



# Women & Environments

international  
magazine

## YOUNG WOMEN WORKING

**Intersecting Realities:  
Young Women and Call  
Centre Work in India  
and Canada**

SRABANI MAITRA AND  
JASJIT SANGHA

**Murder, Mystery and  
Mistreatment in  
Mexican Maquiladoras**

ALLISON MOFFATT

**Attitudes That Don't Work:  
Women with Disabilities  
and Employment**

MYROSLAVA TATARYN

**Wangari Maathai:  
A Woman of Distinction**

CATHERINE KILELU

CND \$5.95 US \$3.95



DOUBLE ISSUE





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### Mission Statement

Women & Environments International is a unique Canadian magazine, which examines women's multiple relations to their environments — natural, built and social — from feminist and anti-racist perspectives. It has provided a forum for academic research and theory, professional practice and community experience since 1976. Produced by a volunteer editorial board the magazine contributes to feminist social change. The magazine is associated with the Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies at New College, University of Toronto.

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#### FALL 2005 **Feminism, Transnationality, and the Nation** —

This issue will explore the topic through text and visual media — focusing on various aspects of the nation and nationality — both inside and across borders, including but not limited to human rights, national identities and technologies within the context of a transnational world.

#### SPRING 2006 **30th Anniversary Issue: Women and Urban Sustainability** —

This special 30th Anniversary issue will focus on urban sustainability from the point of view of feminist organizing, research, practice and theory. The publication will contribute to and be part of the World Urban Forum III taking place in Vancouver in June 2006.

*Your participation in issue teams, ideas, articles, news and funds are critical to the survival of Women & Environments International Magazine. For Editorial Guidelines, Calls for Papers and more visit our website: [www.weimag.com](http://www.weimag.com)*

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### ON THE COVER

#### Mangali Meewalaaracchchi

Mangali Meewalaaracchchi is a final year doctoral student at the Nagoya University in Japan, where she lives with her husband and their three-year-old son. Her research interest is on the impact of globalization on gender equality in the labour market of Sri Lanka. Although busy with her academic career, Mangali has continued to nurture her artistic side, and has participated in several exhibitions in Nagoya, Japan.

The cover image, created for WEI, shows a woman who bears the world and provides protective care for the children, the ill and the aged. These activities are not measured in the free market economy, and as a result of the process of globalization, she is caught in a marginalized position, which is created by multinationals. She is one of the victims of globalization; while she is being exploited at a cheap salary, the rest of the world seeks help from her.

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## Young Women Working

Connecting the Local and the Global

In the introduction to her new collection of feminist work on young women entitled *All About the Girl* (2004), sociologist, Anita Harris writes about the omnipresence of young women: "They are the new heroes of popular culture, the dominant faces on college campuses and the spokespeople for public education campaigns. They are wooed by advertisers and recruitment companies alike. Feminism has furnished young women with choices about sexuality, chances of education and employment and new ways of asserting autonomy and rights." Yet, she also recognizes that "Education, employment, health and safety are precarious experiences for many girls who bear the full impact of economic rationalism, new security concerns and the dismantling of welfare. Young women appear to have it all, and yet many constitute those hardest hit by the effects of the new global political economy on jobs, resources and community."

We know about the gendered impacts of globalization (see issue 64/65: Globalization and Activism). We recognize that women worldwide disproportionately bear the burden of economic restructuring based on the effects on their family, work and community lives. We know less about how these effects filter down to groups of young women. How are young women surviving and making choices about their working lives in different places?

But do we think of young women as workers? In a North American context, we might lump them in together with young male workers in fast food or retail jobs. Otherwise we might think of them as future workers who eventually take up women's work. Seems Mary Jane, the teenage babysitter next door, no longer lives there. But where and what exactly has she moved on to?

The articles grouped under "Their Stories" aim to capture some of young women's diverse work experiences serving cocktails, acting in "Nollywood," giving head, and running a business. Readers will also notice the creative work of young women displayed in art and poetry throughout the issue. In the section "Working under Constraint," authors explore the hazardous conditions, including poverty, violence and discrimination, which frame young women's work. Our writers also describe the importance of making connections across different groups of workers, across generations of women, and across countries. Finally, we profile several dynamic women making connections "in the field." These leaders will undoubtedly influence and serve as role models for younger generations.

At first, our editorial team grappled with the question: Who is a young woman? We wondered: Is she a certain age? Does she dress in a special way? Speak in specific tone of voice?

Later it became clear that it is less important who she is age-wise, than how the notion of "young woman" informs and is informed by current societal norms. Highlighting young women's collective experiences of work should encourage academics, policy makers and professionals, alike to re-think and re-formulate the connections between local experiences and global processes in such a way that by the time this generation of young women become adults, we might all look forward to socially equitable futures. ✂

### Putting This Issue Together

We pulled together an excellent, multi-skilled, multi-faceted team to work on this issue. All of us edited, contributed content (Interviews, articles, book reviews). Specialities emerged as we worked, as follows:

**Gaye-Frances Alexander**, a provincial government policy advisor in municipal affairs, long-time WEI Board member and proud Grandma: overall oversight, and occasional cheerleading, liaison with WEI Board.

**Sandra Tam**, Ph.D candidate, Social Work and Women's Studies, University of Toronto: Co-ordinated content, in-house expert in the area of young women's work.

**Katherine Verhagen**, Ph.D candidate, English & Book History and Print Culture, University of Toronto: solicited article submissions, co-ordinated book reviews, developed a publication timeline, proofreading.

**Sonja Greckol**, writer, independent consultant, activist, teaches at Atkinson College, York University: co-ordinated and encouraged poetry contributions, solicited financial support.

**Ann Danilevich**, senior undergraduate student, art history and sociology, University of Toronto: co-ordinated art, found amazing artists, contributed creativity.

**Marg Anne Morrison**, signed on at the end as a WEI volunteer, and with her publishing background, steered us through the final stages of layout and editing.

**Reggie Modlich**, last but not least, our wise, calm and knowledgeable advisor throughout.



# Their Stories

## We're Here to Serve

Young Women in the Service Industry

Ann Danilevich

“If you don't want to be married, then what are you going to do with your life?” one man asked Gloria\*, a young hotel manager.

The man was not from North America, and since he was merely a hotel guest, she decided not to make an issue of it. Yet the absurdity of that question struck Gloria to her core; she *did* want to get married, if it so happened, but she was also going to remain employed.

### Getting into it

As a young woman, it is hard to find satisfying and well-paying jobs. Many women thus turn to the service industry, or some variation of it — lured in by the potentially high pay. Some do it as transition work, working in a restaurant or bar while completing their education. When graduation comes and goes, however, many are struck by the reality of the instability of today's labour force. And so they remain, making cocktails for drunken patrons or running scorching hot plates to impatient and ungrateful diners.

Gloria started out in the service industry like I did — she lied about her age. This got her a job as a hostess in a family restaurant. She worked there during her high school years. The working conditions were good. A congenial couple ran it and she liked the work.

After high school she took courses in hotel administration, which led her to a position as hotel manager. But the job called for long hours — she once worked a 28-hour shift. She left the hotel for a better position at a smaller hotel, but there was a catch: it was the general manager's policy not to allow female managers to wear pants. After a few months on the job she asked him why.

“If you could fill the pants, you could wear them,” he said.

Naturally, yet almost grudgingly, she quit a month later. This type of degrading, unprofessional behaviour is not uncommon. And if you want to make the money in this industry, you better suck it up. Gloria was lucky. She turned to the Human Resources Department and she had other options.

### It's all about the cash

Young women have to make a choice: either to put up with crude behaviour of male employers, co-workers and patrons and play the part of the subordinate or not. Leaving this harassment also means leaving the money.

The average waitress and bartender can easily make one hundred dollars a shift in tips alone — not too shabby: part-time work with full-time pay.

Young women will trade money for mistreatment. There are very few other options. It can be easy to make money, especially if you are attractive or can tolerate some harassment — or *joking around* — as it is called.

A male waiter or bartender will have to work for his tip. He will have to give excellent service. A woman on the other hand just needs to be present, and most of the time the tips will be good. This is true for any kind of establishment, from a fine dining restaurant to a local strip club.

Good fast cash is very enticing. Sharon had just moved to the city from a small town to start university. She was low on cash. So, putting some of her pride aside, she decided to apply as a waitress at the local strip club. Why a strip club? Well, she saw it in a movie.

In the first month and a half of work-

ing there she made \$8,000 — and this job was *part-time*. Of course, to work there, she had to work it. She had to drink. She had to flirt. She had to pretend to be stupid in front of the management.

### Stupidity paves the way for success

You must not let on that you are in any way smarter than they are; you will lose your job. Sometimes Sharon's managers were so “coked up” that they came right up to her and screamed at her in front of the customers. In their small domain of the local strip club, they need to feel all-powerful.

Sharon could not work unless she was drunk. This took a toll on her grades, but she just could not leave. She was afraid of being broke. She will graduate with an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree this year, but says that she cannot imagine not serving. She wants to hostess in Japan, and then *maybe* start her own business.

We live in the 21st century, but there is still disparity in the treatment of men and women. Some women come to resent differential treatment, and rightly so, while others use it as an advantage.

“Being female,” a young server named Lee told me, “you can get away with a lot more. If you do something wrong, the management will just look at you and think, ‘oh, she is a girl. She didn't know.’ Then they will get a guy to fix it.” Lee knew how and when to act stupid.

There are few options. There is no other way. If you are in the service industry, you need to act subordinate. God help you if you are smart or confident.

When I was working at a sports bar a few years ago, one manager blatantly told me that I was “too smart for this

job." I talked back; I questioned irrationality, stupidity.

One early spring day, the front door of the bar was wide open. The cold breeze filled the whole front section — my section and no one wanted to sit there. The customers were cold. The employees were cold. And I was not making any money. He refused to let me shut the door and I asked for an explanation

"Fire code," he snapped.

"Fire code? Are you kidding me?" I asked and he gave me a dirty look.

"What about when it's raining?" I said. "Do you keep the door open then?"

He replied with his standard no-real-answer-reply: "Don't start with me, Ann."

Needless to say, I got fired from that job, although it did not happen until months later, by a different manager, the one who told me that I was "too smart" for this job.

Lee worked at that bar too. But she did not have the same problems, even though she was a less reliable employee. She called in sick a lot, or if it was an especially nice day, she just did not come to work. However, when managers were irrational, she bit her tongue. She giggled; she flirted — not that I didn't at times. It also helped that some managers at that bar had a "thing" for Asian women.

### Co-worker fun

Not everything about the service industry is negative. The one great thing about the industry is meeting new people; some become friends for life. I met Lee when I was working at the sports bar, and we are good friends to this day. I remained at that bar partly because of her. We relied on each other for support.

Sometimes I had to deal with unpleasant patrons. I smiled at them and pretended everything was okay, but within minutes I'd be discussing their behaviour with Lee. We joked about what we actually wanted to say to them. Then, when we both had another free minute, she proceeded to tell me about her latest run-in; one that she got out of smoothly. We had fun together; this was a definite perk.

When Gloria told me about working at her bistro style restaurant, she referred

to the good friends she met while working there. They often went out together after work.

Having friends at work makes the job more enjoyable. Being able to talk about work issues with co-workers creates a feeling of solidarity. If you are not the only one who has problems with a particular manager, is puzzled by policy or is talked down to by a patron, then you know it is most likely not your fault. If many people are experiencing problems at a particular place of employment and you can't deal with it, it may be a good time to quit, since things are unlikely to change.

### Transitional employment

For many young women, the industry is transitional. They work as bartenders, servers, or hosts while they are in school. After graduation, many do indeed find "real" jobs, yet many remain in the industry part-time to pay off student loans or to save up for travelling. The transitory nature of the employees makes it difficult to implement any kind of real change within the industry. People come and go.

Penelope has two university degrees. She wants to study marine biology, or conduct cancer patient research. She is qualified and keen, and applies for appropriate positions constantly. So far, she has had no luck. She knew some old friends who owned a restaurant. They gave her a job as a server. She finds no job satisfaction, but "it's fun," she says, "and the money is good." As soon as she saves up enough money, Penelope will leave Canada in the search of a "real career."

Young actresses, writers, models, and singers also work in the service industry. Because the hours are flexible though often long, they are able to go to auditions or write. The unpredictability of auditions makes in nearly impossible to work a nine to five job.

When I work in the service industry, I am always aware of being replaceable. That works both ways, i.e. I can leave a job and find an equally good one quickly. Places are always hiring. I pick the least degrading one, or the one in which I will make the most money.

### Suck it up or move on

That is just how it works in the service industry. You learn to take it or you quit. True, there are some places, like the family restaurant where Gloria worked, where women are treated fairly. But from my experience, and from the experiences of the young women I interviewed for this article, such places are few and far between.

You cannot change your surroundings; you can only change yourself. If you speak up, if you question something, you will get fired. They will give you some bullshit reason but you know why. It's because you said something. It's because you reacted. And with the snap of their fingers, you are replaced. But the money was worth it, wasn't it? We usually just assure ourselves that it was and go look for the same job in a different place. ❧

\*All the names were changed to protect the identity of the interviewees

Ann Danilevich is a senior undergraduate student at the University of Toronto. She has worked in the service industry for the past four years, but is currently pursuing other employment opportunities.

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# Genevieve Nnaji and the African Woman's Revolution

The Hardest Working Actress in Nollywood

Mikelle Antoine

When one thinks of women workers in Africa, movie actresses do not come to mind as quickly as other categories of African women workers. In Nigeria's "Nollywood" film industry, actresses come to mind more quickly than their male counterparts. Women, young and old, are the foundation of this movie industry, the hardest workers in Nollywood, bringing the industry a cult following from all around the world. Their contributions are part of what many are referring to as the "African renaissance" or the regeneration of African cultural forms.

Nigerian films explore themes and topics that critique certain aspects of society and call for change. Nollywood has produced films that are transforming society and the entire African film industry. By featuring topics that interest people around the world, such as premarital sex, money problems, victimization of women, jealousy, college life, and independent women balancing their professions and family life, African films are gaining an international fan base while introducing the world to the work of African artists. Nigerian movies reach audiences from Cape Town to Cairo, from Dakar to Zanzibar.

Genevieve Nnaji is possibly the hardest working actress in Nollywood. She is a leading actor in Nigeria and one of the most popular on the international scene. Her movies are in constant demand and she is the most bankable actor in the Nigerian film industry. At 25, she is being compared to the American actress Sharon Stone. What is it about gorgeous Genevieve Nnaji that has everyone talking about her? How has she contributed to revolutionizing the role of young women, as well as the Nigerian film industry?

## The Nollywood Industry

Since the 1970s, Indian and American movies have been very popular in Africa. It is only in the past decade or so that Nigerian movies have gained a reputation and following. Some of the most popular actors are Liz Benson, Eucharia Anunobi, Patience Ozokor, Zack Orji, Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde Taiwo Ajayi-Laysette, Joke Jacobs, Clarion Chukwura-Abiola, Aso Douglas, Edith Jane-Azuh. The subject matter explored by these artists speaks to the African and human condition. One critique of some of these films is that they portray Africans, particularly the women, in a negative light. However, the message of the films is not limited to the locations or societies portrayed—they explore the strengths and weaknesses of human nature. Thus the message of the movies is targeted to human beings worldwide. At the end of each movie, forgiveness is the constant that cures all distress. The most victimized end up forgiving their tormentors. The most greedy, selfish, and jealous character ends up realizing his or her faults, begging forgiveness from those harmed. If only this reflected real life!

One of the most intriguing aspects of Nigerian films and one reason they are so popular and loved is the therapeutic role they play. Lessons and morals push the envelope on forgiveness. When is forgiveness not an option? Is it ever not an option? Are people ever too hurt to forgive? Are there harms done that are beyond forgiveness? These questions, voicing morals against greed, jealousy, and envy, are the major themes in Nigerian films. The films are less important for the acting than for the subject matter explored. Viewers throughout Africa can relate to the settings and the people. As an actress,

Nnaji's portrayal of the moral themes has gained the industry its strongest supporters — the continent's youth.

## Nnaji and the African Woman's Revolution

From "Above the Law" where she played a spoiled daughter of a president, to "The Chosen One," where she portrayed an ex-prostitute turned pastor, Nnaji's roles are diverse. She played a rich person living in Abuja with the same ease as she played the abandoned young girl in a poor village. Nnaji has done a number of movies that many see as agents of change. Her roles depict problems facing women, rich and poor, young and old. Nnaji is known for playing strong-willed, empowered, independent women. In the film series "Sharon Stone in Abuja," (named after the American actress Sharon Stone) she plays a single professional trying to make it in Nigeria's capital city. She has been dubbed "the Nigerian Sharon Stone".

Like Nnaji, Sharon Stone has a presence that is more intriguing to the audience than the roles she plays. Her personality and character are what make the characters she portrays. Nnaji is a symbol for many young girls of this generation. Her roles stress the idea that women can be independent, successful, and single if they so wish. They do not need to be forced into marriage for economic reasons. Women can empower themselves with education and financial success. For a generation of young women college graduates, Nnaji is a symbol of a young woman making it not only in Nigeria but around the world. Nnaji exemplifies the young and successful at a time when so many young women



around the world are entering into marriage for the wrong reasons.

Nnaji walks in the footsteps of the actresses who came before her. However, she came to the movie industry at a different time and her talent brought about revolutions that the others had never seen. When she started acting, some of the fans watching her in movies and on television were her own age. Soon she was the hottest-selling actress in the industry. Born in 1979, Nnaji is a role model for her generation, as well as for others who grew up in a time when most people in the movies did not look like them, nor could they identify with them. From Zaria to Lagos, the most unlikely women, from Muslims to Christians and all other groups, are avid fans of her work. She touches on subjects with which women of all ethnic groups are grappling.

Nnaji has traveled throughout West Africa and England as a guest star. Her life has been depicted as easy and glamorous. But Nnaji is a single mother, working as many of us do to support her family. Her job may be more difficult than some, taking her away from her family and, at times, making them victims of appalling gossip.

