committees have been known to reverse decisions. Deans have been known to reverse decisions. College presidents have been known to reverse decisions. No one has been awarded tenure within my department in a decade. Ironically, if the September vote had been 0 to 6, I would at least know something.

Now, I have to play a cruel waiting game. I play it by avoiding the thought of tenure all together. In fact, the head of the tenure committee told me, "Just forget it! You have done what you can. It is out of your hands now." I am grateful for his support; but this, of course, is easier said than done.

There's the house payment and home improvements and trying to figure out if each and every tree I plant is going to be enjoyed by me—or someone else.

There's Leo, who is tied to a job with NASA. The question becomes one of commitment. But just how committed can you get—if you don't know if you are going to be around 18 months from now?

There's all the people who have ever believed in me. The thought of having to explain that I didn't really want to be a professor anyway made me cringe.

I heard a speaker at the press club last week who compared the whole tenure process to the operation of the sweatshop. The untenured professor is a Nike worker in Taiwan. The whole university system is built upon putting out "the shoe" at the lowest possible price even if it is at the highest human cost.

Look at the advertisements in *AEJMC News*. The overwhelming number of jobs advertised are for untenured assistant professors. Deans and department heads want to fill their positions with people who are at the most vulnerable part of their careers. Naturally, this includes remuneration at the lowest possible wage.

After the luncheon, as I drove back to get to a class of 100, I found myself singing, "I owe my soul to the company store."

The administrators call the prolonged process of getting tenure a testing period, a time in which the quality of teaching, quantity of research and proof of service can be shown. However, there are few other professions that test so long - five to seven years — following an equally intensive graduate preparation to earn a doctorate. I ask you: who else would work 60 to 70 hours a week for the promise of a job someday — maybe.



The only redeeming consideration in this whole lengthy process is that faculty who are denied tenure get a year to look for a job.

I'll be no exception if the tenure decision goes against me.

But, if I'm successful, I will be the first woman to win tenure in journalism at New Mexico State. It would

please me very much to break that gender barrier.

For now, however, I concentrate on other things. I auditioned for a part with the Las Cruces Community Theatre a month before the tenure committee met. It was an ambitious move but I figured memorizing lines for the role of Abby in *Arsenic and Old Lace* would help me cure a bad case of insomnia.

The part had other benefits as well. Learning the lines and rehearsing them on stage required me to work four to five hours in the company of others nearly every night for two months. I had to be my public self, and I could not fall into brooding.

After rehearsals, I fell into bed, exhausted. In this way, I nurtured myself center stage. Then in the mornings, I



*“The untenured professor is a Nike worker in Taiwan. The whole university system is built upon putting out ‘the shoe’ at the lowest possible price even if it is at the highest human cost.”*

concentrated on writing my book about Mary Margaret McBride, the first radio talk show host. I found that if I focused on McBride, my hero, I could forget the odds against me in the tenure process. The play and my writing kept me occupied until Oct. 31.

By that time, I was engrossed in yet another project that kept my mind off the tenure business. I was teaching one of my favorite classes, Women in the Mass Media. By examining heroes and leaders, students were empowered. That semester I used the material in the class to empower myself. I needed that empowerment when I broached a subject that I felt needed to be addressed—disparity in work assignments.

The timing was bad. But how could I not force the issue? I seemed to be driven by some unspoken urge to right the wrong. My intuition told me I had to have at least one small victory, no matter what the cost.

Nearly 65 percent of my classes are at the 100-level, while 30 to 35 percent of the class loads of my male counterparts are at 100-level courses. Actually, because I teach a large lecture

class at the 100-level, the numbers are even higher in my case.

I have just won that battle. I am to have a comparable workload to theirs, starting in the fall.

If I am at NMSU in the fall.

**WRITER’S NOTE:** *In this second installment describing the tenure process, I want to give real credit to the women who went through the process before me at New Mexico State. Mary Marcus, an outstanding teacher here in the late 1980s, and Jean Olson, who fostered an exemplary mentoring process long after she moved on, were the first women to teach journalism at NMSU. Others, including Maurine Beasley (The University of Maryland), Dru Riley Evarts (Ohio University) and Barbara Strauss Reed (Rutgers University) have given me unconditional support.*

## ACE Foundation issues tenure report

The need for a fair tenure process is rarely questioned by academics, but making sure it happens can be difficult.

