Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Simon Fraser University

Ruth Wynn Woodward Chair: 2010-2011

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Final Report
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Introduction

The Ruth Wynn Woodward Professorship (RWWP) in Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies (GSWS) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) is a unique endowment that encourages the dissemination of feminist scholarship throughout the community at large. My year as RWWP involved a dynamic mix of feminist teaching, scholarship, and public outreach. This report will summarize the activities I undertook over the course of the year and offer suggestions for the future.

Overall, the RWWP was a career building and life altering experience. It allowed me to pursue activities I normally would not have the time or support to do. I credit this position with my recent success in today’s competitive academic job market. While holding this title, I was selected out of 89 other candidates for a position as Assistant Professor in Women’s Studies at the University of Victoria.

I would like to thank the department for inviting me to spend a year in this exciting role. In particular, Department Chair Catherine Murray is an innovative Chair and was an exceptional mentor to me throughout the year. My load was lightened considerably as a result of the support of the RWWP Outreach Coordinator Esther Harrison as well as the administrative support of Roberta Neilson and Katherine Hunter.

Public Outreach

While holding the title RWWP, I engaged in many different forms of public outreach. The majority of this work was inspired by my involvement with the New View Campaign, a feminist scholar-activist group which challenges the medicalization of sex.

1. Testifying at the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) Hearing

The same month (June of 2010) I was selected as RWWP, I joined with other New View Campaign members to testify at an FDA advisory hearing in Gaithersburg, Maryland against the approval of the drug Flibanserin. Makers of this drug spent years conducting clinical trials on heterosexual, pre-menopausal women in long-term relationships deemed to suffer from ‘Hypo-active Sexual Desire Disorder’ (HSDD). My testimony centered on a critique of HSDD as a drug cannot be approved unless it treats a valid illness category. I pointed out that there is no baseline empirical evidence for quantifying ‘normal’ desire and that norms of desire varied from era to era and culture to culture. I cited research which suggests that heterosexual women in long-term monogamous relationships are the most likely group of women to complain of low sexual desire. Finally, I reminded the panel that the working committee for the revision of the upcoming edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Diseases recently moved to strike HSDD from their big book of illness categories. Flibanserin was denied approval for several reasons.
2. Co-Organizing a Counter Conference

In the Fall of 2010, I once again partnered with the New View Campaign to host a counter-conference opposing the ‘Second Global Symposium’ on cosmetic genital surgery in Las Vegas, Nevada. While surgeons gathered at the Venetian hotel to discuss the latest developments in procedures such as labiaplasty and vaginal ‘tightening’ and ‘rejuvenation,’ members of the New View Campaign joined with local feminist scholars and activists from Women’s Studies from the University of Las Vegas and others for a one-day symposium titled ‘Framing the Vulva.’ Over the course of the day, we celebrated vulva diversity and critiqued the socio-political forces leading to the widespread epidemic of vulva shame.

3. Academic & Public Talks

I gave a series of academic and public talks during my year as RWWP. In October, 2011, I was invited to speak at a small conference in Glasgow, Scotland titled ‘Sex Bodies, and Emotions in Everyday Life: A Conference In Honour of John Gagnon.’ Throughout the day, this pioneering figure in the Sociology of Sexuality was presented with ten plenary talks showcasing the many ways his groundbreaking work on sexual scripts is being used today. My talk (co-authored with Carol Wolkowitz) was titled ‘Treating Women’s Sexual Difficulties: Touch as Social Interaction.’

Over the course of the year, I also gave talks outlining my scholarly and activist work at Women’s Studies departments throughout the province, for example, the University of British Columbia, Langara University, and Yukon College.

While in Whitehorse as part of the ‘Traveling Speakers Series,’ I gave a series of public talks at the Yukon College and the downtown library. These talks proved to be influential as several people from the Whitehorse community attended the conference I later held at SFU, described below.