Nnaji is worshipped, as the guestbook on her website clearly attests. She has fans from all over the globe and many young women are even asking her for advice. The various roles she plays relate to all women. Some men fear her independence and strength when she plays a strong character, other men criticize her when she plays the dependent, and others see her as their equal and partner, either at work, at home, or in the social sphere.

Nnaji's films offer solutions, which

help women make changes in their lives. In "Sharon Stone in Abuja," her character moves to Abuja in search of a new start in her career. The only job available to her is as a call girl. She eventually throws off that yoke, and gets a job working for the government against illegal smuggling. From a call girl to a professional position in government — her characters defy labels. They have a cult following, similar to that of the American characters in "Sex and the City". And she has become an important role model for young women in Africa and around the world. ❧

**Mikelle Antoine** is a Ph.D candidate in African history, studying at Michigan State University. She is a fan of Nigerian movies. She can be contacted at [Antoine1@msu.edu](mailto:Antoine1@msu.edu).

## The Planners Network Design Conference

Spend the late spring in the Twin Cities at the 2005 Planners Network Conference learning about progressive planning and design.

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### Preliminary Schedule:

**Thursday June 2:** Opening public lecture on affordable housing by architect Mike Pyatok.

**Friday June 3:** Tours, participatory workshops, a keynote by landscape architect Anne Spirn, and an informal welcome in Gehry's Weisman Art Museum overlooking the Mississippi.

**Saturday June 4:** Speakers, training sessions, discussion groups, organizing meetings, panels and an evening of film at a nonprofit arts center.

**Sunday June 5:** Planners Network business and organizing meeting (morning).

[www.designcenter.umn.edu](http://www.designcenter.umn.edu)



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# Another Day of Subbing

A Short Season in the Sex Trade

Claire Major

As a 21 year old, I was sold as just a day past 18 and in need of a good spanking. "It's always a good day to top," said a roommate one day as I left the house angry and disgusted at the thought of facing another day of subbing, as in being submissive, playing the role of a dirty schoolgirl/dirty whore/vessel for various sex toys an hour at a time in exchange for money. For once, I wanted a day of topping, that is, the chance to boss them around, and while it did happen, most often I played passive to their needs.

I moved to Toronto in 1993 to start my undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto. I realized that I didn't have a clue; there was no map of what I was supposed to get out of a university education and I had not realized that it was up to me to design my own map. Fed up with lacklustre grades, I dropped out of school after my first year. Neither school nor the job market seemed able to hold me. The best I could manage was a three-week telemarketing gig, just long enough to pay the rent. Interrupting people having dinner felt even worse than being interrupted: one day, I called for "Mrs. P". Mr. P informed me that she was "gone" so I asked when she would be back. After some probes, I understood that he meant gone as in dead; each of us hung up with a lump in our throats. So I gave it up. After that I went from one cattle-call interview to another for door-to-door sales jobs.

It was just bad timing. I had landed in the city during a recession. I thought I was clearly employable and was perturbed that I could not find something like the retail drudgery of my teenage years. After all, I got my first part-time job when I was 13 and had worked consistently for seven years. I had difficulty reconciling the impact of an abstract economic policy on my ability to make a living because, retail drudgery or

not, I had always loved working. It was not to pay for my university education that I turned to the sex-trade — that was the least of my worries once I had decided to quit school. Without a job to ground me and egged on by chronic depression (which started when I was 12 and lasted until 25), the sex trade ads in the back pages of the *Now* magazine spoke to me too clearly and too often to be ignored for long.

As much as I was frustrated by my unemployment, I was also deeply motivated to push myself as far as I could go. How would it feel to give a stranger a blow job? Would I be repulsed or emptied or get a rush from it? It may seem silly, but as a white woman of relative privilege, I thought the only way that I could know suffering was to use my sexuality, or as the case was, let others use it. I had already shaved my head earlier that year as an experiment in opening up the dialogue, which was more of a monologue really, about what the world expects from women. So, I spent the summer of 1994 submitting to strangers at a high-rise apartment in an inner suburb and in the fall, moved to another house in the downtown core.

I now reflect on this experience as one of a unique setting where private lusts come to be realized, where the inner workings of sexual desires, usually male, get a brief airing in the "real" world. But then I also choose to interpret what I was doing as a job like any other: it required getting up, getting a coffee and taking the transit to a place where I spent the day in the company of others. The working hours were set. We advertised to attract potential customers. It was all normal, except that a usual day entailed sitting around in my underwear, watching Jerry Springer in the lulls, and occasionally putting on wigs to give blow jobs.

Customers always took who and what you are as though one is exactly what they

were looking for and it was all marvellously serendipitous they had chosen you from a long list of women. At \$150 an hour I suppose it was a necessary part of their enjoyment. Commodified as I was, I was malleable, not just to clients but also to my bosses. My limits were constantly being redefined; I drew the line at intercourse and anal sex, I really did, but, over the months, found myself accepting ever more physically painful and mentally jarring roles. The aimlessness and ennui that got me there revealed itself each time one of my bosses took me aside and told me that we were about to lose a customer unless I was willing to \_\_\_\_\_ because our girl who usually does \_\_\_\_\_ has a regular coming at 3pm. On a good day, my 3pm was a no show. If death and taxation are the two constants in life, so also must we add that an appointment for a blow-job/spanking/pussy-shaving, or whatever made over the phone with a stranger often is an unkept promise. On a bad day, I left sessions with my ass covered in bruises or numb from repeated dildo pounding, or smarting from a caning and always covered in lubricant and a strange man's sweat.

Who and what was in demand was always simultaneously a matter of a client's psyche and a function of pop culture and other social forces. Some requests seemed to be for the things I imagine humans think about when masturbating or perhaps having it off, but which are not usually recognized for fear of ridicule. For example, a repeat client didn't care what I had on except that I had to wear a pair of \_\_\_\_\_ hose with the crotch ripped out, \_\_\_\_\_ big too. Once, a pair of \_\_\_\_\_ and the other submissive \_\_\_\_\_ pronounced orientation: the \_\_\_\_\_ him *wanted* was \_\_\_\_\_ pants of his friend \_\_\_\_\_ a pact: if *wanted* \_\_\_\_\_

desire to be a slave to a group of women, then *wanted* would get naked with *wanter*. Late in the day *wanter* went down on *wanted*, who could not maintain an erection. All day he had pestered me to caress my size ten feet so I walked over to *wanted*, removed my shoe, and covered his mouth and nose with my foot. Within a count of ten *wanted* had hardened and ejaculated. I had performed my role in the id-enactment of customers. It was not likeable, but acceptable, and it usually meant I played a more proactive i.e. not submissive role but after one foot fetish, I felt like I had seen them all. It was easy and it was boring. And I felt I was being untrue to my goal of suffering, of redressing something, through my sexuality.

Between extremes, it was predictable. Even how we were sold was very blasé: measurements, height, weight, hair colour, "age", preferences, willingness, price. The middle of the sex-worker's road is the place of unimaginative consumption. It lacked the armchair psychoanalysis of the id acts and rarely had anything to do with submission and domination. Clients commonly demanded schoolgirls — in 1994 every man in the GTA had seen Atom Egoyan's *Erotica* — tiny Asians or busty blonds, occasionally requested two women, and there were plenty of inquiries about big tits. As soon as the new *Now* hit the stand the phone rang incessantly. Businesses tend to place at least half a dozen ads in the back of the paper, with slightly different pitches or girls listed. At my first job, I enjoyed taking calls on Thursday's because there were callers who started with the first ad and made their way down each column, calling every last operation. It was a riot to catch them at it. The middle of the road consumer was often married and mildly curious about S&M so they requested a half-and-half session that usually involved very light abuse. Or they were men who craved a blow job, that's all. The only client I really enjoyed did not want to use toys or ties, he just wanted to fool around with a young woman. He caused me to question whether I wanted to be in this "profession" or if I really wanted to be having my own unpaid, dull, amateur, middle of the road sex.

I regret that I was not a more active participant, that I did not make conscious decisions, or call my bosses on it when they were being unreasonable. But that is what I see through the lens I use today; then I did not know any better. For instance, in the second house where I worked I was naive enough to assume that I got barely any calls because I was not in demand. But now I think I was too green to give the boss a kickback for tossing business my way, apart from his ordinary take.

Very soon after I started working the houses, a kind of self-protection set in. On the surface, I was still preoccupied with wanting to "mess myself up" — that was how I described what I was doing — but clearly I was turning myself off. I am not tiny or delicate so I got a tougher beating than my colleagues and more and more I needed to dissociate. Given that I had come into the trade in an ungrounded state, the acts became more difficult to absorb without somehow taking my self out of the situation. I spent more time ungrounded and miserable. In the end, it was phone duty and a creep that made me quit. At my downtown job, we were required to do the phones a couple of times a week. After a call that ... I don't even know (grated my nerves with its predictability? grossed me out? angered me?), my boss tore a strip off me for not being "sexy" enough on the

phone. It was an asinine request given the genuine unsexiness of the job; I could have been taking an order for a pizza. Soon after, I found myself in the dungeon with a customer who had removed my clothes, blindfolded me, and bound me. My hands were chained high above my head. I tried to peek out the blindfold, but the creep could see me trying to see him, clearly not part of what he was paying me for. I felt ashamed for trying to know what he was about to do to me, caught in the act of trying to understand what my role was in all of this. When we met and chatted before we started, he seemed normal, but I didn't know what normal was anymore. Despite the pain, ejaculate and lube, constant taste of latex and mental anguish, the fact that this was a risky business had not entered my mind until that day, hands bound above my head and blindfolded. Vague promises about safety were always made, including the green-yellow-red for good-warning-stop pain infliction system, but no stop sign was going to help me when my hands were high above my head and in a state of shame for trying to place myself in what I was doing. ❧

**Claire Major** is a Master of Environmental Studies candidate at York University, where she studies post-fordist labour markets and how social reproduction is mediated by urban planning.

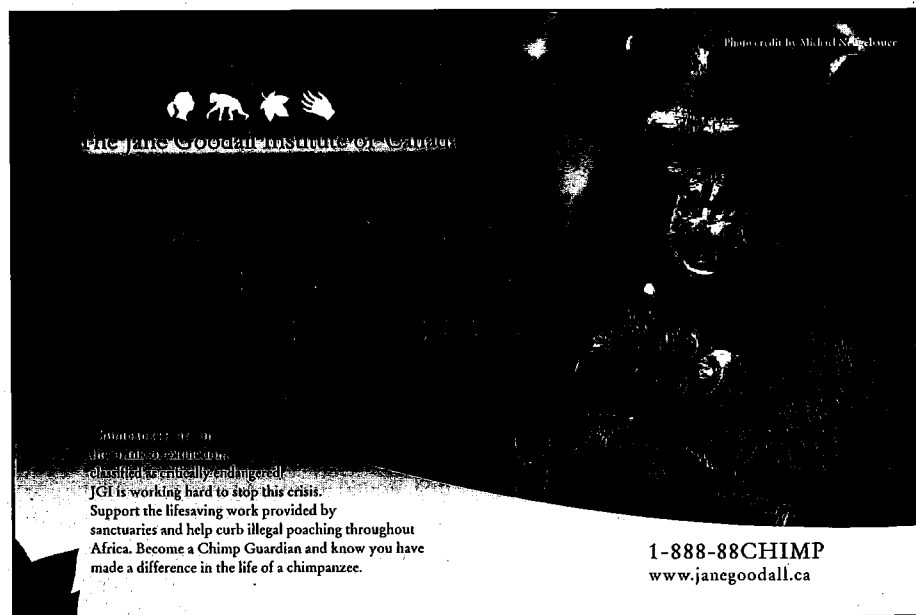



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# Entrepreneurial Spirit and Strong Views

An Interview with Hampstead Tea founder Kiran Tawadey

**Katherine Verhagen**

**C**urrently based in London, England, the Hampstead Tea & Coffee Co. are the proud winners of the 1998, 1999 and 2001 You/Soil Association Organic Food Award for the best hot beverage of the year, as detailed on their website ([www.hampsteadtea.com](http://www.hampsteadtea.com)). They are proud practitioners of fair trade, as "a portion of the proceeds from every package of tea sold goes directly to the tea estate workers to fund social development programs, including village electrification, education initiatives and medical care." WEI thought it was important to interview Kiran Tawadey, the founder of Hampstead Tea, on the circumstances under which she started the company as a young female entrepreneur. Katherine Verhagen interviewed Ms. Tawadey on July 19th, 2004.

**WEI:** *What inspired you to start your company?*

**KT:** I grew up in India and met my husband in business school. Seventeen years ago, we moved to the U.K. and were impoverished new parents with major student loans and thus weren't taking care of our son's diet the way that we should have. He developed an extreme eczema and our doctor suggested that it was caused by a food ingredient — a pesticide-tetrazine in the orange juice.

We didn't know about food additives in India at the time, and were outraged at the company. We joined other parents in our concerns about safe food and got involved in food issues. An old family friend, who was visiting London and working as a researcher on organizational behaviour, owned a tea garden. He told me that he was growing his tea organically and we were very compelled by his story. I asked him why he didn't promote it further but his reply to me took me aback: he said, if you feel so strongly, why don't you do it?

**WEI:** *What was involved in setting up your company?*

**KT:** I didn't know anything about tea but I took initiative and phoned everyone I could think of. I was like a dervish of activity, expending all of my energy, and I found that if you put in enough effort, many people will respond.

**WEI:** *Could you tell me a bit more about what you mean by a "biodynamic" product? Also, I'm unclear on what you mean by a "single estate" tea plantation.*

**KT:** Of course. A "biodynamic" process is more proactive than a just organic one. Maikabari was the first biodynamic tea state. We not only believe in fair trade but also in the ethical values of trade, with no exploitation. Also, we can buy many estates but having a "single estate" product implies that the tea is not a blended mixture of different crops but comes from one yield. Though we buy from some Darjeeling estates, the bulk of our product comes from Maikabari.

**WEI:** *So how long have you been in this business?*

**KT:** For eighteen years.

**WEI:** *What was the market for organic tea like at the time that you started? Did you find that there was a supportive network in place for your work, or did you feel that you were breaking new ground?*

**KT:** We were a bit ahead of our time, as it took consumers a while to understand the idea of a single estate organic farm. We gained organic certification within two years of our efforts and began to sell tea in large quantities seven years ago, when we began to be creative about the product. We launched Hampstead Tea, our own brand, which was a biodynamic high-grade organic product following the principles of Rudolph Steiner. We started out as a small business but are growing rapidly.

The good thing about it is that there's room for everyone with the possibility to do

many different things in the same market. I had some cynicism at the beginning. There is some freedom afforded to us because we don't provide a mass-market product.

**WEI:** *What obstacles did you encounter in starting up this business?*

**KT:** Well, the tea world was part of a very old established trade and therefore very traditional. When I started out, one gentleman sat me down and said, "my dear, don't you know that all tea is organic?" I had to find my corner.

**WEI:** *What was involved in the transition from a small local business to working in a global market?*

**KT:** It wasn't very difficult. In the U.K., tea generally comes from India, therefore a lot of our customers are based in the U.K. Though we need to transcend national boundaries, we still treat it as a "local" global concept.

Things get lost in translation; therefore, we have to do a lot of the leg-work ourselves. Because we're now at the top end of the market, we're not looking to approach large distribution channels. We find it quite easy to find in-store awareness programs from distributors. Also, we had one of the first products to be presented as fair trade and organic at a time when people didn't know how to get those things, so we've built up a solid customer base.

Also, most costumers come to us from personal recommendations, even retailers. The product seems to be more interesting if other people talk about it. We do very little advertising and the information has spread almost virally.

**WEI:** *In packaging your product, what attention do you pay to customer awareness?*

**KT:** We have a package that's eye-catching information and tells our story. People will take time to read our story. We feel it's important.

tomers to look for artificial additives.

**WEI:** What steps do you make towards gender equality in your own business?

**KT:** The worker's community at Makaitah is 80% female. All of the tea pickers are female and all of them are involved in the decision-making process, such as involvement in social development programs. In the families of the 1650 people on the estate, the husbands will do the weeding but the women will do all of the skilled labour — plucking two leaves and a bud with knack and sensitivity.

**WEI:** On a more personal note, how have your business efforts affected your family life?

**KT:** I tend to work from home, now. As part of an Indian family, that's one of my priorities — to be with family. Also, I'm a very disorganized person. Organized people never have enough time because they over-schedule themselves. For me, high priority things get done and low priority things don't need to get done.

Nonetheless, I'm very committed to how young people look at food. My son went to university and he loves bio-chai. I was so proud to see that, at 19, he could figure out how loose leaf tea was so much better than bagged mixtures and that he was encouraging his friends to invest time in examining the organic quality of their food.

**WEI:** Did you find it difficult as a woman to enter this business?

**KT:** The problem is that people still initially think this must be a "lifestyle" business. People open up once they find out what you're trying to do, compromising their notions that women try too hard or aren't professional enough. There is no happy medium.

I've had my share of irritations but I didn't have too much of a problem. I decided very quickly that I needed to be straight and up front and tell people my beliefs so that I wouldn't take anything personally.

It's important for us women to do that, as we tend to be oversensitive. If people don't like what you're selling, it's not an indictment of you.

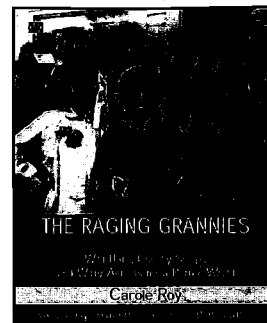
**WEI:** So, what advice would you give to young women seeking to be entrepreneurs in a global market?

**KT:** Well, that depends a lot on the product. But, I think it's important for them to be direct and open about their practices and policies. The limitations are a given but can be circumvented by relying on supportive niche markets and networks.