To help universities organize clear and consistent tenure policies, three higher education associations released a report, “Good Practice in Tenure Evaluation: Advice for Tenured Faculty, Department Chairs and Academic Administrators.”

The report is a project of the American Council on Education, the American

Association of University Professors and United Educators Insurance Risk Retention Group, a company providing insurance to universities - including coverage for legal disputes regarding tenure.

The report recommends:

- Clarity in standards and procedures for tenure evaluation. “Institutions should ensure that their stated criteria for tenure match the criteria that, in actual practice, the institutions apply,” the

report emphasized. Departmental chairs and other administrators need to communicate that criteria to the candidate.

- Consistency in tenure decisions. The same standards need to be applied to all candidates regardless of race, gender, disability or national origin. Consistency also requires that formal evaluations over the probationary period reflect “a coherent set of expectations and a consistent analysis of the individual’s performance.”

- Candor in the evaluation of tenure-track faculty. After the initial explanation of the standards for reappointment and tenure, an administrator needs to provide evaluations that evaluate the candidate’s progress “in plain English.”
- Caring for unsuccessful candidates. Faculty and administrators need to treat the unsuccessful tenure candidate “with professionalism and decency.”

A copy of the report is available on A.C.E.’s Web site (<http://www.acenet.edu>).

**Nominees needed for MAYS Award**


The Commission invites applications for the \$500 Mary Ann Yodelis Smith (MAYS) Award, which funds feminist scholarship that has the potential to make significant contributions to the literature of gender and media.

First presented in 1995, the MAYS Award honors Mary Ann Yodelis Smith, a past president of AEJMC and a long-time advocate for women in the academy.

By April 15, applicants should send four copies of a five-to-seven page description of the project and its potential contribution to the scholarship on gender and the media and a brief one page description of the applicant's qualifications for undertaking the project. A three-person panel will judge applications.

The winner will be notified in May.

Applications should be sent to Kate Peirce, Department of Mass Communication, Southwest Texas State, San Marcos, TX 78666. For questions, contact Peirce at 512/245-3482 or e-mail at kp02@swt.edu. The award will be presented at AEJMC's Washington, D.C. convention in August.

*Co-chairs' columns* 

**Therese Lueck, First Year Co-Chair**

January 2001 and it has begun - the year of honoring our foremothers.

The Mexico City Colloquium provided an international forum for AEJMC to interact with journalism and mass communication industry and education leaders. It also provided an opportunity for us to recognize women who have laid the foundation for our activist efforts.

Tall and modern, a building stands in the heart of Mexico City as a symbol of press freedom. It also stands for 25 years of dedication to journalistic integrity by the first woman president of AEJMC. Working with the local press in Monterrey, Mexico, Mary Gardner began a newsroom transformation at the *El Norte* newspaper in 1970 that has resulted in the most ethically responsible



press policies in Mexico. She helped overcome cultural practices run amok, such as the custom of gift exchange. When does a practice such as giving gifts rise to the level of bribery? One Mexican lawyer said she considers the intent

of the giver. But *El Norte* doesn't split hairs. Its reporters would be fired for accepting even a cup of coffee.

Such a policy shift was complicated by the fact that most reporters had several jobs, which often resulted in conflicts of interest. In fact, they counted on bribes to supplement their income. To counter this potential for corruption while allowing a living wage, Mary proposed a revised pay scale. Today, reporters in this group make salaries that equal that of other reporters - including what they would make if they did accept bribes.

"She was one tough woman," said a prominent Mexico City publisher, recalling his early work with Gardner as they struggled to initiate the changes. The

publisher, Alejandro Junco de la Vega, now heads the *El Norte* and *Reforma* publishing group. Although Mary wasn't able to attend the conference, she was ardently acknowledged in his speech, "Against Corruption ... Information."