4. Organizing and Chairing an International, Interdisciplinary, Multimedia Conference

The major component of my public outreach during my tenure as RWWP was the organization and chairing of ‘The Medicalization of Sex’ conference, held between April 28th–30th, 2011 (see program attached). Approximately two hundred people from all over Canada, the US, South America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel gathered to critically assess science, medicine, and the pharmaceutical industry’s efforts to shape our understandings and experiences of sex. Included in this group were cross-generational, junior and senior scholars from all branches of the humanities and social sciences, doctors, nurses, counselors, therapists, women’s health advocates, sex workers, sex educators, journalists, and creative artists.

Over the course of the weekend, we made use of three of SFU’s downtown spaces and one off site space. Thursday evening we kicked off at the Goldcorp Cinema with a
welcome reception and screening of the documentary *Orgasm Inc: The Strange Science of Female Pleasure* with a special talk by the director Liz Canner. The rest of Friday and Saturday were spent listening to a host of plenary and breakout papers at the Segal Business School and Harbour Centre. Friday evening we gathered for ‘Antidote,’ an art show and reception celebrating bodily diversity at Gallery Gachet, a unique artist run gallery bordering Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.

**Papers Presented**

There were over 70 papers presented at the Medicalization of Sex conference. Plenary speakers included keynotes Leonore Tiefer (NYU Medical School) and Jennifer Terry (UC Irvine), special guests Virginia Braun (U of Auckland), Allan Cassels (U of Victoria), Liz Canner (Brown), Carol Groneman (CUNY), Rebecca Jordan-Young (Barnard), Barbara Marshall (Trent University), Ray Moynihan (via Skype from Australia), Elizabeth Reis (U of Oregon), and Judy Segal (UBC). Close to 60 papers were presented in well-attended breakout sessions.

**Staff, Volunteers, & Financial Sponsors**

This major undertaking was made possible through the help of the New View Campaign and the help of SFU staff, volunteers, and financial sponsorship.

Special thanks to New View Campaign leader Leonore Tiefer, GSWS Chair Catherine Murray, and RWWP Outreach Coordinator Esther Harrison, my main sources of support throughout the planning of the conference. Also thank you to student volunteers from SFU and UBC who were key in the execution of the conference: Annelies Becu, Kelsi Cox, Aysha Dhala, Annie Ellison, Janine Farrell, Tirsh Garner, Meghan Murphy, Sarah Rudrum, Chris Rzepa, Anika Stafford, Chrissy Taylor, and Shannon Vogels. Jennifer Safronick. Jennifer deserves special mention as the chief organizer and curator of the ‘Antidote’ art event. She did a fantastic job and kept me energized throughout the year.

**Funding**

This was an entirely self-funded event.

$13,750 was donated to the event by:

- $5,000 Ruth Wynn Woodward Endowment, Dept of GSWS, SFU
- $2,000 President’s Office, SFU
- $2,000 Office of the Vice President - Academic, SFU
- $2,000 Office of the Vice President - Research, SFU
- $2,000 Dean, Faculty of the Arts & Social Sciences, SFU
- $500 Women’s Studies, UBC
- $250 English, UBC
$12,872 was generated through other revenues:

$11,227 Registration  
$ 385 Movie Night  
$ 835 Book Sales  
$ 425 Bar Sales at Antidote Event

Donations in kind were contributed by:

Astrea Media  
Fairwind Design  
Russell Beer  
Showoff Books  
The New View Campaign

**Budget**

Here is a detailed list of our costs:

$5,431.34 Speaker Travel  
$3,488.26 Speaker Hotel  
$ 790.74 Incidental Speaker Travel Stipend  
$ 500.00 Honoraria (Liz Canner and Ray Moynihan)  
$4,390.00 SFU Room Rental  
$ 369.28 Gallery Gachet Rental  
$1,265.40 Conference Marketing (graphic design and printing)  
$3,793.00 Audio Visual Equipment (Harbour Centre, Segal Bus, Goldcorp)  
$5,287.62 Catering SB and Goldcorp  
$ 220.00 Front of House/Ushers at Goldcorp  
$ 20.00 Extra Security Hours (Building Open)  
$ 379.48 D & M Publishers (Books)  
$ 440.54 Antidote Expenses (Jennifer and Thea’s including art ship & wine)  
$ 444.59 Registration Refunds  
$ 27.63 Thea’s Expenses (Copying, taxi, meal)  
$ 240.21 Gifts