Tawadey claims that there are possibilities open to young female entrepreneurs in the organic food industry. Anyone entering this "lifestyle" business can provide an

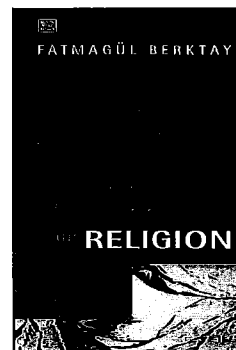
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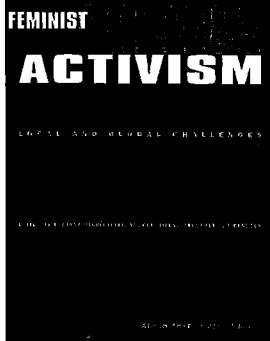
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# In Solidarity

## Interview with United Food and Commercial Workers' Anna Liu

Gaye-Frances Alexander

**WEI:** *What is your role with UFCW Canada?*

**AL:** I have been a member of the union for approximately five years and I am currently working with the national office on several different campaigns; two very exciting ones are the Justice for Ontario Agricultural Workers Campaign and the Wal-Mart Campaign.

**WEI:** *Both of those sound very challenging! Can you describe some of the issues faced by young women agricultural workers?*

**AL:** Workers in the agricultural sector have many concerns. First, there is very little legislation in place to protect their interests if their employment situation becomes unfavorable. Unlike most workers in Ontario, agricultural workers generally do not have access to the same protection under the law. They are excluded from the Employment Standards Act, which details minimum wage, public holidays, overtime pay, hours of work, and eating periods. There is no regulation of such things in agriculture. In addition, these workers are not covered under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. In other words, agricultural workers do not have the right to know, do not have the right to participate, and do not have the right to refuse unsafe work. In an industry reliant on the operation of mass machinery and pesticides, there is no protection. Lastly, agricultural workers in Ontario are not permitted to join a union or bargain collectively to improve their working conditions.

There is a board range of workers who experience harassment, racial job segregation, unpredictable hours of work, harsh and dangerous working conditions, arbitrary rules and no respect from management. Young women working in this sector are in an extremely vulnerable posi-

tion. With virtually no protection under the law, and no law to facilitate improvements to their wages and working conditions, young women find themselves with very few options in this industry.

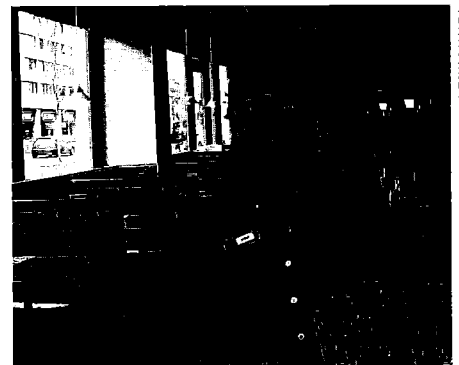
However, there is good news. With the support of agricultural workers, UFCW Canada launched a Constitutional Charter challenge against the Ontario government for the exclusion of agricultural workers from Occupational Health and Safety Act and the exclusion from the Labour Relations Act, prohibiting agricultural workers from joining a union.

**WEI:** *Will you tell us about the Wal-Mart situation in Ontario?*

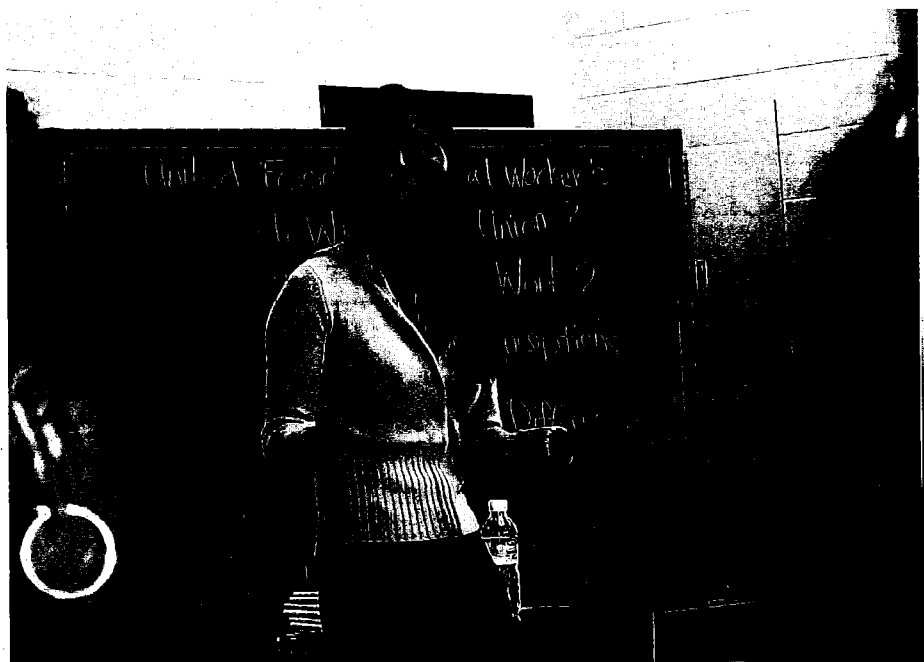
*[The Wal-Mart store in Jonquiere, Quebec, closed less than a year after its workers formed a union, citing low profits in that particular store.]*

**AL:** The Wal-Mart announcement in Quebec has had a "ripple effect" in Ontario.

The majority of Wal-Mart workers are women. They represent regular associate positions and lower levels of management. The age of workers varies at Wal-Mart. There are young women still in high school and living on their own or with parents; there are also women who have children in single and dual income families. As well, there are older women who live by themselves who are just a few months or years from retirement. The work at Wal-Mart is precarious. The wages are just above the minimum, it's predominately part-time, benefits are scarcely accessible, there is little opportunity for upward mobility and there is very little job security. Job growth in the labour market mirrors the Wal-Mart model and that provides little choice for these women.



Anna at Swiss Chalet



Anna teaching a "Talking Union" session at a high school



## Helping Wal-Mart Workers Make a Difference!



UFCW poster for Walmart campaign (Anna is on the left)

However, workers in the retail sector do have the option of joining a union if they so desire. Joining a union can often be a very emotional and trying experience for workers. It's not uncommon for workers to think they are causing problems for themselves and their co-workers if they choose to communicate with a union.

**WEI:** *What do the women workers tell you about their work and the biggest issues affecting them?*

**AL:** There are many issues like the ones

mentioned earlier. In addition, there are concerns around few hours, hiring temporary workers to fill hours without regard to requests for additional hours from permanent staff, discrepancies in pay, scheduling and availability, job postings, and favoritism. If you are a woman with small children, the work schedule fluctuations can make it difficult to make childcare arrangements. This flexibility is also reflected in the take home pay, which is never consistent. This makes it difficult for

women who rely heavily on their earnings. Without a collective bargaining process in place, workers rely on management to be fair and to make the right decisions around rules and procedures in the workplace.

**WEI:** *This sounds very discouraging. How did you come to this work? What is your own story?*

**AL:** I worked in the customer service industry. I served chicken at Swiss Chalet. We were unionized by UFCW Canada Local 206. Once again, in this setting, the workers are predominately women. In urban centers, the workers are mainly women of colour and immigrant women from Mediterranean and Asian backgrounds. I was in my second year at York University, majoring in women studies and labour studies when I started to work at Swiss Chalet. I was told that the restaurant is unionized. Up until that point I had never worked in a unionized setting.

**WEI:** *What did you gain from your experience in this job?*

**AL:** I got my consciousness raised. I began to see the immediate benefits of being unionized, and I became a union steward. From there, I began to get more involved with my union.

**WEI:** *We certainly applaud your work and efforts on behalf of these workers, and the young women workers particularly. Thank you for sharing your stories!* ❧

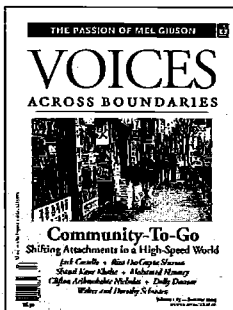
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# cracking (the code)

Catherine MacIntosh

to start the story with shoes is stereotyping, being true to myself, it does  
it begins with shoes: black fabric stretched to capacity, nervous swelling, tights sticking to  
my ankle where it bled from the friction, my anyway smiling

filling the mold of the "working woman",  
walking slippery feet on low-pile office broadloom  
dizzying mosaics of lint-like colour flecks, stains,  
years of coffee trips, "mornings", "nice evenings", pleasantries of the surface code

me; wanting to be myself, feminine, soft, shy  
knowing the success-path paved with everything austerely masculine  
can't function that way, brought cookies to the office  
like the other "Maman Gateau" filling us with her maternal needs and sweets  
I saw myself in her, the mothering hurdle between her and the corner office

four years later, training my superior the basics of the game  
fumbling the relay pass from the alpha female who penetrated  
the rumbling male code of old industry,  
not too attractive, too young, too soft  
knowing the strength of the woman who held this post  
for twenty five years, strong enough to wear what she pleased (she was)  
cat hair and purple t-shirts, fiercely feminine

not this paler girl-woman in a nice sweater the new boss wanted to touch  
like that pigeon on the ledge wearing her failure around her thick neck  
like that pigeon with a poppyseed bagel stuck on my head  
for the others to feverishly peck... peck...peck.

Catherine MacIntosh is a freelance writer living in Toronto, ON, Canada.



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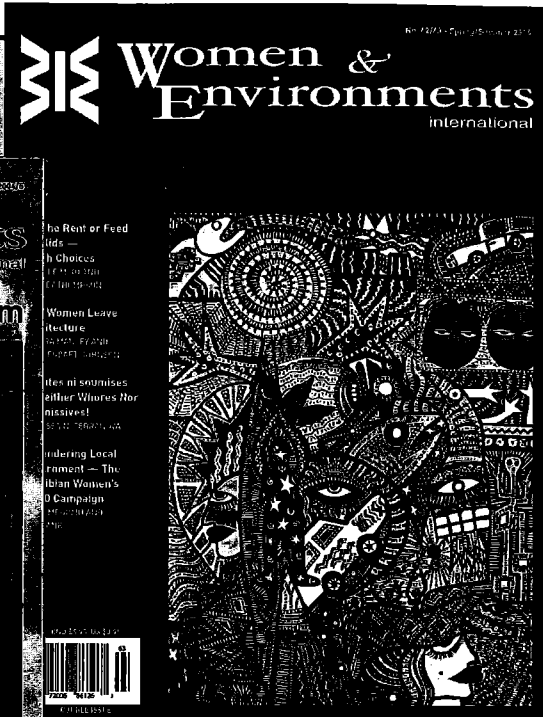
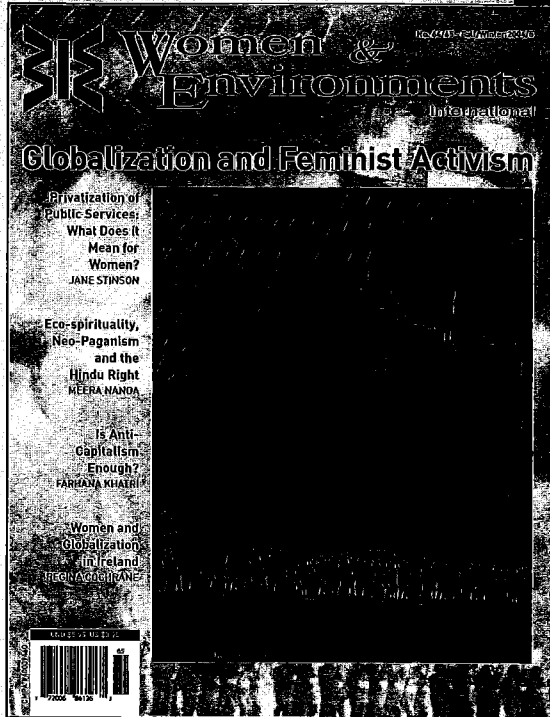
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A Voice From Nigeria

Adeola Akinsanmi

**R**ural poverty is a hydra-headed creature characterised by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, unsanitary surroundings, high infant mortality and low life expectancy. It is fed by small fragmented holdings, lack of access to credit, health, and educational facilities. These describe a number of rural economies in Africa and the conditions under which at least fifty percent of women live. In an environment where the average number of children per family is four, it means that for every woman living in poverty, there are at least four hungry children.

Within these rural economies, women are "a hidden productive force", hence a hidden productive force of the nation. In Nigeria, women have been recognised as cultivators, processors and traders of yam, tobacco, maize and cassava. In the rural cottage craft industries, they weave mats, make pottery, weave and dye textiles and raise animals. They work as hard as their male counterparts and often work longer hours.

Women's contributions, however, are under reported because their efforts have not been fully appreciated in economic terms. Because their economic contributions are not recognized women and their work, are marginalized in policy discussions and technological development, programs and projects implemented for rural development and increased food production, for example, are male oriented. Processing machines, which were targeted at women, were eventually taken over by the men. This in turn hampered women's ability to produce and increased their economic vulnerability. In summary, women have hardly benefited from policy designs and programs. A major reason to which this can be attributed is that the scene has not been set as necessary, that is, neither women's position in the family,

### Song of An African Woman

I have only one request, I do not ask for money  
Although I have need of it, I do not ask for meat...

I have only one request, and all I ask is,  
That you remove the roadblock from my path.

Song of Lawino, by Okot P'Bitek

or the rural economy has been fully recognized in economic theory or planning.

To understand the situation of rural women in Nigeria, first, it would be practical to admit that macro economic policies and economic changes have made women more vulnerable than their male counter parts. An example that readily comes to mind is the period of the oil boom in the 1970's, when farming became unattractive. Many men and young people left the rural areas in search of high paying white collar jobs, thereby leaving the burden of farming to women. Though the level of success or failure of the men may not be quantified, it sets the tone for rural-urban migration, which continues today. Government policy at that time was more capital intensive and expansionary but it did not bring adequate returns to the rural sector. The "invisible" efforts or participation of rural women have increased as a result of urbanization and rural-urban migration, thereby suggesting an increase in female-headed homes. Consequently, they become more vulnerable to poverty; they continue to struggle for survival even though they are supposed to be the recipients of benefits of innovation, credit facilities and have access to extension agents.

Second, specific questions need to be answered: What is the relationship between women, poverty and productivity? Who are the women and how do they survive? and, what are their requests and desires? While it

appears easy to give blanket responses to these questions, caution must be taken given that socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions vary. The central point, however, is that rural women have a voice and can speak for themselves.

Evidence from five villages in Ondo state, southwest Nigeria, gives indications of an early marriage and long child producing period. In order to have a full understanding of the family status of the women, a detailed look into the family size, the children's level of education, the number of dependants and their economic status should be considered. Usually, older women have more children, which supports the idea that the procreation period is long. In most cases, more kids are at the attention needing age, so they are not expected to contribute economically. The family structure is such that extended family members live with the women as dependants. Various reasons are given for this, especially education. Direct contributions to the upkeep may not be much. Their presence may be expected to yield labour and income but it also means more dependence on limited resources such as money, time, and land.

The women may be separated from their husbands due to the presence of "another wife" or because the man has to work in a different city. As such, women are not in decision-making roles, which is not equitable. Where the man is not in the home, though care is taken for the



contribution to expenditure is low. No man shoulders all or more than half of the financial responsibilities at home. As a result of this, women have to combine various off-farm and non-farm activities together to make a living. This means waking up early and going to bed late, going fishing early in the day and coming back to process food, to be consumed at home or sold in the market. It also means making purchases from one market and taking it to the other to be sold at a profit. The women sometimes have to walk long distances to achieve this. At the end of the month, the monthly income is usually less than the national minimum wage, while expenditure is more often higher than income. It implies that most families have to borrow to make ends meet. The socio-economic environment also does not give room for capital accumulation. They have small farm holdings, which are owned by the men or their extended family so long term planning and investment can hardly be carried out. Most of the women make do with the cultivation of food crops such as cassava, which require little or no input and can be processed to many forms to meet food consumption needs.

Contrary to assumptions, rural women do not sit around bemoaning the situation, they have evidently tried to live on. But factors like transportation, absence of capital and poor social amenities, which are deterrents to marketing and farming, bother the women. This gives a hopeful thought that if these limitations are ameliorated then they will have a breakthrough.

Thus it can be summarised that:

- Women are young and within the

active labour force age.

- Women are either the household heads or have to act as such.
- Women have at least two job sources yet earn extremely low income.
- Women have access to some resources, such as land, but they have no control of them.
- Absence of infrastructural facilities and technology make work and life drudgery for women.
- Women are relatively poor, live on credit and from 'hand to mouth.'
- Their major request is to create a favourable environment, which will facilitate economic activities and create more economically rewarding alternatives.
- Women are optimistic.

In establishing the women, poverty and productivity nexus, particular attention needs to be paid to economic activities, the most obvious being farming. Evidence from the same region shows that demographic and socio-economic factors like age, family size, educational level, land size, hours worked and involvement in cooperatives, influence income. While maturity to adulthood (age), family size and cooperative activities may favour innovation and labour supply on the farm, working long hours are detrimental to income generation in the long run. This often occurs through ill health and malnutrition. It indirectly leads to inadequate use of resources such as land or family labour, which in turn reduces the resource productivity.

Finally, the way forward would be a true participatory approach where the poor are

involved in problem identification, goal definition and the solution strategy. The twin problems of poverty and productivity should be tackled simultaneously within this context. This means that the conceptualization of the programmes or projects should be carried out with the involvement of the women. This implies that different groups of women, depending on the socio-cultural and socio-economic environment, will need different strategies, but it also means more success, better recognition of their contribution, faster growth and development. This could translate to better life for rural women. ❧



Adeola Akinsanmi is Nigerian and is currently in a doctoral program at the University of Hohenheim. She studied Agricultural Economics at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. She loves reading, writing, travelling and meeting people. The above is an excerpt from previous research, which she carried out in Nigeria.