Donna Allen was another woman who understood the necessity of economic independence. As founder of the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, she was a life-long activist who enabled people to access information, express their opinions and share their experiences. Her work lives on in the people she touched and the institutions she forever changed.

The Commission is rededicating itself to activism with the creation of the Donna Allen Award. While we were in Mexico City, Felix Gutierrez of the Freedom Forum told me the organization has agreed to support this award with a \$5,000 donation. We are grateful to the Freedom Forum for this high recognition of the late Donna Allen and the importance of her work.

The Donna Allen Award will be formally announced at Wild Women 2001 in D.C., but Commission members are invited to make their donations now, in the hopes that we may go into the convention with a fully endowed award.

2001 and the tribute has begun.

*Terry*



**Kate Peirce, Second Year Co-Chair**

I hate it when a message pops up from Kitty that says, "It's that time again. We need your column."

Column!?

When did I become a columnist? What do I write a column about?

Well, since it's my column, I'll do whatever I want. And what I want to do is praise editor Kitty's idea of running stories by Bev Merrick about the tenure process.



Fewer things are more traumatic or, at least, nerve wracking than dealing with tenure - maybe reading reviews on AEJMC papers, but

that's another column.

It can also be a lonely experience, because until you know for sure how the vote went, how can you know whom to trust, who likes you and who would prefer you move to the South Pole?

All right, you non-paranoid people didn't think about these things for a minute. I don't want to hear about it. But even those who didn't have anything truly traumatic or dramatic happen during the process no doubt have stories of their own to tell.

One of the ways we can make the experience slightly less traumatic and lonely for those yet to experience the fun is by sharing those stories. (It's the misery-loves-company-and-I-know-I-had-it-worse-than-you syndrome. Or something like that.)

So that's why I'm going to share a couple of stories.

The tenure story is just a little one, but I have a promotion story that could eat New York. The tenure story goes like this: In the fall of 1990 three of us were going up for tenure, two women and one man. In early December the tenured faculty met. In early January the three of us knew nothing.

I finally grabbed my chair - the human not the furniture - and demanded to know what was going on. He told me I was fine. I was, it turned out, but why couldn't he have shared that news earlier? Because someone else, who ended up getting tenure, wasn't fine. The month-long meeting was a fight about that person and not me, but I didn't know and I was panicking.

The promotion story is this: Five years later I submitted my materials for promotion to full professor. It didn't get out of the department. I was angry, depressed and certain that all of my colleagues had suddenly decided I should move to the South Pole. My chair, the same one who had been in charge during the tenure trials, wasn't at all forthcoming as to the reason for my rejection.

Months later, it came out in a discussion with the dean. My chair thought I had missed a week of classes at the beginning of the semester and had run to the dean screaming (the dean's word not mine) that I would never get my promotion over this. However, while the dean got an earful, he never told *me* that he was furious with me or why, so I never had the chance to inform him that he was flat out wrong. I lost a decent merit raise as well as my promotion over something I hadn't done. (And if I *had* done it, would the punishment have fit the crime?)

All's well that ends well, they say. That chair retired at the end of the year, and our new chair took pity on me. The next year I not only got my promotion but also the biggest merit raise in the department!

So those are my stories; what are yours?

*Kate*

**Grad applicants sought for award**

The Commission invites graduate students who conduct research on women in journalism and mass communication to apply for the third annual Mary Gardner Award.

This award is designed to fund research that has the potential to make an excellent contribution to the scholarship on women and journalism and mass communication. The award honors Mary Gardner, professor emeritus at Michigan State University and the first woman elected president of AEJMC.

By April 15, applicants should send four copies of a three-to-five page description of the project and its potential contribution and the applicant's qualifications. A three-person panel will judge the applications.

Applications should be sent to Kate Peirce, Department of Mass Communication, Southwest Texas State, San Marcos, TX 78666. For questions, contact Peirce at 512/245-3482 or e-mail at kp02@swt.edu. The award will be presented at AEJMC's August convention.

## Feminist

Continued from page 1

scholars, are especially aware of these difficulties.

Relatedly, the sheer complexity of addressing intersecting themes of gender, communication and power can be overwhelming. No one can master all of the relevant literature in all of these areas, but we have to try, and we have to do it well enough to make persuasive arguments and get published and other forms of recognition as well.