**Total Costs: $27,088.09**

We came very close to meeting our budget. In total, we generated $26,628.70 and spent $27,088.09 for a shortage of $459.39. Had it not been for $444.59 in registration refunds, we would have been within $20 of our goal.
**Dissemination**

I am now in the process of disseminating the conference findings. I have circulated the attached ten-page conference report to all participants. I am also planning to write a more reflective, critical piece for the Canadian Women’s Studies journal *Atlantis*. Finally, keynote speaker Leonore Tiefer and I are co-editing a special issue of the *Journal of Sex Research* inspired by a selection of papers from the conference. The selected authors submitted their 4,500-word papers by August 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2011 for review by October 1\textsuperscript{st} and publication by January 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2012.

**Concluding Remarks: Suggestions for the Future**

Based on my own experience, I have a few suggestions for the future of the RWWP:

**The Advantages of a Junior RWWP Position**

In the past, the RWWP has been available to senior scholars, artists, and activists only. I grateful to have been the first ‘Junior’ RWWP. The Junior RWWP fills a much-needed niche for the postdoctoral support and funding of junior scholars who are making their way through today’s challenging job market.

**Integrating Grad Students into Large Undergraduate Classes**

A key element of the RWWP is teaching a special topics class closely related to one’s research expertise. I taught The Medicalization of Sex as an undergraduate/graduate split class with an enrollment of over 60. There were only 6 graduate students. However, it proved difficult to meet the needs of the grad students in a split class of this size. I recommend that this type of class be restricted to undergraduate credits only, or include undergraduates and graduates with a cap of 30-40 students. Another alternative is to offer a separate graduate class tackling similar themes at an advanced level in a different time slot.

**Suggest Change to Position Start/ End Date**

The RWWP traditionally starts September 1\textsuperscript{st} and ends at the end of August. I believe a July 1\textsuperscript{st} start date would be more effective. The majority of RWWPs tend to organize a major conference as the main component of their public outreach. If the RWWP wishes to seek funding for this conference, the deadline for most funding bodies is October or November 1\textsuperscript{st}. In order to apply for conference funding, all aspects of the conference have to be arranged by this time including the budget, event summary, marketing materials, venues, and keynotes speakers. A call for papers would have to be distributed by September 1\textsuperscript{st} at the latest.
On another note, the goal of most RWWPs is tenure track employment following the appointment. The majority of tenure track positions start July 1st. Officially ending this post by July 1st is more conducive to a smooth transition to a future post.

**Special Consideration for Conferences Ineligible For Outside Funding**

The major stumbling block I faced during my tenure as RWWP was funding The Medicalization of Sex Conference. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) no longer funds health related topics. This is a serious issue of wider concern for scholars in critical health studies when one’s work does not fit into the mandate of funding bodies geared towards the ‘hard’ sciences and/or the social determinants of health. This coupled with the cost of holding a conference at SFU made the process of organizing a conference extremely difficult. For a conference which only included two buffet breakfasts and one lunch, $13,710 out of $27,088.09 (50%) was paid to SFU. SFU and future scholars in my position will have to think of new creative strategies for conferences like mine to be possible. The conference I held was a benefit to students and helped raise the profile of SFU. I therefore recommend that SFU considers donating or discounting certain services for self-funded conferences.

A heartfelt thanks once again for this wonderful opportunity. I look forward to connecting and collaborating as I begin my position at the University of Victoria.

Best Wishes,

Thea Cacchioni