## DOING IT: WOMEN WORKING IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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# Murder, Mystery and Mistreatment in Mexican Maquiladoras

It Is Never Too Late to Make a Difference

Allison Moffatt

**A**nother Sex Tape Made by Paris Hilton, Britney Spears Seen Smoking a Cigarette, J.Lo Marries Again, Angelina Jolie Adopts Another Child. Hundreds of Women Abducted and Murdered in the Maquiladoras. All of these headlines, except one, are seen in magazines and newspapers across the country on a daily basis. Despite the continuous sexual abuse and harassment suffered by young women in the maquila factories, the issue still fails to make headlines over celebrity gossip. Sensationalism supercedes reality in the media.

For many North Americans, Mexico is a vacation spot—a place to tour and to bask in the hot sun. Ciudad Juarez, found on the border of Mexico and the United States, is not a city anyone would enjoy visiting for those purposes. There is virtually no tourism. The city hides a dirty, atrocious secret that few people know about. This secret is poor workers' rights, extreme poverty and the murders of young women in numbers exceeding five hundred. The residents of Ciudad Juarez live in homes made of skids, cardboard, and any other miscellaneous materials that can be found to provide some kind of shelter. These shacks generate feelings of desperation, longing and sadness: a confining fence, and beyond that, freedom. El Paso, Texas, is the land of the free and the home of the brave. But there is no freedom for those on the Mexican side of the border. Without proper food, water or any physical or economic security, young female residents of Ciudad Juarez live in an endless cycle of mistreatment, fear and poverty.

## Women and Work

Work is not only an occupation on the

Mexican border; it is a way of life. Unfortunately this way of life is filled with anguish and a tremendous amount of both economic and social insecurities. Author Altha J. Cravey describes the practice of maquiladora factories along the Mexican border as the "new factory regime." This new regime was put into place after NAFTA was organized. Maquiladora factories are located along the border of Mexico and employ mainly young, female workers between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, although the factories have been known to employ workers of even younger ages. In a patriarchal society such as Ciudad Juarez, women are considered easier to exploit than their male counterparts. There is no

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**"We have a social responsibility to fight economic injustices against women."**

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global monitoring of labour law violations. There is nothing to stop child labour, poor working conditions and harassment in the maquila factories. The factories produce many everyday products we take for granted, such as our clothes and cars, which are then exported out of Mexico to North America.

Holly Gibbs, a PhD candidate at McMaster University in Ontario, writing her doctoral thesis on "Comparative Regulation of Local Labour Markets," states: "We have a social responsibility to fight economic injustices against women." Cheaper production of materials

for the United States and Canada leads to exploitation, sexual abuse and oppression for young Mexican women. Gibbs has been doing research in Juarez over the past year. She was informed of the issues in Juarez while interviewing workers at an auto parts plant in Southern Ontario. Factories in Ontario are often threatened or even shut down by increased competition from factories located in Mexico. Parts made by workers in Mexico are identical to those made in Canada; however, Mexican workers are paid much less. Gibbs describes this situation as one in which, "globalization produced both physical and economic insecurity."

The maquila jobs are critical in sustaining a living for both Mexican women and their families. Minimum wage in Canada is currently approximately \$7.15 an hour. Minimum wage in Mexico, according to Gibbs, is estimated at \$4.67 a day. The wages may be considerably lower in Mexico, but Gibbs maintains that the quality standards remain the same. "It's not a standard of living," explains Gibbs, "It's a standard of survival." Four dollars US per day is undeniably not a wage deserving of the hard work produced by Mexican maquila workers, nor is it a wage with which to raise a family. This "new factory regime" has not only changed the way women work in Mexico, but it has also changed the power relations in families and the family unit altogether. Since wages are so low, young women often live with extended families, with more than one maquila worker per household. Families cannot survive on earnings as low as twenty dollars per week. Children are often left home alone during the day, since women regularly

work twelve-hour days, and cannot afford the twenty dollars it costs to send their children to school. To make matters worse, families sometimes have as many as twelve children.

Cuidad Juarez is only one Mexican city comprised of maquiladoras. The maquila factories are found throughout border cities in Mexico. The factories share high standards for quality and low standards for the treatment of employees. The Mexican Solidarity Network and The Human and Labour Rights Commission of the Tehuacan Valley describe the working conditions in maquila factories as having, "compulsory and often unpaid overtime to complete production quotas, verbal abuse and humiliation of workers by supervisors, sexual harassment and abuse, discrimination against pregnant women." Cuidad Juarez may share the same characteristics with respect to maquila factories, but what has made the city infamous is the mysterious and frightening reality of the hundreds of murders of female maquila factory workers.

### **Murder and Mystery in the Maquiladoras**

If mass murders were occurring in Canada, all of North America would know about it, talk about it, and would not be satisfied until the murderers were found and brought to justice. Although the number generally varies depending upon the different sources, the bodies of approximately three hundred murdered women have been found in Cuidad Juarez since 1993, and officials estimate that over four hundred women are still missing. These statistics are rarely seen in North American media, and few people have ever heard of the Mexican city of Juarez.

Since many women working in the maquila factories cannot afford to live in Juarez, they live in shanty towns on the

outskirts of the city. Unfortunately, these shanty towns have no streetlights and therefore they become incredibly dark and unsafe at night. The only mode of transportation for the women workers of the maquiladoras are buses, one at the beginning of the shift and one at the end. The bus, at the end of the shift, drops women off in their shanty towns at approximately midnight, leaving them to risk their lives, walking the unlit streets alone.

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"We have the  
privilege to choose  
to pay attention  
or not."

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Hundreds of bodies have turned up on the outskirts of the city, representing a chilling tale of brutal sex killings, which have become rampant in Cuidad Juarez. The bodies are all young, beautiful women undeserving of such brutality. No one is deserving of this brutality. With each murder, another family is left without any income. Not only have loved ones been lost, but families are forced out of their small homes because they are no longer earning an income and can no longer afford shelter. The residents of Juarez choose not to discuss the murders. Women must work in order to survive. Thinking about the murders makes the ubiquitous physical insecurity a grim reality that most do not want to imagine. Distancing the issue creates an "it's safe because it's not me" mentality; a mentality that Gibbs describes as enveloping the city.

Government and authorities have blamed many of the murders on the young women themselves. These women are condemned for wearing short skirts as

well as being involved in the drug cartel which is also prevalent in the city. These attitudes are not only demeaning, but they completely displace ownership from the murderers. Some women in Juarez are prostitutes and are involved in the drug cartel; illegal professions are symptomatic of the necessity for some standard of living to feed large families. Even if some of the murdered women were prostitutes or involved with the drug cartel, they still do not deserve to be brutally murdered.

### **Too Much Has Gone Unnoticed**

Realistically, police corruption in Mexico has been an issue for a long time, and there is no exception in the case of the murders in Juarez. Police have mishandled evidence, allowed press to handle evidence, incorrectly identified bodies, and mixed up DNA results. Rumours of lost evidence and corruption circulate in the city, and families of victims are worried that those responsible may never face just consequences for their vicious actions.

There are several theories about who has committed the murders. Suspects include serial killers, employers in maquila factories, drug traffickers, and even police officials. Police in Cuidad Juarez seem as though they are actively investigating the hundreds of murder cases, when in reality very little has been done. Pink crosses have been placed at the sites where bodies were found. Gibbs recounts an eerie encounter she had with police officials at one of the pink cross sites: Police were at the location, sitting in their cars but not saying or doing anything. Mexican police rely on the power of presence so that the residents of Cuidad Juarez believe they are doing something, when in actuality they are merely observing the pink cross locations.

"Apathy sets in because everything seems so futile," explains Gibbs, "but people have to make the political personal." There are so many steps that can be taken to bring awareness of the plight of the women of Cuidad Juarez to Canadians. Anyone can host a speaker from the Mexican Solidarity Network, or even raise money for families of murder victims. Although the process of taking on



police and government may indeed seem futile, actions can only help the situation, not worsen it. It is a travesty that more has not been done to help these vulnerable women, especially since many Mexican officials are often turning a blind eye to the issue. As Holly Gibbs points out, "we have the privilege to choose to pay attention or not." It should no longer be a choice. On a global scale, it is our obligation to create an awareness of violence against women. It is our obligation to pay attention. There have been some articles written on the murders, mainly in the United States, but the issue has yet to span the globe.

Awareness is essential to stopping this extreme exploitation and dehumanization. Not only is it important to catch whomever is responsible for these murders, but most importantly, a society must be created in which women are valued both in the public and private spheres. Until this respect and equality is accomplished in the workplace as well as in Mexican society as a whole, violence against women will continue to occur and justice will never be reached. ❧

**Allison Moffatt** is in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario. She is very interested in the working conditions of women around the world and is adamant about bringing attention to the issues surrounding the maquiladoras in Mexico.

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# Attitudes That Don't Work

## Women with Disabilities and Employment

Myroslava Tataryn

**W**orldwide, women with disabilities find themselves unemployed more than any other group in society. This has been documented by the Canadian International Development Agency, Rehabilitation International, the World Institute on Disabilities and working groups of Disabled Peoples International among others. A breakdown of many of these findings can be found on the website of the Disabled Women's Network of Ontario ([dawn.thot.net/](http://dawn.thot.net/)). Already at a disadvantage for having bodies that refuse to conform to the cultural norms of their respective societies, unemployment further exacerbates their marginal positions and leads to more poverty, illness and stigmatization. In countries, regions and communities that are already impoverished, women with disabilities are considered to be the poorest of the poor. Because they are believed to have no prospects, girls with disabilities are not educated; this keeps the vicious cycle spin-

ning. Yet, even after extensive education young women with disabilities in developed countries find it more difficult to find work than their non-disabled counterparts. Many would argue that these extraordinarily high unemployment rates are the result either of these young women's inability to perform regular work tasks, or the physical inaccessibility of workplaces at which they are applying. Although building accessible environments is important, it is our social, and not our physical environments that are most disabling to young women with disabilities.

### Disabling Beginnings in the Ukraine

In many cultural settings, including North America, children with disabilities are not given a chance to participate in mainstream society. Moreover, disabled girls are at a double disadvantage in places where, as a result of being female, they are already given second priority to their male counterparts.



Help Us Help The Children Camp 2004 (Vorohta, Ukraine). Author is pictured here (third from the right, with glasses and backpack) with her camp group before a performance at the closing of the camp.

LUBA PETRUSH

While visiting Ukraine this summer, I was shocked to learn about the number of children with disabilities who are kept indoors; some never leave their bedrooms. A visible physical difference seems to negate their human abilities and they are automatically labelled as invalids, which literally defines them as in-valid, in-capable, crippled. True, many are pampered by their families and are given the latest clothes and toys, but regrettably, their social and educational well-being remains neglected. Fortunately, there are some exceptions to this type of treatment.

At the children's camp in Ukraine, where I worked in August of 2004, campers as well as counsellors who had physical disabilities were encouraged to participate in all daily activities. When camp ended, a senior staff member, with whom I had become friends, came with me to visit my aunt in Lviv. After his departure, I listened to my aunt express her shock and amazement that a "dwarf" could be successful in a leadership role. Although her comments were positive, it struck me how people, in this case in Ukraine, can be oblivious to the abilities of people labelled as disabled even in cases where their particular disability doesn't even prevent them from functioning in all the ways considered "normal" for that society.

In Ukraine, there is some evidence of slowly changing attitudes. Networks established to facilitate the integration of children into schools and daily community activities are making major improvements in the attitudes of families and the larger Ukrainian community (an example of this is the Dzerelo Rehabilitation Centre that was founded by a group of committed parents of children with Cerebral Palsy). However, I learned that in the Ukraine for some children growing up in a family is a privilege rather than a given.

It's not uncommon for parents to abandon their child if he or she has a disability. These children grow up in orphanages. Over the last decade, there have been improvements in orphanages but there is nevertheless an institutional denial of the intellectual potential of kids with disabilities. This has resulted in the automatic streamlining of disabled orphans into less-



STEPHANIE GARRETT

Tamale School for the Guide Child. Adams Abdullai, volunteer teacher, and the Primary 2 class of the School for the Guide Child at the Tamale Resource Centre for Persons with Disabilities.

academic school programs. Orphanages in Ukraine are segregated. Children living there attend orphanage schools, not mainstream schools, which means that they socialize only with other orphans. Children labelled as disabled, regardless of the specific disability they may have, are placed in separate orphanages, not only excluding them from the mainstream school system but also segregated them from mainstream orphanages.

The academic programs in the schools for orphaned children with disabilities are known to be sub-standard. Children enrolled in such programs will be unable to qualify for entrance into highly respected post-secondary institutions even though they might have the intellectual capacity, since they would not have had the necessary academic preparation. Excluded from more prestigious secondary institutions, they are immediately streamlined into technical college programs.

Many "orphans" with disabilities are even encouraged to only apply for technical programs that are specifically "tailored" to persons with disabilities where it seems that the more a program is "tailored" to students with disabilities, the lower its quality. Receiving a low quality education limits students' future employment opportunities.

If allowed to pursue a regular academic program, disabled students may still encounter prejudicial attitudes from their prospective employers based on their disabilities, but they would not be further disadvantaged by their lack of appropriate academic background. An equal opportunity for education would, at the very least, equip some women with disabilities with the tools to break down other barriers that block their engagement in the labour force.

### Overcoming Disabling Attitudes in Canada

Worldwide, people with disabilities are aware that even the best-qualified persons with disabilities often struggle to secure employment. I was recently speaking to a woman in Saskatoon who is paraplegic but has been teaching in a Saskatoon elementary school for over a decade. She described how as an established teacher she no longer experiences discrimination; however, she acknowledges the significant challenges she faced in order to be accepted into teachers college and then to secure a teaching position.

Just as women, even in the world's wealthiest countries, continue to face more obstacles to employment than their male counterparts, young people with disabilities, and even more so, young women with disabilities are regularly required to have higher qualifications than their male and/or non-disabled counterparts in order to obtain a job. Once a job is secured, colleagues often doubt their capabilities, and assume that they received the position due to "equity regulations." This type of reasoning presupposes that gender and a disability renders a person incapable of satisfactory job performance. A younger age only exacerbates the stereotype.

Disability is shaped by complex relationships between context, environment and subjectivities, and therefore, the term can't be reduced to a definitive description anymore than the term woman. It's the perception of the two irreducible categories of woman and disability — two markers of inferiority — that lie beneath the devaluation of women with disabilities and the perverse justification of discrimination.

The misconceptions of deficiency and



institutionalized discrimination against people with disabilities is endemic not only in the work world but in the educational system. People with physical disabilities who only have a technical education, if that, find that the jobs available to them based on their lacking educational background are more physically demanding than the jobs available to those who have a higher education. It should be up to each individual woman with disabilities to decide her career path, and she should not be additionally disabled by a discriminatory educational system; this is an international concern.

### Perception of Disability in Ghana

In North America many women who may only have a high school education end up working in the service sector: restaurants, hotels, grocery stores etc. These jobs require extended times on one's feet and include other physical demands, which would pose definite challenges to anyone with impaired mobility.

In Ghana, many non-disabled illiterate women make a living selling street food and various market goods. However women with disabilities cannot make a living as street vendors because they are considered incapable, and even worse, unclean. As a result, no one will buy their products. A blind woman in Ghana told me about visiting an extended family member where she had washed the dishes after a meal. She later heard them washing the dishes again, in fear that she had somehow contaminated the dishes with her blindness.

Yet there are women with disabilities in Ghana who have succeeded with teaching careers. Once a person is well-educated, people respect them for their educational accomplishments and are more willing to look beyond their disability. The role education plays in the acceptance of disability varies in different cultural contexts, but education is clearly a significant factor in the success of women with disabilities as workers.

Without education, women with disabilities in less developed countries are most often compelled to make a living through begging. I know from my work at the Resource Centre for Persons with



Wa Resource Centre for Persons with Impairments. First Resource Centre for people with disabilities to be established in Ghana. Located in Wa's central market, many of the tailors, seamstresses and other crafts people who were trained here operate their business outside the centre.



Tamale Resource Centre for Persons with Disabilities. This Resource Centre is funded by Action on Disability and Development but operates with only 1 paid staff person and many volunteers.

Disabilities in Northern Ghana that while women do not like begging, it is nevertheless a reliable source of income. They often have families, and the need to feed their families comes first.

Increasingly women with disabilities there are recognizing that begging further reinforces society's perception of disabled women as helpless. They are, therefore, lobbying for the government agencies and NGO's to provide them with training in income generating activities like soap-making and weaving, which will enable them to leave begging.

### International Barriers to Finding Employment

Although we must acknowledge the role that inadequate education plays in preventing women with disabilities from acquiring meaningful employment, it is crucial to look at this issue deeper and question why even highly qualified professionals with disabilities continue to face barriers when trying to enter the workforce. I think that the answer lies within the

domain of attitude. Women with disabilities, more so than men with disabilities, are disabled not by their physical condition, but also by societal attitudes and the daily manifestation of those attitudes by employers towards prospective employees.

Issues of physical inaccessibility are not the only obstacles preventing young women with disabilities from entering the workforce; they are prevented from entering the workplace by the social stigmatization rooted in societies prejudices against women and disability. Those who break through the barriers are seen as heroes, anomalies, rather than normal women. By looking at successful women with disabilities as heroes, society continues to refuse to recognize the potential of all women with disabilities, both young and old.

The very notion of young and old varies depending on the cultural context. In North America, under 30 is "young," while in Ghana, young people were distinguished from "adults" on the basis of marital status. While someone was unmarried they were still "young." Increased talks about the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities and publications of *Disabled People's International* are an indication that people with disabilities of all ages are coming together in a global movement and are being heard on an international level.

### What Can We Do?

It's too easy to believe that oppression forms in layers and if we try to tackle one issue, for example gender, this makes all women less oppressed; but this doesn't recognize the inter-dependent nature of all forms of oppression. In order to tackle any form of oppression, we must recognize how we fit into that structure. We'll never be able to adequately resist prejudice and biased behaviour until we recognize our complicity within all social structures that sustain notions of various groups of people as second-class citizens or not citizens at all. In her book *Looking White People in the Eye*, Sherene Razak argues that ablesim (discrimination against people with disabilities) is intrinsically dependent on other forms of discrimination. She maintains that we cannot have sexism without racism, heterosexism, ageism, ablesim and capitalism.