This takes time and it may take longer than the six-year tenure clock allows. I have anecdotally known feminist scholars whose work is criticized for being either too “eclectic” (the word is used pejoratively by reviewers) or too superficial, and doesn’t show sufficient mastery over an area of theory or method. Additionally, it’s likely that some of the work is too political and threatens academic gatekeepers. This may be the case to the extent that research agendas permeate the candidates’ teaching and service. But usually that’s not the criticism made—rather the work is criticized for lacking conceptual and methodological depth.

A related problem that others

have written about is feminism’s so-called turn to culture and away from social scientific analyses (e.g., Barrett, 1999). Turning to culture *may* mean not only a decreased focus on lived experiences of inequity, but also the luxury of working within narrow areas of theory and, therefore, the likelihood of greater rewards within the academic system.

In my view, women’s reality is significantly a material reality. All over the world unemployment is higher among women than men, female wages are lower than male wages and women don’t advance as quickly as men.<sup>1,2</sup> Women constitute the vast majority of unpaid family workers.

Women have fewer opportunities than men to improve their economic and professional status, because of greater illiteracy, poverty and health and family constraints. Additionally, women who obtain an education and employment may face increased risks of sexual harassment and violence as a result. Representations of women in media, on the Internet and elsewhere reinforce these material realities.<sup>3</sup> As few women participate at the highest levels of state and organizational decision making globally, there is usually little incentive to create or enforce laws and policies that improve women’s situation.<sup>4</sup>

From these facts it seems obvious that feminist analysis needs to attend to material inequalities. Yet changes over the years in feminist scholarship have not only widened gaps between feminists and political economists

*“It seems obvious that feminist analysis needs to attend to material inequalities.”*



(who focus on resource inequities), but also between theorists and activists within feminism.

In general, feminist theory and scholarship have evolved significantly in the past two decades. Michèle Barrett has summarized the change as a move from an emphasis on *things* (such as low pay, gender violence and female illiteracy) to *words*, including verbal and visual symbols in texts (Barrett, 1999). Obviously this shift, which Barrett also describes as feminism's "turn to culture," is particularly significant for communication studies, as well as for literary and film studies. Post-structuralist theorists, such as Foucault, Derrida, Saussure and Lacan, have been influential in challenging the assumptions of previously dominant feminist frameworks.

Post-structuralism has influenced feminism in at least three ways (Barrett, 1999). First, post-structuralism has changed traditional views of language. Language does not merely convey meaning, but actively constructs meaning (Saussure and Derrida).

Second, Foucault and others have challenged the materialist basis of theories on which many feminisms have been grounded, including liberal political theory and Marxism. Foucault argued that material objects by themselves—including social structures—are meaningless, but that they are given meaning by signs and discourses.

Finally, post-structuralism challenges assumptions about

*“ . . . feminist scholars have increasingly acknowledged the heterogeneous reality of women’s lives, which argues against essentialist explanations of (and remedies for) patriarchy.”*

causality. Most earlier feminist theories (like liberal, radical and socialist feminism) make assumptions about the causes of women's oppression. Post-structuralists argue it is more valuable to identify meaning in representations than to search for explanatory origins.

Post-structuralist arguments have been supported by post-modernism, which has accompanied post-industrial capitalism and the globalization of communication and information systems. Post-modernism is difficult to define, as it means different things from different perspectives. Like post-structuralism, however, it tends to reject the conceptual projects of Enlightenment thought and to focus on a plurality of meanings, on "pastiche and parody," and on surface meanings versus depth (Barrett, 1999, p. 23).<sup>5</sup>

Alongside post-structuralist and post-modernist influences have been critiques of traditional feminist frameworks by minority

and international feminists. These feminists have rightly noted that the assumptions and political agendas of traditional frameworks reflect the experiences of their creators, and do not include all women.

