

Women's Studies

Bemidji State University
Winter 2012



Photo by Wes Holland

Barrie Thorne presented a workshop for faculty and gave a keynote address entitled "Gender Play and Beyond."

SPRING 2012 COURSES

WMST 2600 Women & Diversity

3 credits, M 4:00 p.m. – 6:40 p.m.

WMST 3100 Writing Women's Lives

3 credits, MW 3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

WMST 3190 Feminist Theories & Practice

3 credits, TH 10:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

WMST 5100 Topics in Women's Studies

3 credits, MW 3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Present and future

Colleen Greer

Director

Faculty and students in the women's studies program have been busy this fall hosting events and planning for spring activities. In mid-September, Barrie Thorne, a gender studies scholar from the University of California–Berkeley, was on campus. She presented a workshop for faculty and gave a keynote address entitled "Gender Play and Beyond." Dr. Thorne's presentation sparked conversations about the meaning of the terms sex and gender, as well as how we "do gender" every day in all interactions and in all spaces.

In October, planning began for the March 2012 celebration of Women's History Month. The theme this year is "Women's Education – Women's Empowerment." On March 15, we will kick off the activities with an event designed to introduce students to experiences of women from other areas of the world. At 11:00 a.m., Shannon Murray will start the day with a performance in the Lower Hobson Union. This will be followed by a brown bag luncheon event with students from the International Student Organization. The students will be talking about the experiences of girls and young women, and future possibilities. A late-afternoon panel discussion by international professional women will be followed by a concluding musical event. This is only the beginning of our celebration. Be sure to watch for the events flyer, and join us as we celebrate the lives of women!

Discovering women's studies

Na Lee Student

Women's studies? Feminism? What are women's studies and feminism?" Those are the questions that usually come out of people's mouths when they hear those words, and I find it amusing that there are so many misconceptions about the subject. But I have to admit that when I was younger I used to ask the same questions. I thought feminism was just all about "man-hating" or "lesbian pride." When I think about my views today compared to then, I laugh and realize how naïve I was. I grew up in a pretty conservative home; I had always thought of myself as a young female who should obey and let the males lead. I never really thought of myself as a fighter or one who will confront issues that are unequal based on gender and life in general. All of this would suddenly change.

When I was a junior in high school, I made the decision to take post-secondary classes, and I got the opportunity to take an "Introduction to Women's Studies" course. I was immediately inspired as I entered this room and listened to the instructor speak. I felt that my eyes were being opened for the first time. I noticed things that I never did before, like my mother's influence in our household or my

sisters' leadership and success in academics. There was so much to learn and so much to see; I was an eager student. I felt that, for once, my voice was finally being heard. My voice became louder and my opinions seemed to matter.

Let me redefine women's studies and feminism to those who knew little or nothing about them. Women's studies is an area of study concerned with the actions of women (and men) who strongly believe in equality for all. It recognizes the diversity in every individual, whether it is gender, age, class, race, or sexual status. Feminists are the representatives or followers of this area of study. What feminists represent is all that women's studies focuses on.

After being so empowered through taking multiple courses in the women's studies program, I knew I wanted it to be a part my life. Now, I want to take everything that I have learned and take it to a whole new level. I want to reach out to women. I want to be there for them. I want educate them. And I want to speak up for them. I understand that by acting I will influence, so it would be an accomplishment for me if I could use my actions to influence others, whether men or women, to also act and influence. Everyone should have equality, and no one should have to feel that they deserve only what they are given.

WHEN "WOMEN'S STUDIES" BECAME REAL

CarolAnn Russell Schlemper M.F.A.; Ph.D.; English & Women's Studies

I grew up in the 1950s in Montana and Minnesota, where families were simple and happy, and no one questioned anything after the horror and victory of World War II. However, by the time I was in high school, things were shifting. I spent a year as an American Field Service exchange student in Australia in 1968 and was delighted to wear a school uniform, which enabled girls to be on the same playing field (purely academic) as boys in high school. Girls' sports were on par with boys' sports in Australia, too, at the time. I joined the girls' swim team and also the girls' tennis team! What a different experience from my friends who were National Merit Scholar- cheerleaders, choir members, etc. When I returned to Minnesota in 1969, it was a different world. The blue jeans strike had been won by students of Robbinsdale High School, and I went off to college with a suitcase full!

My first encounter with "women's issues" was as a college freshman at Saint Cloud State

University: Consciousness-raising groups were being held at the student union. However, the biggest change was when a full professor of psychology, a woman, created a course titled "Psychology of Women." It took her several years of political maneuvering to accomplish this, and I registered for the course in my junior year, 1972. It was held in a small auditorium, which was overflowing with students, both male and female, all of us curious and rebellious in our own ways. I remember her opening lecture: She walked up to the podium wearing a colorful caftan, holding a little card in her hand: "This is my first charge card," she said, "in my own name: American Express. I can now travel nationally and internationally without relying upon my husband's name, credit, or legal rights." THAT made an enormous impact on us ALL.

Now, when I teach "Women's Issues" (both men and women enroll) or "Women & Diversity," I root my teaching in what I learned 40 years ago, while at the same time marvelling at what little my students really know about the history or psychology of "being female" in American culture, or even in the world. While a graduate student in English

at the University of Montana in Missoula in the mid-1970s, I joined with other graduate women students in supporting the first women's studies program there. Our first victory was a "women's center" in the UM Student Union, actually an office with comfy chairs: However, this was a PUBLIC PRESENCE, and it encouraged us all.

You can't really imagine what it was like then to be a student: In my graduate English classes, "women's literature" was a footnote, not even a margin. I, a poet in UM's nationally recognized M.F.A. program, could rarely find a woman poet in any contemporary anthology (and when I did, she was usually dead, e.g., Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Emily Dickinson). Also, I was one of only three women in the program, in a class of nearly 30 M.F.A. students!

So, it is with a whole heart and sharp mind that I continue to support, and to teach in, this area of knowledge from a multitude of angles. The generative seed of "women's and gender studies" is both actual and archetypal: WOMAN: *the personal in relation to the theoretical*. Excising either reduces freedom.

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