She argues that in order to tackle any one of these issues we must be conscious of our role in each one of the other forms of oppression simultaneously. She describes how "the systems of oppression that regulate our lives sustain one another but we do not always see this interdependency." It is time to ask ourselves how we fit into this matrix of oppressive systems and how we can commit our life's work to change. ❧

# Workplace Harassment in Tanzania

## Young Women Speak Out

Consolata Godfrey

**Myroslava Tataryn** recently completed an honours B.A. in Development Studies and Environmental Science at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. She is now working as a Project Leader for Katimavik in Ponteix, Saskatchewan.

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**A** director of a company operating in Tanzania secretly promised to employ young women who agreed to have sex with him. Maria, (subjects' names have been changed), one of the victims of a male employer who pretended to recruit for jobs, said she took an HIV test at a hospital in Dar es Salaam in the presence of the potential boss, but was not given the results. Women applicants are asked to take an HIV test to make sure they do not have AIDS.

Sexual harassment in Tanzania remains a major workplace problem for young women. A survey conducted in some work places in Dar es Salaam revealed that many young women have been sexually harassed by their employers or supervisors in work environments. Harassment occurs during the employment application process, around promotions, training, and salary increase discussions, to name a few instances.

The definition of the term sexual harassment can be broad and is a controversial one, depending on each individual's opinion of what constitutes sexual harassment. Typical behaviour usually includes unwanted touching, lewd comments, sexual jokes, and talk about gender superiority. A good example of sexual harassment is sexual behaviour, when the person doing it knows it is unwanted and distressing.

In an interview, Maria told of how she was linked up with that company director by a job search organization.

"At the job search centre, the director asked for a private room, which he was given. He told me that his company was well established in the neighbouring country, with a head office in a European country. A 'person of integrity' was required to work as an accountant here in Dar es Salaam. The successful candidate would be trained in one

African country and, quite often, would be travelling to the headquarters."

Maria said she was promised a 400,000 shilling monthly salary (\$400US) for a six-month probation period, during which she would be in training. The pay was to rise to 600,000 per month (\$600US) after the probation period.

However, Maria proposed 700,000 a month (\$ 700US), as she needed to settle herself after her time in college. The director offered to "meet her needs" while she was in training.

"I became suspicious of this man. Why would he volunteer to help me settle down? Why this sudden kindness? I thought that I should be careful lest I stepped on the wrong path."

"He promised to meet me at a hotel where he had arranged a room for us. I went there and he told me I had to have sex to get the employment opportunity. I refused and got out of the hotel."

Flora, 29-year-old university graduate, is now a victim of HIV/AIDS after her employer infected her. She says that she was fired because of poor work performance, caused by her illness.

"My employer forced me to have sex with him when I was looking for a job. He promised to pay an attractive salary. I really needed a job to support my family. Two years later my boss died and I started to be worry about my health. I became sick and my work performance started to go down," she said.

Flora added that after the death of her employer, the new boss came and, after a year, fired her because she was always sick. She went to the labour office to claim her rights but nothing is being done.

Many young women are not getting training opportunities, especially those

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with private companies. Their directors are also writing poor reports on them.

Julie, working as a personal secretary with a local private company, says that her boss is always asking for sex in exchange for a salary increase, training opportunities, and company trips.

"I refused and in three years my salary has not increased, and I have never attended any training courses. I receive no benefits apart from my little salary. When I find a training course on my own, I am still refused. I fear for my future because sometimes he threatens to end my employment," she said.

Some of the women, who are aged 25 to 40, have admitted to having engaged in an office romance. Many of them keep quiet in order to maintain their status and jobs, because it is difficult to get another job, and it is shameful to declare that their supervisor has harassed them.

According to the survey in Dar es Salaam, one-quarter of employed women believe they have experienced sexual harassment at work. Most of them took no action in response to being sexually harassed. The most common reasons given are the feeling that nothing would happen, even if they did speak up, or that they might lose their jobs.

Some companies falsely reported that

they have fired employees (after a co-worker had complained of sexual harassment) for such actions as telling the complaining co-worker how good he or she looks for an upcoming date with another person, or for what seemed, to the fired employee, to be just a harmless compliment. In actuality, the harasser is transferred to another work station. Nothing is done about real harassment in most cases, because the victims do not have the resources to bribe police and court officials. If any of these cases do make it to court, the penalties are harsh-jail for 30 years to life. But most do not get to court, and the process, in any case, takes three to five years.

The problem of sexual harassment is growing because most women are not aware of the formal policies of the Ministry of Works. Most of them believe they will not get help. If they do, it takes many years. How will they live with no jobs? The problem has also contributed to an increase in the number of HIV/AIDS cases in the workplaces.

However, the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA), which is committed to empowering female journalists, has succeeded in persuading the parliament to pass a bill on sexual offences, dealing with rape, defilement, sexual harassment, and incest. A person

found guilty of sexual harassment will be jailed for not less than 30 years.

Until recently, there were very few women journalists in Tanzania and no women in decision-making positions in the media. In spite of this, the association has helped to reduce the number of sexual harassment cases in Tanzania by using the media to educate people. Now, one-third of the journalists in Tanzania are women.

Although the issue of sexual harassment is far from resolved, there is now more hope that women, who are working together to help and educate each other, as well as those in positions of power, will begin to reverse this oppression of young Tanzanian working women. ❖



**Consolata Godfrey** is a Tanzanian woman journalist working with local magazines. She has also worked with local radio, television and newspapers.

Consolata Godfrey

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# Making Connections

## Female Activism and Leadership

An Empowered Woman in a "Glocal" System

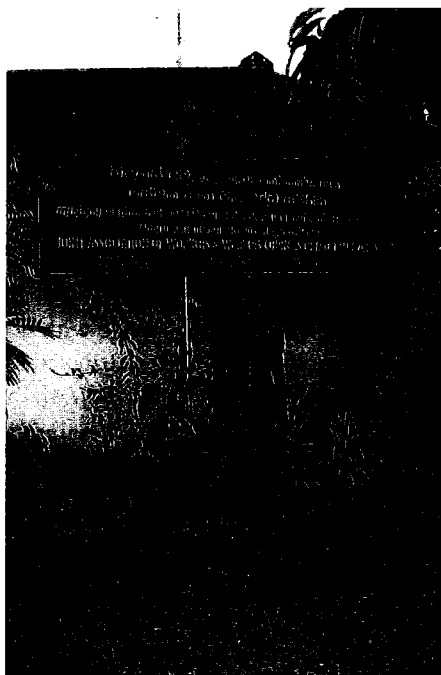
Chamila T. Attanapola

**M**y very first impression of Seetha was of what a helpful woman she was. When I phoned her asking for help contacting female export-processing workers, I was about to begin my fieldwork on industrial women workers in Sri Lanka and was wondering where to start. I had phoned several non-governmental organizations working with women in the export-processing zone (EPZ) and when I called the Women's Centre at *Katunayake*, Seetha answered. She invited me to the Women's Centre the following Saturday. A social gathering where I could meet many of the women workers was scheduled on that day.

I expected to meet a middle-aged woman, but Seetha was tiny, younger looking than her actual age. Everybody at the centre called her "Seetha akka", the way Sinhalese address women who are older (at least one year) than themselves. She introduced me to the "girls", without her help my research would not have been successful.

Seetha helped me to conduct my research, contacting EPZ workers, introducing me to other NGO workers, accompanying me to boarding houses, and doing participant observation with me. During our time together, our conversations convinced me of her interest in and dedication to solving EPZ workers' social and legal problems. She works as the coordinator of the Women's Centre as well as being an executive member of the Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union (FTZ&GSEU).

Leadership and union activities are not traditional female roles for Sri Lankan women, not even among the empowered women with higher educations and economic independence. However, Seetha



Seetha in front of the Women's Centre/Free Trade Zone Workers' Union at Katunayake

represents the non-traditional, empowered women who dedicate their lives to achieving female workers' rights. Her story not only shows us the problems faced by a female activist in a "glocal" environment, but also how she chooses to be an activist against the traditional expectations and norms of her society.

### Seetha's Story: Activism and Leadership

Coming from a lower-middle class family, the second youngest of seven children, Seetha studied up to Ordinary Level examination. Her results did not allow her to continue her studies, so in 1980, at eighteen, she started to work at a botanical garden, growing flowers for export. She received 300 rupees per month, and

worked hard from early in the morning to late in the evening. She recalled:

*"I remember when the Labour Department's personnel came to inquire, the managers showed only the male workers as their employees. We fifteen girls were hidden, since the owners did not want to pay social benefits and proper salaries to us. I realized that the job would not help me in any respect, so after a year I quit."*

As a young woman she was not able to fight for her rights but she stopped letting herself be exploited by the owners. It was her first action of resistance against unlawful employers. A few months later, she got a job at a large local textile company through her brother-in-law who was a supporter of the ruling party (United Nation's Party). She worked for nine years and earned 2000 rupees per month. The job ended in the late eighties as a result of a tragedy not only for her family but also for the country. Her brother-in-law was murdered because of his political affiliation, and Seetha lost her job. She sought legal help but, knowing that legal battles take time, she got another job at the Katunayake export-processing zone. It was 1990 and she was twenty-seven years old. Since she had experience in sewing-machine operation; her age was not a barrier. She worked in the garment factory for nine years. She describes her job:

*"We worked from six a.m. to ten p.m. Managers (Pakistani owners) sometimes forced us to work overtime at night to finish urgent quota productions. Sometimes I refused to work, explaining that I was too tired. However, they provided us with good meals and paid us according to the labour laws, so there was no resistance from most of the workers."*

Motivated by her previous legal battle, Seetha joined the Industrial Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU later FTZ&GSEU) in 1993. She raised awareness about workers' rights and regulations affecting EPZ workers. She joined the factory's "workers' council", made up of workers' representatives and executive staff, whose purpose was to secure social welfare conditions for workers. She says:

*"Even though in many factories workers' councils were regarded as representing employers' interests, my fellow council members and I tried to work for the betterment of fellow workers."*

They acquired better quality drinking water and an improved working environment. Sometimes she spoke to managers on behalf of individual workers needing to take entitled leave in cases of family emergency, illness, or pregnancy. Describing why she had to fight alone she says:

*"Most of the workers were silent when injustices happened at the workplace. They were afraid of losing their jobs. But for me I could not stand by when someone treated us unjustly, since I knew the law. I spoke on behalf of colleagues and showed the managers what they did was wrong and against the law. They listened to me and took necessary actions. My knowledge gained through union work helped me enormously to convince my employers, and it further helped me to build my self confidence."*

However, her empowered actions led to her dismissal in 1999. It started as a simple demand at the workplace, when the newly appointed Pakistani manager ignored workers' needs. The workers' council prepared a list of demands (including rubella immunization, better food and sick room facilities, roof repair, bicycle space, and higher salaries) and handed it to management. Seven months passed with no response, so the workers' council resubmitted its demands. Managers responded with deductions from workers' pay for holiday work. With legal advice from the ITGWU, Seetha wrote a letter demanding their entitled money, collected signatures from every worker, and sent the petition to the personnel manager. The personnel manager told the workers that the money would be

paid, but did not keep his promise. With Seetha's guidance, the workers decided to strike. They struck for three days inside the factory and on the fourth day the gates were closed, so workers continued their strike outside. Meanwhile, representatives of the Board of Investment (BOI) and the employers convinced the older men who worked as drivers and mechanics to return to work. Managers were able to destroy the strikers' morale by threatening to dismiss anyone who would not return. After a week, of the 130 who had participated in the strike, only 20 remained. The others returned to work because they badly needed their jobs. But Seetha and her fellow strikers lost their jobs. With ITGWU guidance, they appealed to the Commissioner of Labour.

### From activism to leadership

For Seetha, the dismissal was a hidden blessing. The ITGWU leaders were so impressed with Seetha's active participation in workers' struggles, they invited her to work with them to achieve justice for EPZ workers. Seetha gratefully accepted, since this was the job she had always wanted to do. She was appointed to the Women's Centre at Katunayake as the coordinator, where she mobilized EPZ workers and, in 2000, formed the Free Trade Zone Workers Union of Sri Lanka (FTZWU). As the Coordinator of the Women's Centre and a member of the executive committee of the FTZWU (in 2003 it became the FTZ&GSEU), she has facilitated the welfare of female workers who visit the centre by organizing social and educational activities (health, workers', and women's rights seminars), and directing them to relevant professionals (lawyers, female counselors) at FTZ&GSEU. With the help of the FTZ&GSEU, she advises workers who have lost their jobs because of factories closing or dismissal, to follow legal procedures to obtain justice.

Working with the FTZ&GSEU and at the Women's Centre has broadened her knowledge of leadership development, unionization, and organizing worker campaigns, and increased her awareness of such issues as international labour, gender,

and women's rights. She visits EPZs around the country with groups of female workers to share experiences and to build solidarity among EPZ workers. In Indonesia in 2002, she participated in a series of seminars organized by Transnationals Information Exchange — Asia (Tie-Asia), a non-profit, independent, regional labour network. Tie-Asia began in 1992 in response to the growing number of (mostly) women workers, who were largely unorganized and precariously employed by transnationals. There, she gained more knowledge of leadership and capacity building, and exchanged experiences with other leaders and EPZ workers from Thailand, Bangladesh, and Indonesia.

Seetha is an active leader, mobilizing factory workers to organize labour unions. By 2004, her invaluable contribution to awareness-raising campaigns for workers had resulted in five companies in Katunayake EPZ recognizing labour unions created within their factories. This is a victory not only for the workers at those factories but also for the entire labour union movement in Sri Lanka.

### Female leadership: is there a space for keeping traditional gender roles?

At 42 years, Seetha is unmarried and the breadwinner in her household. Since her father died, she has had the full responsibility for her mother and youngest sister. She also takes care of her widowed sister. Family responsibilities and union work leave her no space for marriage and a family of her own. She says:

*"Men have come and passed on since my union activities replace the other aspects of life such as love and companionship. In this society, men want women who stay at home and raise their kids. For me, I want a man who supports me and who understands that I must work all the time; day and night, as well as travel around the country. There are no men like this in this society yet. So I'll have to remain unmarried and dedicate myself to my work. I don't have any time for a family. Most women want to get married and depend on a husband for their financial salary and to take care of their children. When I get older, my children will be*

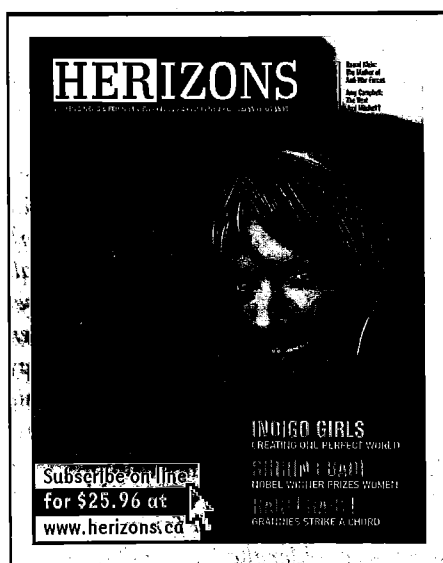


where I can spend the rest of my life."

Even though Sri Lankan society accepts and respects working women, it still believes that women should give priority to marriage and taking care of children. Seetha has decided to lead her life on an untraditional path, against the traditional gender expectations of her society. The decision to stay unmarried is not an unconscious one, since she has planned how to spend her old age. Traditionally, elderly people live with their children and depend on them for care and protection. She does not fear for her future since she is entitled to a pension.

Seetha's life story reflects the courage of a young activist in workplaces affected by the impact of global influences (multinational investment, WTO and ILO rules) on local institutions (Sri Lankan labour laws, the BOI, and NGOs). She has resisted and taken action to fight against human rights violations. By joining the FTZ&GSEU, she is able to work at the local and global levels to secure the rights of export-processing workers. Seetha wants to continue with this good work for the rest of her life. ❧

**Chamila T. Attanapola**, is a Ph.D fellow at the Department of Geography, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway. Development studies, gender studies, and health geography are her disciplinary backgrounds. Her PhD thesis focuses on globalization, changing gender roles, and women's health in the export-processing zone industries in Sri Lanka.



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# Here

E. H. D.

It all comes back here, when it comes,  
it's a fight to the wrecking yard,  
to the boneyard,  
the place of lost things,  
the dull Sunday hangover place,  
it's a fight to come back here,  
though everyone hates to stay,  
it's a necessary pilgrimage.

Somewhere between the flame lighting up your night again  
and the part when you can't find purchase  
on the minefield of floorboards,  
that's the bit when your heart acts up,  
does the jitterbug all alone in its little house of ribs,  
your heart pipes up with its own lungs again,  
humming the riff it learned this time last summer.

But the dawn's gotta do its thing, crack its yolk  
all over your night self, your plans to live forever,  
over the rooftop where you watched low-flying planes in the dark,  
over the dirty underwear and empty bottles,  
over it all,  
over everything that looked so pretty  
when the world was dark and spinning.

Then, you come back here, where it all began,  
the place you come back to, when you come,  
and you hate to be here, but take a bit of pride,  
because it's a fight to get here,  
to the place of wrecked bones, the dull-yard,  
the junkheap of lost Sundays.  
The place where you address  
the late morning mirror in the bathroom,  
you say, I lost myself.  
Then you square your reflected shoulders  
and start looking.

# Feeding A Hunger Across Difference

Julie Mooney

**W**inifred Vera Briggs was known to play a mean hand of Rook on Saturday night and then dazzle her Baptist Church on the piano on Sunday morning. She was born in 1913 in rural New Brunswick. A year later, her father died working on the railroads. Her mother, Zenobia, remarried and had seven more children. Winnie grew up fast, her mother's faithful helper. When she reached puberty, she moved in with an Aroostook Junction family to serve as a domestic worker in exchange for room and board and the chance to attend the Aroostook High School. She graduated with straight As, married and had three children. In 1941 Winnie's husband, a railroad worker, died of typhoid fever. A widow, still nursing her youngest child, Winnie had no choice but to find paid work again. My Nana started as a clerk at the general store and eventually became the store manager.