Black U.S. feminists have challenged the white, middle class basis of liberal and radical feminisms (e.g., hooks, 1984). Minority and immigrant British feminists have challenged the white basis of Marxist and socialist feminism (Barrett, 1999, p. 146). Third World feminists have critiqued the ethnocentrism of perspectives originating in the West (Mohanty, 1991a; 1991b). Many of these

Continued on next page

## Feminist

Continued from page 11

feminists have argued against gender—or gender and class—as the primary social division(s) in feminist thought, agreeing with Foucault's view that there are no totalizing explanations, whether gender, class, race or nation. Rather, the nature of gender oppression shifts by context and cannot be generalized. However, while these feminists agree with post-modernists and post-structuralists on many points and disagree with traditional frameworks, noted above, their work retains a material political agenda. As Michèle Barrett observed in the British context, "the voices now most effectively addressing questions of class, inequality, poverty and exploitation to a wider public are those of black women, not white socialist feminists" (1999, p. 149).

Like post-structuralists and post-modernists, minority and international feminists may not wish to theorize links among—or origins of—specific social inequalities; but the material relevance of these links is evident in their work.

In general, an outcome of all of the trends mentioned—post-structuralism, post-modernism, global feminisms—has been a turn away from the social sciences and toward the arts and humanities,

both conceptually and methodologically.

Questions of concern less frequently relate to issues of social structure, including capitalism and patriarchy, and more to issues of culture, sexuality, identity and personal agency. The focus of interest has moved toward processes of symbolization and representation, as well as of consumption and reception, in order to understand issues of subjectivity, psyche and self (Barrett, 1999, p. 21). Hence, methodologies have favored discourse analysis, with decreased uses of the methods of history and social science.

Another more troubling outcome has been decreased academic interest (including feminist interest) in activism and a widening of the gap between scholars and activists.

Activists seek to reveal and reform oppressive structures and practices in society. Analyses of discourses and practices of consumption and reception may be considered activist if they are contextualized within or clearly contribute to an activist political agenda. Yet, as Larry Grossberg (1995) has observed, feminist cultural studies scholars vary in the extent to which they situate their work in the larger context of social structures of power.

For instance, some who study consumption equate pleasure with resistance; others agree that pleasure may be empowering, yet

recognize "the exploitive, manipulative, and dominating aspects of the market" (Grossberg, 1995, p. 73). The meaning and basis of resistance and of political activism remain points of difference between feminists.

To briefly conclude, in the past two decades or so, feminist scholars have increasingly acknowledged the heterogeneous reality of women's lives, which argues against essentialist explanations of (and remedies for) patriarchy. As this has occurred, feminism has become more diverse. Additionally, the overall feminist emphasis has shifted from social structures to discourses and symbols of marginality in texts, often with little attention to underlying material inequities. This change in feminist thought may work against analyses that are fundamentally concerned with the distribution of material resources within capitalist societies.

One solution is to combine assumptions from feminist cultural studies and political economy, as others are also advocating.<sup>6</sup> The increased interdisciplinarity of the work makes building a comprehensive conceptual framework a daunting task. Because the work makes political arguments and challenges the status quo, not everyone will feel comfortable with it. It is easier and safer to focus on conceptual questions of cultural



and psychological meaning, sexuality, and identity.

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1, 2 For statistics comparing male and female AEJMC members, see, e.g., Riffe, Salomone & Stempel III (1999).

3 For comparative data examining the representation of women in news, see the 1995 report of the Global Media Monitoring Project. For information, write to MediaWatch, Suite 204, 517 Wellington Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 1G1, or send an email to [mediawat@accessv.com](mailto:mediawat@accessv.com). An updated report will be available in spring, 2001.

4 For data and examples, see, e.g., Nelson & Chowdhury, 1994; Seager, 1997; UNDP, 1997, 1998; United Nations, 1995; World Bank, 1999.

5 See also *Destabilizing Theory*, ed. by Michele Barrett & Anne Phillips for discussions and definitions of postmodernism and poststructuralism and their impact on feminist theory.

6 See, e.g., Meehan & Riordan (in press) for examples and citations.

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Ramona Rush



Carol Oukrup

## **What do these women have in common?**

They've both won the Commission on the Status of Women's  
Award for Outstanding Woman in Journalism  
and Mass Communication Education.