Sixty years after she was born into an era marred by Europe's First Great War, I came screaming into a vastly different Canada — Trudeau Canada. I have no memory of scarcity in my childhood. I remember being aware at an early age that we had more than a lot of people and less than some. For what seemed like an eternity, the richer kids beat and humiliated me, reinforcing the class system. I hated school in those early years. Mom was heart-broken whenever I came home beleaguered by another schoolyard incident. Her love of learning, of English literature, her top marks in mathematics (much like her mother's) and my father's passion for the sciences, languages and the arts all seemed to have been lost at the time of my genetic encoding; my supposed intellectual deficit seemed to be confirmed each time I brought home my declining report cards. But my capacity and my passion for learning were not the problems; my predicament was that I was different.

## Rocking Chair Retreat

My fondest childhood memories are set in Aroostook Junction, safe in the environs of my Nana's house. There were sixty years between us but it didn't matter; we were kindred spirits. We were both defiant and determined to make it in a world that had been cruel and unwelcoming; we connected deeply from my earliest childhood. She filled my tummy with home-baked beans dripping in molasses and pork rind fat. I devoured each plateful, soaking her homemade brown bread into the sauce. Some years I couldn't wait to crawl into her lap in the old wooden rocking chair and snuggle into her bright red polyester housecoat; the warm smell of her wrapped around the social outcast I had become. I recognized her as a formidable matriarch; she was my solace but there was seldom need for her to come to my defence in Aroostook. Her love for me extended throughout that space and time. I was welcome to play with my cousins; I was loved by my aunts and uncles. I was little Ruthie's daughter and Winnie's youngest granddaughter. Those were positions of honour and privilege. I was respected as the next in a line of strong women survivors. They loved me and I them, though we only saw each other when I escaped from the city to take rest in Aroostook.

From my white middle-class urban-intellectual home I fled to my white working-class rural-life-educated extended family. But just as the city had its share of cruelty so did the country have its ugliness. Both spaces were racist and insular. In Ottawa, I heard reference to "the smell" of our "Pakkie" neighbours. In Aroostook, there was grumbling silence around the history of an "Indian" who was never named in our family tree and snide remarks were made about the neighbouring French communities. Whether it manifest against indigenous peoples, la francophonie or South Asian communities, I was taught to stick to white-skinned Christian Anglophones. Whenever I

was back home in Aroostook, that's precisely what I did. Of course, some of the white Anglophones were viewed as better Christians than others. Some cussed and smoked and got up to no good. Some had problems with the bottle. Some cheated on their wives, squandered their money. Some just gave up in an economy designed for city-folk; many, like my Mom, fled. These moral judgements divided families and regulated individual behaviours.

Nevertheless, in this world I felt safe from the pressures and bullying of school, safe from the standards of grooming and poise expected of a young lady in my father's upper-crust family. It was among my skidoo-driving older cousins that I learned to be myself. It was on those summer breaks in New Brunswick that I delved into my writing life, first letters, always letters. I became one who collected writing paper, just like my Nana. She bought it for me when we went across the line to Presque' Isle, Maine to have supper at the all-you-can-eat all-American Bonanza Restaurant, surrounded by people my urban education would describe as morbidly obese. It was those summers watching the Kraft processed cheese slices on white Wonder bread balloon and blacken under the heat of the toaster oven that I started to come out to myself, to embrace the queer geeky wonder of a woman I was becoming. It was because of my worlds — divided between Aroostook and Ottawa — that my class consciousness painfully emerged.

## Working for Unity Across Difference

I struggle with my class identity; my roots seem incompatible and my economic class confusing in the social systems we have created. I have gone further in university than my father, but I am still viewed as a woman — by a world so obsessed with binaries — a woman who must act like a man (a man who must act invincible) if she wants the same status and salary. A world

where writers and artists still die poor, where heterosexual white nurses and accountants still raise middle-class nuclear families, are socially accepted, and can afford to send their children to the universities. This is a world in which we are cautiously beginning to name ourselves as genderQueer omnisexuals, where brown-skinned women with a wall full of degrees move to Canada to clean the toilets and diapers of white-skinned families, where the unionized nurses still have to put up with an arrogant sense of entitlement in their doctor-colleagues. This is a world where Christianity is defamed as a weapon against the "Other," a weapon that guards capitalism. This is a world mad with patriarchy, racism/white supremacy, classism, homophobia, ableism, ageism — all enforced by colonialist militarism.

I am a worker in this crazy world, participating in the labour movement with the best of my courage. I experience reprisals from middle and upper management as a result of my outspokenness. Signing my name to this essay raises a niggling fear of the reckoning to come if/when my bosses read it. I have seen how their lawyers find loopholes to get around our collective agreements, how they use stall tactics to weaken us and undermine our efforts to gain power despite the progress we make.

My Nana was a worker who never benefited from the Union. She struggled through capitalism, a worker in isolation, with poor access to health care, education and work opportunities because of her geographic location, because power and money is concentrated in the cities of this country. In her rural reality, she learned by necessity how to make the pennies stretch

to the end of the month, to the end of the winter, to the end of the woodpile that heated her home. She never gave up.

By contrast, I was born into an urban context with bountiful opportunities. Still, on cold winter nights, sitting in my poorly heated Toronto room, grateful for the freeze that plugged my leaking roof, I called Nana for support and advice. I poured my dissatisfaction through the phone line. My heart crushed under the tyranny of another workplace injustice, ready to give up this cycle of addiction to money and independence, fighting to keep a job that was killing me to keep up with the cost of rent in Toronto; I was ready to burn all my bridges to stand for my beliefs. Utterly frustrated by the politics of control and fear-mongering in the workplace, tired of watching the people in positions of authority making six-digit salaries cut the wages of the support staff and restructure job descriptions to provoke lay-offs so they could hire new workers with no seniority at entry-level incomes, I ranted into the phone. When I collapsed into stillness, my Nana said, "You just be who you are. Don't let this world tell you that you're wrong."

When she died on September 3, 2004, tears flooded the St. John River spilling over the land all the way to Lake Ontario and the labour movement lost one of its strongest supporters. Across distance, class, education, and an urban-rural divide, Nana and I connected on the question of justice for working people. She did not identify as an activist or a feminist. I do not recall her choosing any labels for herself. But she understood the grit and groundedness needed to endure in this fight for freedom.

From my struggle as a privileged young

women making barely enough to pay my rent, unable to find a sustainable job, purpose and meaning, how do I learn from my Nana what it means to support and ally with the struggle of a newcomer-immigrant woman who scarcely speaks the dominant language of this nation, and who has fallen out of status because she had to flee an abusive sponsorship relationship. Or with an indigenous woman incarcerated in the prison industrial complex in a welfare system that criminalizes poverty. Or with a transsexual woman who is forced to dress as her biological gender in order to keep her job. We are all in need of mentors to kindle our dreams and guide our ambitions.

Nana's struggle, her determination and defiance, as well as her belief in me encouraged me to find my own paths of resistance and empowerment. Her struggles and mine were not as distant as the land that stretched between the communities we chose as our own. Our contexts were disparate; the details of our lives distinct but the essence of our economic realities were similar. Building bridges across our differences through regular phone calls and email exchanges (yes, she was ninety-one years old sending me Hotmail messages from her dial-up) and, of course, our letters resisted our separation. In memory of my maternal grandmother, Winnie Briggs, and for the many diverse women working in these dangerous times, may our collective struggles and our oneness endure. ❦

**Julie Mooney** is a poet currently living in Toronto, Canada where she works at a community health centre for new immigrants. Her forthcoming collection of poetry features the sleeping and waking dreams of contemporary revolutionary women.



BRITT SANTOWSKI

# Programs & Responses

## Dare to Dream

### Corporate Encouragement of Young Women's Pursuits

Kim D. Abramson

**W**hile Hawai'i is part of the United States, it is a vastly diverse multicultural environment. Asians, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, Portuguese, Filipinos, Caucasians and those with mixed heritage share the islands. Together, they have developed "local" culture, and each of the major Hawaiian islands has developed its own unique culture.

I moved to the island of Maui, Hawai'i, from New York City. My primary career is as the CEO of a high-technology company, and as part of my company's commitment to the community, I also teach at the local college. In my communication classes, comprised of approximately 80 percent young women, I am often surprised at the women's attitudes toward their own roles in work and in life. Much of what I see can be attributed to the local environment; young people feel limited as to their choices in life. Primary and secondary public education needs improvement; families promote traditional ways of living and working; and cooperation, respect, and subservience are highly valued.

I grew up in a very different environment, on the east coast of the continental U.S. From the time I was about four years old, it was instilled in me that I would attend not just college, but graduate school, to become a professional. The women in my family, who were generally "traditional," encouraged me to break from old patterns and take advantage of the opportunities that my generation was being afforded. Value was placed on my asserting my independence and ideals, standing up for myself, thinking creatively, and exploring the unknown. I was told that I could do anything I wanted to do — if I could dream it, I could make it reality.

This message permeated my world and that of many of my female peers. We all assumed that we would be career women with professional jobs such as attorney, doctor, or business owner. Anything "less" was simply not an option.

I went on to college, graduate school, professional school ... and more graduate school. Although I changed my mind and my career several times, I knew that I had the option to do so. Although during college I worked my way through as a receptionist, assembly line worker, secretary, and other low-paying service positions, I knew that I was paying my dues toward my future. Whatever my dreams, I would fulfill them.

And then I moved to Maui.

Local culture emphasizes that a woman's role is respectful, subservient, and home-based. She works in the home and outside as necessary to support her family. Practically, in this tourism-driven economy (in which tourists drive up the cost of living) supporting her family often requires a woman to work two, three, or more blue-collar jobs, just to make ends meet. With a gallon of gasoline nearing US\$3, a gallon of milk costing around \$5, the average house price close to \$700,000 — and the average family of four living on \$50,000/year, the emphasis for young people is to graduate from high school and get a job that will contribute to family expenses. Combine this practical need with traditional Hawaiian values such as living with one's extended family, respecting one's elders, being loyal to one's family, and balancing one's work and personal life, most young women do not consider higher education. When there is an extended family to feed, clothe, and shelter, there is no time for

college, graduate school, or dreams.

On both personal and business levels, I have had difficulty accepting that things must remain as they are. While I would never attempt to dissuade individuals from "traditional" lifestyles such as farming (which some continue to follow) many young people want to know that they have options outside of western-imposed low-paying service jobs, many of which support the thriving hospitality industry. I discussed this with the leaders of an organization that supports Native Hawaiians' workforce retraining, and they confirmed that a significant portion of their clientele simply refuses to support the tourism industry, opting to be unemployed instead of "surrender." Those same individuals often attend workforce training, attend junior college, and make efforts to qualify for higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs. Yet just as often, they prevent their daughters from stopping the cycle by insisting that they work to support their families instead of attending college or pursuing higher employment goals.

Although I understand that it is not always possible, and sometimes not desirable, to change cultural values, this is one area in which I believe that I — and every other business owner, teacher, parent, and mentor — can make a difference. The goal does not need to be to force change on traditional lifestyles or culture, but to introduce young women to the options that they have choices. If they choose to maintain a traditional vocation, they can support the hospitality industry, and so on. But they need to be encouraged to go beyond that. They need to be encouraged to choose a career path that is not traditional. In the classroom, I encourage my students to explore the unknown, to stand up for themselves, and to dream big. I encourage them to explore the unknown, to stand up for themselves, and to dream big.

students to dream. I asked them all what their "dream jobs" were, then found individuals who were "experts" in the students' chosen fields. It was then each student's responsibility to practice her interpersonal skills by scheduling an appointment with the expert and interviewing her/him. The interview and subsequent essay were required to reveal, at a minimum, what it takes to succeed in the job and what kinds of interpersonal communication skills she would need in the job.

The results were remarkable. One 21-year-old student, Laura, was originally very difficult for me to get to know (names and some details have been modified for the privacy of the individuals). She sat in the back of the classroom, remained quiet, very rarely smiled, and never made eye contact with me or with her fellow students. At the beginning of the semester, she had written that she wanted to be a nurse. She shocked me when, for her dream job assignment, she said that she wanted to be an engineer. When I asked her why she wasn't pursuing engineering, she told me that her mother and others had told her that she "wasn't smart enough." Upon further questioning, I learned that Laura had been an honors student since high school and had been independently studying engineering for about six years. However, without her mother's support, she deemed it futile to dream. She did not believe that she could ever accomplish what she'd hoped. She had shut down, and stopped pursuing anything that meant something to her. She withdrew, emotionally and even physically.

The interview changed her life. Not only did she ascertain the required information, but she impressed the man she interviewed so much that he offered her a job. Laura is now working for a worldwide engineering company that is even financially contributing to her education — through graduate school. She has begun to dream bigger and higher than she'd thought was possible. Since the initial interview, she has metamorphosed into a confident, assertive young woman who freely participates in class and community activities, takes every opportunity afforded her, and makes consistent eye contact. She even smiles.

This transformation was truly amazing — but how did it happen? What made Laura (and several others) take the assignment to heart and let it lead them in new directions, despite their upbringing and self-concept? As simplistic as it may sound, a great deal of the answer is that the assignment empowered them to believe in themselves. For the first time, these young women were exposed to the fields that they considered impossible dreams, far from the reality of what was expected of them. They did not believe that they would ever have the opportunity or, if presented with one, be successful. By providing the opportunity right in their backyard and teaching them what to expect and what would be expected of them, I was able to introduce them to the idea that it was possible, and allowed them to learn it for themselves. Like having one's siblings or peers insist

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### She has begun to dream bigger and higher than she thought was possible.

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that there is no Santa Claus, the child believes that Santa exists when she finds him standing in her living room. These dream jobs were the elusive Santa who suddenly appeared in the house.

Interestingly, the assignment impacted more than just the students. Their excitement and pride helped many of them (consciously or subconsciously) overcome the barrier to talking with their parents about their hidden aspirations. In some cases, the parents proved supportive, to the surprise of both the students and me. For example, Laura's parents have since demonstrated dramatic changes that have supported Laura. Her father, who has always been passively encouraging, became more vocal in his support and has provided new opportunities for her that he had otherwise not considered. Her mother realized the impact that her negative messages had been sending and has begun encouraging Laura, instead of minimizing her aspirations.

Laura's new ability to communicate her passion to her parents helped not only her, but them, to recognize the depth of her commitment and joy in the field. This has translated to other aspects of her life, as well, and they have told me that their relationships have improved.

In some cases, the parents needed a bit more coaxing to help them believe that the dreams were possible; coming out of the same environment that their children now face, many parents simply perceived the situation as "the same from generation to generation." One example is Maria's family. Maria, 20, wanted to be a physical therapist, but her mother and grandmother had been pressuring her to quit college and work at a hotel alongside the two of them. Maria dreamed of helping injured people through physical therapy and was dismayed at the thought of leaving school. We spoke for a while about the fact that she was 20 years old, a legal adult, and permitted to make her own choices. When I realized that that argument was futile, we looked for a compromise that would allow her to pursue her goals and maintain the respectful demeanor expected of her.

We discussed the reasons that her family wanted to her to work at a hotel: a steady income (since tourism is the dominant industry on Maui), safe work, and the importance of her staying both physically proximate and emotionally close to her family. These were not just desired outcomes, but required expectations of her family. When Maria finally approached the matriarchs with the compromise we had conceived — that she pursue options in physical therapy that were marketable in the hospitality industry and regularly practiced at Hawaiian resorts, such as massage therapy and sports therapy — they acquiesced. Her family, while still not encouraging her to "go beyond" their expectations, permitted her to stay in school, change her major, and pursue physical therapy, with the agreement that she practice at a local hotel.

Of course, there were also those who stood their ground and refused to allow or strongly discouraged their (adult) children to advance their pursuits. But the best that we — the corporate leaders, educators,



parents, and mentors — can do is present the opportunity, be supportive, and hope that the young women will find their own strength in their beliefs.

### Solutions

As corporate professionals, community leaders, academics, and parents, we need to remember that today's young women face not only discrimination in the workplace and academia, but within their communities and sometimes their own families. We must find ways to enforce the belief that they are permitted to dream and can accomplish their goals. We are required to encourage those dreams by providing them with the self-confidence and tools to achieve their goals — factual, practical, and emotional.

Another simple reason why these young women thrive when encouraged is that often, the fact that someone in a position of authority cares enough to make that phone call, follow up after asking a question, or arrange a meeting demonstrates that an outside party believes in them. I am usually surprised by the very strong reactions these students have when I extend the smallest bit of effort for their benefit; their eyes light up, and their energy soars. They begin to take action instead of wandering passively through class. I believe that my small actions — and those that are easy for any corporate or community leader to perform — send a clear message to the young women: You matter. You are worth my time and effort. This builds the self-esteem crucial to helping these young women achieve their goals.

Some of the small steps that everyone can take include the following:

**Provide a young woman with basic skills.** This includes life survival skills (from preparing a healthy meal to fixing a flat tire), financial management (establishing a bank account to investing for the future), use of technology (setting up one's own cell phone to effectively selecting and using a computer), and oral and written communication (speaking in public, interpersonal communication, and writing a basic formal letter or memo).

**Provide a young woman with critical thinking skills.** These are the foundations: logic, reasoning, how to research and locate information, and questioning assumptions. Challenge her, and demonstrate respect for her ideas and opinions, even if you do not agree with them. If we can instill in young women these skills, we lay the foundation for dreaming and achieving.

**Be a positive role model.** Subtly and in context, tell her about your accomplishments and how dreaming and developing fundamental skills allowed you to achieve your goals — or are contributing to your aspirations. Demonstrate that you are constantly dreaming and honing your skills to become better than you are. Let her know that life isn't perfect and that achieving dreams may take patience and a few failures along the way, but that if she strives toward her goal, she will eventually reach it.

**Provide opportunities.** To a young woman who has not yet been exposed to all that the world has to offer, opportunities can be small: a conversation with someone who has achieved a great deal, a day of shadowing a professional, an internship, tickets to an event that she otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to experience, a phone call to inform her of an upcoming meeting or event in which she would have interest, mentoring or tutoring, and the like. In classrooms and workplaces, working one-on-one with a student or employee — even if that's a 15-minute "getting-to-know-you" meeting — may uncover specific issues that she may be dealing with and that you can provide support for.

**Expose her to the world.** Help her to reach beyond her boundaries and learn about the world at large. Whether through media (books, newspapers, magazines, movies, World Wide Web, television, music), people, activities that increase awareness, or simple discussions about living with passion and exploring new ideas, exposure to new concepts will help her expand her mind and ideas.

**Discuss dreams.** Let her know that she is allowed to dream. This may be the toughest step. Unless she already has a foundation for this concept, it may take time, patience, and repetition to make a young woman believe that she deserves to dream and that there is a purpose to dreaming. Do not give up. If you give up on her, she will give up on herself.

**Facilitate.** Once she identifies her own dreams, encourage her. Provide specific opportunities (as opposed to the general opportunities discussed above). Enlist the support of the people close to her — whether they are fellow employees, student peers, or her family. Provide a support system. Remember that this may be the most difficult thing she has ever done, and be empathetic — after all, you likely either went through this experience in your lifetime, or you still long to.

### The Future

A significant result of my project and research has been recognizing that young women can be encouraged to pursue their dreams simply by having an outside party support and guide them. It is equally important, however, that the supporter be willing to follow up, get personally involved, and listen. The payoff for this action can be tremendous, however; by developing young women's minds and encouraging their dreams, we create the leaders of tomorrow and beyond. For my company, I think of each student as a potential employee, and I train them with that goal in mind.

It is the responsibility of every adult to create a path for younger people. It does not have to be a path paved with gold, but with dreams — and the tools for accomplishing them. *For more information, please contact Kim Abramson at [abramson@hawaii.edu](mailto:abramson@hawaii.edu).*

**Kim Abramson**, CEO of a U.S. company, was selected as one of the Top High Technology Leaders in the 2005 U.S. Small Business Administration Minority Business Champion community competition. He is currently a law professor at a University of Hawaii. *For more information, please contact Kim Abramson at [abramson@hawaii.edu](mailto:abramson@hawaii.edu).*

# Engendering Youth

## Shortcomings of Canadian Youth Employment Programs

Sandra Tam

**N**owadays, young women's advancements in education and careers in high-tech, high-skilled, global labour markets seem a Canadian fact of life. Indeed, some young women find success in the new economy of flexible, virtual, entrepreneurial workspaces with international, jet-setting lifestyles. Sociologist Anita Harris (*Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*, 2004) calls these the "can-do" girls — they are powerful, confident, resilient, intensely career driven with the "world at their feet." Yet many other young women continue to experience low wages in gender segregated labour markets and continuing pressure to do unpaid, caring work. As well, gender inequities are still worse for young women who have disabilities, are poor, racialized, Aboriginal, or single parents.

This analysis will uncover the assumptions being made about young women based on the concepts of youth transitions, youth jobs and youth "at risk," and provides insight into what seem to be contradictory employment outcomes for different groups of young women in Canadian youth employment programs. These common policy conceptions of youth, which construct young women and men workers as ungendered individuals, do not account for the ways that gender, race, and class still influence young people's education, employment choices, and experiences. From the perspective of young women, this analysis suggests that youth employment program and policies serve to reinforce existing inequities of gender and race in local labour markets. First, I will describe the goals and content of Canadian youth employment programs.

### Canadian Youth Employment Programs

The general goals of Canadian youth employment programs are as follows:

- Create opportunities for all youth to develop the skills and knowledge needed for work
- Increase work opportunities for youth
- Help youth respond to the changing nature of work
- Address the cultural and social barriers that may prevent youth from working

Generally, young men and women from age 15 to 30 can participate in mixed-gender programs, which are delivered through community-based organizations. Some programs target youth "at risk" who do not attend school and face multiple barriers to employment, while others are geared towards students. Others are aimed at youth in high poverty level neighbourhoods or at specific groups of "at risk" youth like squeegee kids and homeless youth. These programs have various components such as job search assistance, career information and referral services, employment resource centres with resume writing and interview workshops, access to computers, phones, and fax machines, individual vocational assessment and counselling, job placements with or without wage subsidies, short-term skills development, and summer job or self-employment assistance. The intention of youth employment programs is to help youth find and keep jobs, or return to school. The next sections describe how the effectiveness of youth employment programs is undermined by assumptions underlying youth transitions, youth jobs, and youth "at risk."

### Youth Transitions

The idea of youth transitions comes from psychosocial developmental theories. This perspective, which heavily influences the study of youth employment, sees young people moving through various transitions towards adulthood. Young people "grow up" by progressing through these normal and natural transitions in a linear, orderly and predictable manner. Youth transitions include finishing school, getting a job, moving out and starting a family. Young people are expected to move through these transitions by making decisions based on values, aspirations, information and opportunities. From this perspective, youth employment programs help young people make smooth transitions from school to work and careers by providing opportunities, resources and information.

However, this model of universal experiences of youth transitions from school to work is challenged by the influence of gender, race and class realities on the process of growing up. At the present time, gender roles and expectations for women are changing. Young women appear to have more pathways and choices open to them in the workplace than in the past. Yet, despite the pressure to succeed as career women, the gender division of labour continues to influence young women's choices and pathways because young women still see themselves primarily responsible for caring, family, and unpaid domestic work. The expectation for young women to balance both worker and caregiver roles means young women's transition to adulthood amounts to transition to super-mom, super-worker or super-woman. However, without adequate social support for caregiving, it is uncertain how she will ever achieve this transition successfully.

### Youth Jobs

Jobs in the services industry, where young people often work as sales associates, customer service representatives or coffee-serving baristas, tend to be low paying, insecure, non-unionized with little opportunity for advancement. Yet, there is little concern about young worker's marginalized status (a status that they share with other low-wage workers) in the

labour market because according to the transitions approach, "McJobs" are just short-term, stop-gap jobs for youth who will eventually make the transition onto real careers, or at least better jobs. Based on the human capital theory, young people will be especially prepared to advance into good jobs if they have accumulated relevant skills and knowledge along the way.

In reality, not all young people transition into better jobs, especially in the context of a restructured labour market that is characterized by few "good" jobs, and persistent gender and racial inequities. Canadian economist Jim Stanford observes a labour market reality of deskilled and low skilled jobs:

A substantial majority of jobs in our economy still do not actually require all this higher education. For every computer technician in Canada, there are 15 retail clerks. There are 12 restaurant workers for every financial professional. There are 6 truck drivers for every specialist in pharmaceuticals and biotechnology. ("We don't need no education" *This Magazine*, July-August, 2001)

This means that even if a young person upgrades him/herself through formal education or youth employment programs, there might not even be enough good, high-skilled jobs to go around.

For young women, focus on skill development and formal education as the best route to secure jobs obscures the reality of persistent gender inequities in occupation and earning — today, a Canadian woman earns approximately 71 cents for every dollar that a man earns. Besides, not all young women are positioned to take advantage of educational opportunities. Young women from upper- and middle-class families can make use of family connections in social networks to ensure access to education and work opportunities; working class and immigrant families will not have these connections. As well, education does not seem to translate to labour market success for racialized youth. Analyzing census data, sociologist Jean Kunz finds visible minority youth, regardless of whether they are born in Canada or immigrants, have unemployment rates approximately five percentage

points higher than non-visible minority youth even when both groups have post-secondary education.

Although it might still be reasonable for youth employment programs to encourage youth to pursue training or higher education for their own personal development and benefit, it is not reasonable to take education and training as a panacea for youth under- and unemployment given the above observations. These cases signify that higher education might be necessary, but not in itself sufficient to predict successful employment outcomes. Gender and race still affect employment outcomes and earning potential.

### Youth "at risk"

Youth employment programs target young people with multiple employment barriers, who are "at risk" of underemployment or long-term unemployment. Youth "at risk" describes young people who are not successful in their transitions to work and adulthood. Risk factors for youth described by the Forum of Labour Market Ministers include dropping out of high school, being poor, living with single parents or no parents in poor neighbourhoods, or with parents with low levels of education. Youth who are Aboriginal, visible minority, recent immigrants or have disabilities are also considered "at risk." The intention of categorizing youth this way is to predict which young people will likely get into trouble in order to take preventative measures.

Despite its best intentions, there are problems with using the "at risk" approach to address young people's employment barriers. The individualism of this approach obscures the fact that young people become "at risk" due to conditions of poverty, violence, racism or sexism, and that those conditions are created by social policies that affect young people's relationships to work, family and communities. While youth employment programs offer individuals options and choices, they do not effectively address systemic and structural barriers of sexism, racism and homophobia that influence individual choices and access to and experience of education and work.

Different groups of young people become "at risk" in gendered and racialized ways. Youth employment programs particularly target poor, single young mothers who may be legitimately at risk of under- and unemployment. But instead of recognizing that poverty and discrimination faced by women originate at a systemic level, and providing them with additional social services to help them to balance work and childcare, young women are often offered learnfare or workfare programs that purport to make participants "skilled" and ready for the workforce. The denigration and construction of "at risk" young single, black mothers as "welfare queens" in the United States contributes to the justification of regulatory policies and practices. Initiatives, such as the promotion of marriage for poor and racialized single mothers in receipt of welfare, seem to have more to do with control over women's sexuality and private lives than facilitating young women's work lives. Individualizing the risk of poverty associated with single motherhood effectively brings attention towards what the individual has or has not done to minimize their own risk of unemployment while drawing attention away from welfare state policies that fail to support young women with below poverty level welfare rates and diminished social services.

### Transition Towards Nowhere: Reinforcing Inequities in Labour Markets

Thus far, this analysis has been critical of the ideas of youth transitions, youth work and youth "at risk" and the way they have informed youth employment programs. It appears that youth employment programs attempt to support youth in their transitions into post-secondary and entry-level, service jobs that are nothing other than menial and dead-end opportunities; the program's focus on how individual choices and the individual experience of education and work influenced by systemic and structural inequalities in the labour market and individual choices and access to and experience of education and work.

worker. This leaves us with the question: What can be the role and impact of youth employment programs that help youth transition towards nowhere?

Youth training programs are supposed to offer more choices. In reality, the limited range of career options made available through these programs has resulted in the tendency for young women to be funneled into traditionally women-dominated occupations, like personal support or clerical workers. Studies have documented how the young women themselves believe they are participating in their own self-invention, and exercising vocational choice, because the option of training as a transitional pathway to work is framed as an individual choice. It just so happens that young women's "choices" coincide with gender stereotypes and a labour market need for cheap sources of caring labour. Elsewhere, sociologist Roxana Ng makes an analogous observation with regard to immigrant women. (*The Politics of Community Service: Immigrant Women, Class and State*, 1996) She finds that employment programs functioned to reproduce labour market stratification based on race and gender in the construction of immigrant women as low-end, unskilled workers. In this case, stratification was achieved through the daily practices of counseling staff who were adhering to the state funding agency's accountability system, which determined what counted as a successful program outcome; namely the quick placement of women into jobs.

Changes in Canadian welfare and labour policies have made it more difficult for young people to access social assistance and employment benefits than in the past. In addition, eligibility for benefits has become contingent upon participation in coercive workfare or learnfare programs that rarely make accommodations for young mothers. Young working-class and racialized women who find themselves at the bottom of the labour market hierarchy, without the assistance of welfare provisions to assist their families, may very well be drawn to the informal underground economy. For example, more and more young immigrant women from

Southeast Asia have been found working in the garment industry under unregulated home-based or sweatshop conditions.

### Need for New Theory about Youth

Given that the life chances and work experiences of young people remain structured by gender, class and race, and skills development or education is no guarantee of secure work, it is not surprising that youth employment programs based on individualistic assumptions of youth transitions, youth jobs and youth "at risk" are less than effective at addressing young women's employment needs. These programs address young women as ungendered individuals navigating transitional pathways as if the world of limitless possibility and opportunity were her oyster. Perhaps most problematic is how individualistic theories of youth can lead to youth blame, where youth themselves are held responsible for their own choices that make them "at risk."

We could hypothesize reasons why as a society we commit to a transitional approach to youth employment. For starters, its orientation towards the future can offer genuine hope and optimism for the young worker who serves endless cups of coffee, on long or late shifts, to cranky customers for low pay and no benefits. Perhaps as adults, knowing the physically demanding, repetitive, or confrontational nature of service work, we alleviate our own anxieties about its effects on workers by thinking that young people in these jobs will soon grow out of them. Perhaps by believing the North American dream, that hard work will pay off in the future, we justify to ourselves the inequities and possible exploitation experienced by young and other marginalized workers. Perhaps by individualizing risk, we can avoid confronting the devastating possibility that our own complacency has led to social policies which create conditions of risk for young people in the first place.

It seems that in order to be effective at addressing youth employment issues, youth employment programs require some reinvention. According to this analysis, their new design should be

informed by theories of youth that incorporate a structural analysis of gender, race and class, as well as consider the links between global and local processes on experiences of work for different groups of young people.

Finally, I want to make the case that the experiences and perspective of young women workers will be key to developing new theory about youth and work. A young woman occupies a range of social locations from which she experiences multiple and contradictory expectations in her work and family life. In her multiple roles, as worker, mother, caregiver, volunteer and citizen, she engages in a number of activities to balance her work, school, family and social responsibilities. Examining these practices and their local regulation should provide insight into broader social, political, economic and cultural processes that facilitate or restrict her employment options. Thus, the position of young women workers in global labour markets establishes this group as analytically important for assessing local responses to global processes. This new knowledge should guide approaches to social policy and youth programs that go beyond individualistic solutions and have the potential to create social and economic equality for all young people. ✎

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### Further Reading:

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Bessant, J., Hill, R., & Watts, R. (2003). *"Discovering" Risk: Social Research and Policy Making*. New York: Peter Lang.

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## Young Women Work

### Community Economic Development Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Improving Income

Molly McCracken

**Y**oung women work — in their homes, in the community, in schools — with other youth and in the labour force. But young women who live in poverty find themselves unable to make our economy or society work for them. Struggling to stay in school, working for low wages, and lacking childcare, young women face many challenges. At risk of a future determined by poverty, and possibly raising another generation to live under the same conditions, young women said they want to work to build a better future and community.

*Young Women Work: Community Economic Development Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Improving Income* is one effort towards supporting young women at risk of poverty to improve their status. This feminist participatory research study was guided by a coalition of community-based organizations that work directly with young women in Winnipeg. Two local young women were trained as community researchers and conducted interviews and focus groups with 50 young women in two inner-city neighbourhoods in Winnipeg. The goal of the research project is to describe the barriers and opportunities for young women in the “new” economy, and outline Community Economic Development approaches to preventing poverty among young women age 15 to 24.

Community Economic Development (CED) is a “bottom-up” rather than “top-down” approach to economic development. CED uses a capacity-building approach to poverty, and considers individual and community assets as starting places for building local economies. It is founded on the belief that problems fac-

ing communities — unemployment, poverty, job loss, environmental degradation and loss of community control — need to be addressed in a holistic and participatory way.

Young women are finding themselves continually at a disadvantage in this “new” economy, which arguably offers little advantages for women as a whole over the “old” economy. Characterized by information technology and a knowledge-based workforce, the new economy has given rise to a polarization of job structures, which increasingly rely on part-time and temporary work. These changes only entrench women’s status as part-time workers — women have accounted for seven out of ten part-time employees since the late 1970s. Currently 40% of employed women, compared with 27% of men, are now working in non-standard jobs, such as part-time, temporary, part-year and contract work, as well as self-employment (Statistics Canada 2003, *Women in Canada: Work Chapter Updates*; also see Townson, 2004).

Furthermore, the “new” economy continues to restrict women in the same way the “old” economy did — through occupational segregation, the wage gap and undervaluing women’s unpaid and paid work. These inequities are exacerbated for racialized young women.

The feminine face of poverty is more prominent amongst the Aboriginal community in Winnipeg. Nearly half of Aboriginal young women (49.7%) and young men (40.1%) aged 15 - 24 live below the poverty line, compared to 16.2% of Winnipeg youth in this age range (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, *Aboriginal Peoples of Canada*). These dire

statistics are the result of the legacy of colonization, residential schools, and persistent racism. This is reflected in our study: 72% of the participants are Aboriginal.

Cultural traditions shared by Aboriginal people in Manitoba are based on different values than the Eurocentric approaches that shape the economic and social rules under which Aboriginal young women live. The present economy rewards certain skills and upholds structural barriers that have historically excluded groups based on race and gender. However, the economy is a function of societal relations, which shift and change over time. This research project is based on the idea that asking young women about their experiences related to the economy can help to transform prior unequal relations and develop local skills, knowledge, equity and equality.

The scope of the research was broad; participants were asked to share their thoughts on their neighbourhoods, schools, unpaid work, paid work, computers, role models, and hopes for the future. Responses were both inspiring and heart wrenching; participants describe dealing with formidable challenges. This article will focus on the paid work findings; participants were asked both about the paid work they do now and might want to do in the future when they “grow up”.

Several qualifications must be made about women and work. First, the amount of the work women do is not paid, and by asking what paid work young women aspire to do, we were not to devalue their unpaid work, or to suggest being another’s labourer is a goal. Secondly, the research project should always be understood as a



themselves. Policies such as workfare, that force social assistance recipients into the workforce, create a source of low-wage and free labour by providing subsidies to the private sector and forcing recipients to volunteer in exchange for assistance. These policies are based on a distrust of those living in poverty. They do not empower people, but coerce them into working for pay (see "Workfare in Manitoba" by Shauna MacKinnon in *Solutions that Work: Fighting Poverty in Winnipeg*, 2000).

Thirdly, taking on paid work in the face of women's gendered responsibilities for housework and childcare means women face a double-burden that can affect their quality of life. Work-life balance is important to leading a healthy life, and any discussion of paid work for women must also consider resources to ensure unpaid work also gets done equitably.