### **Nominations for this year's award are currently being accepted.**

The award recognizes a woman who has represented women well  
through excellence and high standards in journalism  
and mass communication education.

If you would like to nominate someone for the award, please send a  
letter of recommendation that outlines the individual's contributions to:

Kate Peirce  
Professor  
Department of Mass Communication  
South West Texas State  
San Marcos, TX 78666

**All entries must be postmarked by April 15, 2001.**



write  
**Will right  
 for food**

Surviving on an  
 assistantship

By K.L. Gionti  
 The University of Akron

Checking account balance as of  
 Jan. 16, 2001: \$47.11.  
 Days until next paycheck: 11.  
 Welcome to life as a graduate  
 assistant.

Perhaps the most difficult thing  
 about starting graduate school has been  
 learning to live on the measly stipend of  
 a graduate assistant.

Prior to grad school, I worked for a  
 local hospital as a human resources  
 assistant, earning more money in a week  
 than I now earn in a month. Although  
 the job stifled all creative energies, I was  
 able to order enough books on  
 Amazon.com that they began sending  
 me free gifts. Buying a new lipstick  
 didn't mean I wouldn't eat for a week.

But while having extra money was  
 nice perk, the thought of spending  
 another day doing the exact same thing  
 as the day before was enough to make  
 me mad.

So what is a girl with a bachelor's  
 degree in English to do? Why, go to  
 graduate school, of course!

I remember getting a phone call, at  
 work no less, saying I received an  
 assistantship and literally jumping for  
 joy at the thought of never having to tell  
 someone the hospital wasn't hiring  
 anymore people for housekeeping.

At the time, I didn't understand  
 just how much my spending addiction  
 would be cut. I was sent into convul-  
 sions, however, when I received my first  
 paycheck. The horror!

Once the initial shock wore off, I  
 realized I needed to get on a budget.  
 Since this was the first time I ever had  
 to make a personal budget and stick to  
 it, it wasn't (and isn't) always easy. I  
 made a monthly budget sheet and kept it  
 in my planner. Things such as rent,  
 insurance and food were  
 essential; things such as  
 red-patent-leather shoes  
 were not.

I also began to look  
 other places to make  
 money. The old adage –  
 when you're hungry, go  
 hunting – holds true.  
 Although I wasn't able to  
 get another part-time job  
 because of my contract, I  
 started looking for  
 freelance jobs that paid.  
 The occasional \$50 for a  
 short news brief helped  
 cushion my checking  
 account. I was also lucky  
 enough to land an assignment to write a  
 feature article that paid the equivalent of  
 a month's rent.

For the most part, my budget  
 works—I still put money into my  
 savings account. You never know when  
 you'll really need it – a lesson I learned  
 from my parents.

Lastly, I started being smarter with  
 my money. Things such as eating the  
 food at home instead of ordering  
 Chinese take-out, avoiding ATM  
 machines not from your bank and  
 staying away from the mall have been  
 paramount in helping me  
 control my spending.

Like most graduate  
 students, I wish I made  
 more money. But the truth  
 of the matter is, I love my  
 job. I'd rather be a poor  
 graduate student than  
 watching the clock at the  
 hospital.

Now if only the next  
 payday wasn't so far away.



**Grad student for hire**

Even during my  
 January trip to New  
 York City (where I  
 checked out places to  
 send resumes), I  
 budgeted my funds.  
 Trust me, the \$3  
 subway ride from  
 LaGuardia to the hotel  
 is a deal.

**AS QUOTED**

*“Graduate students  
 are the low-cost players in  
 the new commercial  
 university.”*

- Chronicle of  
 Higher Education 1/19/01





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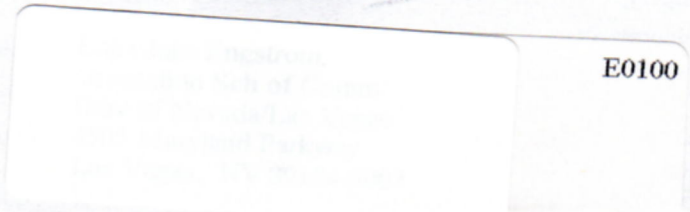
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