This being said, working for pay is currently the only way that people can elevate themselves out of poverty. However, there are significant barriers to escaping poverty. When making the transition from social assistance to the paid labour force, people lose benefits they were previously eligible for, such as paid prescriptions and dental coverage. Full-time work at minimum wage provides a living at only 70% to the poverty line and rarely offers health plan benefits. According to the Just Income Coalition, a provincial advocacy group, people need to earn at least \$9.44 per hour in order to earn a living wage in Manitoba.

Access to the labour force is also a challenge. Young women living in the neighbourhoods in question have higher than average rates of unemployment. For example, the unemployment rate in West Broadway and the North End was 19.7% and 23.5% respectively — double the 10.5% average rate for females ages 15 - 24 in Winnipeg (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census data for West Broadway, Point Douglas South).

Most of the participants in the study did not work for pay. Some worked casually, babysitting or cleaning homes for others. A few had jobs twice weekly in the community job creation programs. Two

worked at fast food restaurants.

The young women had a broad range of paid work they aspired to. Many identified professions that would enable them to give back to the community and help others, such as social worker, nurse, or community worker. For example, one young woman wanted to encourage other youth:

*(I want)... to be a motivational speaker I guess you could say? Because I used to be really bad...I was hating on everybody when I was younger, I did lots of bad things and I got into like running around with a bad crowd and everything, but that changed after I had my kid... I mean like I know a lot of these kids need to know like before they run into trouble and something they need living proof.*

Some young women knew what career they wanted to have, and had some idea of what was needed to get there:

*I want to be a police officer, I've wanted to do that ever since I was young, so that's like my goal. (What kind of training would help you get this job?) This summer I was planning on going to Bald Eagle. It's like military camp...I think that would help out a lot.*

Others knew what they wanted to be, but were not clear on what education or training they might need:

*I'm going to college after school, after my high school and I'm going to take teaching lessons... like to be a math teacher, I like math (What do you think your school could do to help you get this job?) give me lots of math work? I don't know.*



Young women in the focus groups who had been through career planning had a much broader range of professional aspirations, whereas those who said they had not had any career planning, aspired to work that is likely more familiar: social workers,

nurses or probation officers. More research is needed to corroborate this, however it is safe to say that career education and role models for youth can only broaden their horizons and reveal a broader range of paths to take in their lives.

What was clear is that, when asked, young women have enthusiasm for the possibilities the future holds, however they lack information on how to get there, and the possibilities that exist. Additionally, we found that participants did not aspire to high earnings, possibly because they do not have a sense of how much money is required to earn a living wage, and/or because they have grown up in poverty. In short, there is a lack of "the economic" in community organizations support young women's access.

Community Economic Development approaches can offer supports for young women to develop skills and knowledge necessary to improve their status in the new economy. Our research suggests this should take the form of holistic programming on career and life preparedness, economic literacy, and mentorship with young women.

Aboriginal young women want and need supports that uphold their traditional cultures and teachings. This is best led by Aboriginal organizations with experience and connections with the Aboriginal community. Access to cultural teachings is important for identity formation and well-being, and needs to be available in all aspects — for pregnant and mothering young women, in educational programs, and in skills and paid work programs designed for young women.

CED should also be centred on young women's needs. Childcare was most frequently mentioned as an essential support for young mothers, for example. CED must consider the long-term benefits for women to improve their wages and economic security by building transferable skills that are valued in the economy. Moreover, these should be guided and led by young women themselves, who identified that they want to lead the next generation of youth.

CED offers the potential to supply better opportunities for young women in

the new economy. CED focuses on multiple "bottom lines" that are both social and economic. This offers a buffer against shifting demands of the new economy, and a type of incubator where small local cooperatives and businesses can support young women to learn and develop leadership skills.

Partnerships between organizations with different core competencies can result in holistic programming to this end. For example, CED organizations can partner with Aboriginal organizations to build on the strengths of each.

The study concludes with suggestions and ideas for CED emerging from the findings of this research study. The following key features should be incorporated to support young women's success in the programs:

- Aboriginal cultural teachings
- Basic needs such as childcare, trans-

portation, and nutritious food

- Living wages
- No cost to participants
- Economic literacy and career guidance
- Mentorship/role modeling

Young women are ready and willing to participate in holistic programs that respect their cultural backgrounds and build strong futures for themselves, their families and their communities.

Please see [www.pwhce.ca/young\\_womenwork.htm](http://www.pwhce.ca/young_womenwork.htm) for the full report, or contact [mollym@mts.net](mailto:mollym@mts.net) for more information.

Young Women Work was funded by the Manitoba Research Alliance on Community Economic Development in the New Economy and the Margaret Laurence Endowment for Women's Studies; and through in-kind support from the Prairie Women's Health Centre of

Excellence, SEED Winnipeg, Andrews Street Family Centre and Wolseley Family Place. ❧

**Molly McCracken** is an active member of the women's community in Winnipeg, and currently lives in West Broadway with her cat Mousseie.

**Further Reading:**

Just Income Coalition on minimum wage in Manitoba: [www.just-income.ca](http://www.just-income.ca)

Townson, Monica. 2004. "Women's Poverty Reaches 20-year High." [www.straightgoods.com/item276.shtml](http://www.straightgoods.com/item276.shtml)

Silver, Jim. 2000. **Solutions that Work: Fighting Poverty in Winnipeg.** Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)

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Chinook. Hoser.  
Mickey. Pogey.  
Muskeg.  
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# Intersecting Realities

## Young Women and Call Centre Work in India and Canada

Srabani Maitra and Jasjit Sangha

**“H**ello this is Amy calling from [Company X] and I would like to talk to you about our latest promotion.” We are all familiar with call centres and the joy of running to get the phone only to realize that it is yet another person calling to sell you a product, but what many people do not consider is who is doing the calling. Telecommunication work is being transferred from North America to India, so that companies can benefit from reduced labour costs, government subsidies and an educated, English-speaking youth who face a high unemployment rate.

This story becomes more complicated when you consider that Amy is really Amrita, and is falsifying her accent, her personality and her culture to fulfill the expectations of multinational corporations. This phenomenon is not limited to India alone; immigrant call centre workers in Canada are also subjected to falsifying names and personas in order to “get a sale.” In this article we will rely on transcripts from over 40 call centre interviews conducted in India and 21 conducted in Toronto, Canada to weave together the experiences of young women and unstable work in opposite ends of the world.

### History

In the last decade, the proliferation of the process of globalization has made the establishment of call centres in North America important. The shift of emphasis from localized centres of economy to greater stress on internationalism, combined with technological innovations in communication networks, has fostered the growth of call centres. The imperative behind the emergence of call centres has been the need to connect companies with their client bases directly through the medium of telephones

— an effective marketing strategy. Two factors have contributed to this development. From a technological perspective, the rapid growth of telecommunication and computer networks has had a profound effect on the emergence of call centres; however, this period of growth has also witnessed massive structural changes in the world economy with emphasis on trade liberalization and the relaxing of trade barriers across national boundaries. Global economy has thus become decentralized, resulting in a dispersal of multiple centres of commerce; transnational business conglomerates have played a significant role in this process.

Canada has not remained untouched by the call centre phenomenon, but has become an important market for the set up of call centres by a number of US-based companies. Companies outsource to Canada because of Canada’s excellent telecommunication networks, infrastructure, advantageous exchange rates and workforce, which is composed mainly of educated yet unemployed immigrants. Immigration has ensured a vast pool of labour, which can be exploited at low-paying, unstable jobs. Not surprisingly, students or immigrants (mostly women) who are often denied access to job markets directly related to their education/profession constitute a significant part of the call centre work force across Canada — particularly in Toronto. While such jobs are relatively easy to obtain and salary levels are above the minimum wage requirements, such jobs continue to remain unstable. Moreover, this type of work is predominantly part-time.

In India the growth of the call centre industry has been a more recent occurrence. Business process outsourcing has created a major presence and led to a rapid expansion. Although it is difficult to calculate the exact number of people

employed in this sector, a study estimates that, in June 2003, 75,000-115,000 were employed by Indian call centres. By 2008, states McKinsey & Co, the Indian outsourcing market is estimated to reach \$77 billion, with 2 million employees; this is a significant rise from the 770,000 workers currently employed. The call centres are located in some of the major cities in India such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, and are increasingly spreading to smaller towns, such as Pune and Cochin.

The outsourcing of voice services to India has been fundamentally motivated by reasons of economy and the need for cost reduction. Additional factors such as extended hours of customer service, the workers’ ability to speak English and a large unemployment rate have been important considerations for outsourcing to India. Key initiatives to increase outsourcing have been taken by the government of India through significant tax exemptions and incentives, the deregulation of the telecommunication industry and facilitations for improved infrastructure. Call centre training institutes are spreading all over India to help young people join the industry effectively.

Many young women interviewed in India found the job attractive. They are drawn to the job by the very idea of working with a multinational company like IBM or GE. The work environment is also appealing, as call centres are known for having a relaxed, casual atmosphere which resembles an “American” lifestyle. Call centres are located in new air-conditioned buildings with indoor gyms, pools and restaurants. This environment offers employees a place to socialize, as well as work, and indicates a particular image of “Americanism,” which is rapidly becoming the normative cultural form.

## The Worker

In India, the average call centre employee makes a salary of approximately 10,000 rupees a month (roughly CAD \$300), with meals and transportation to work usually provided by the company. To put this salary into context, just consider that the income of a middle-class family is about 20,000 rupees a month, and an entry-level software engineer makes about 5,000 rupees a month. Call centre work is therefore economically beneficial to young people coming out of college. This is especially true for women who often perceive these jobs as a source of economic independence. Interviewees stated that the information technology slump in North America, and the repercussions of the events of 9/11 have made it even more difficult to find a job in a profession such as engineering or computer science. Some of our respondents were trained professionals who turned to call centre work due to the salary and the relative ease of obtaining such a job. The interviews conducted with call centre workers in Canada have yielded surprisingly similar results. It is easy for women, especially immigrants, to find jobs in call centres since these jobs do not require prior training or experience. Many immigrants find it difficult to get a job in their profession because they do not have Canadian work experience or their foreign education is unrecognized. Call centre work thus becomes an economic necessity to survive in a new country.

Working conditions in this industry follow equivalent standards in both parts of the globe: workers are heavily monitored, given specific targets to obtain, and have restricted mobility during their shift. Interviewees in both countries stated that they were monitored by team leaders, a quality control team, the company for whom the service was being provided, and even customers (via customer surveys). They also needed to fulfill specific targets, such as answering a certain number of calls per shift, or making a specific number of sales. As the calls stream on a continual basis, taking unscheduled breaks is either not allowed or highly discouraged, leading to a regimented work environment. As one interviewee stated, even taking a minute to

collect your thoughts or clear your throat after a stressful call is frowned upon. This experience was shared by employees in India and Canada who found the stress of non-stop talking, with little control over their environment, impacting their well-being. In India, the situation is worse as call centre workers usually start their shifts at night if they are servicing American or Canadian customers. This usually results in a debilitating effect on their health; their eating and sleeping patterns are thrown into confusion. Women who have childcare responsibilities find it emotionally and physically exhausting to cope with their household work after working at a stretch of nine to ten hours overnight; child care needs and unconventional working hours form a double burden.

women working in Canadian call centres, as they are often subjected to racial and gender discrimination. Female agents in both Canada and India mentioned that they have dealt with irate customers who ridiculed them for their accent or race and even accused them of taking jobs away from American workers. This can be emotionally stressful for many women, since they are not allowed to protest due to customer service requirements.

Call centre workers in India have some advantages to their Canadian counterparts because of the laws of supply and demand. There are so many call centres in India that retaining employees can be very difficult. In order to combat high attrition rates, companies try to motivate employees with incentives, bonuses and elaborate social

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**Most of our interviewees, in both India and Canada, did not perceive this job as a career option. They are conscious of the instability of this work.**

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Customer interaction is another aspect related to the working conditions of call centres. Interviewees in both India and Canada stated that they change their persona when they are at work. As we stated at the beginning of this article, anglicizing Indian names is very common, and in some cases even a requirement of the job. In India, call centre workers are given two months of training, with part of the time focused on learning how to overcome the "mother tongue" influence and modify one's accent to sound more American or "neutral." In Canada, call centre employees who are not Canadian born or do not have western names are also requested to shorten, or alter their names. For workers in India, this can be a difficult adjustment as the persona they take on at work is different from the reality of their everyday lives. Thus a rupture is created between the cultural domain that they inhabit and the artificial acculturation to which they are exposed in the context of their jobs. In the process of negotiating between their own cultural identity and that of the clients, they undergo frustration and psychological tensions. Psychological tension is intensified in the case of immigrant

gatherings. One interviewee showed me with pride the TV, VCR, and video camera that her team had won at work because they had the highest performance rating in a particular month — these were items that she could not afford to buy for her family. Another interviewee spoke about how her company organized social gatherings at five-star hotels, with all meals and alcohol provided. Relationships between team leaders, supervisors and employees also appear to be friendly and relaxed, and interviewees often talked about being friends with their superiors. One interviewee stated that work was already so stressful, that if she had to deal with an irate boss on top of that, it would just be too much and not worth the effort.

Most of our interviewees, in both India and Canada, did not perceive this job as a career option. They are conscious of the instability of this work. Women are reluctant to pursue call centre work once they are married or have children. They feel that this kind of work severely hampers social life. Many women are also continuing their education by taking courses in their respective professional

fields; they are also applying for other jobs. Call centre work is simply a transitory phase in their lives before they move on to something better. Women in India mentioned saving a part of their income for higher studies, and Canadian immigrant women often use call centre work to gain Canadian work experience or improve their English skills before applying for a job in their professional field.

### Resistance

There are call centre workers in both countries engaged in resistance to the monotony and instability of their employment; they seek avenues to assert some control over their environment. In India call centre workers are in demand, and retention is a serious problem. Some women take advantage of the high demand for workers by "hopping" from one job to another every few months. Each job change leads to a pay increase, because the worker has already had some experience. As one interviewee stated, workers realize that call centres can leave India at any time, and they want to take full advantage of them while they can. Most interviewees had switched jobs at least once during their call centre "career", in order to increase their pay. Another interviewee, who did very well at her job, stated that when she needed time off in order to look for other work or attend interviews she used her sick days. She then started to take leave without pay, and finally just calling into work and stating, "I am not coming into work today." But because of the need for good workers, she was never fired and was simply asked to come back to work as soon as she could.

In Canada, the call centre employees we interviewed were in a more unstable position, as sometimes there was not enough work, and they could be sent home early if they were not performing well. Despite these restrictions, workers were still engaged in resistance. One interviewee stated that she would alter the script that she had to read if she did not agree with the questions. She would also challenge her supervisors if they complained about her work performance, by stating that the scripts were the problem,

not her. She said that although she was not the most favoured employee, she was often able to pinpoint problems that were leading to poor employee performance. Another interviewee mentioned that she and some other women went and complained to the manager about their supervisor who was penalizing women, especially visible minorities, for using the washroom too often. Their complaints led to the dismissal of the supervisor.

In some of the recent newspaper reports, we came across news of trade unions trying to penetrate the call centre industry in India in order to address the well being of the workers. Salary structure and job security are the key issues on their agenda. In fact many of our interviewees in Toronto also felt the need for the unionization of call centres to help regulate their wages and combat oppressive working conditions. However, none of our interviewees in India had any knowledge about trade union activities in Indian call centres nor were they very enthusiastic about the presence of trade unions at their work place.

### Final Thoughts

Call centre work has very important ramifications for women. Such work translates into economic independence at a relatively young age. While the unconventional working hours in call centres in India can be a difficult adjustment, they also result in greater social mobility for women. The need to work during late hours can often become a transgressive action in relation to the gender hierarchy imposed on women in India.

Our interviewees had mixed feelings

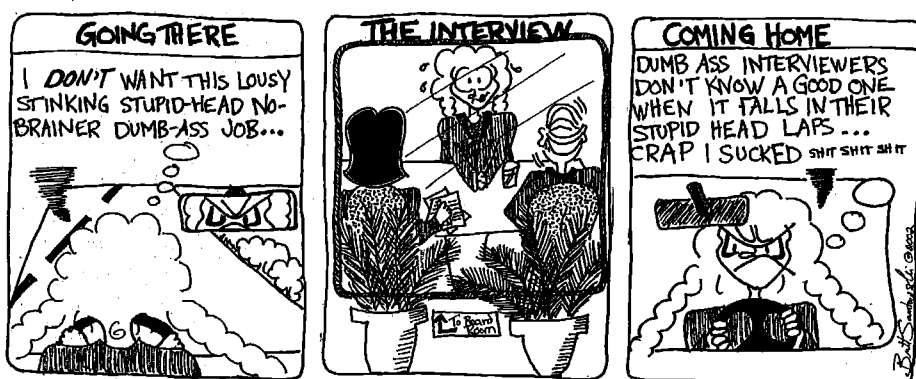
about the role of call centres in India. One interviewee who left call centre work stated that she wished that "nobody would have to work in call centres in India" because of the stress and timing of the work. Other respondents felt that even though call centres may only be in India for a short time, they were going to take advantage of the employment opportunities they were offering. Call centre workers in Canada seem to have similar viewpoints. They'd prefer to have a job in their professional field and are frustrated. Call centre work is a temporary solution for them, while they search for better career alternatives.

It is interesting how multinationals are able to create a temporary workforce on both ends of the globe by taking advantage of educated, skilled and underemployed women. By creating adaptive pools of employees at opposite ends of the world, global finance can become even more powerful; call centres are provocative sites to further study these processes. ❧

Jasjit Sangha and Srabani Maitra are doctoral students at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. They are also working as researchers on innovative projects funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, that examine contingent/precarious work both nationally and internationally.

### Further Reading:

Bain, P. T. and Phil Taylor. (2004). **India Calling to the Far Away Towns: The Call Centre Labour Process and Globalization.** Paper presented at the 22nd International Labour Process Conference, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam.



BRITT SANTOWSKI

# In the Field

## Wangari Maathai

A Woman of Distinction

Catherine W. Kilelu

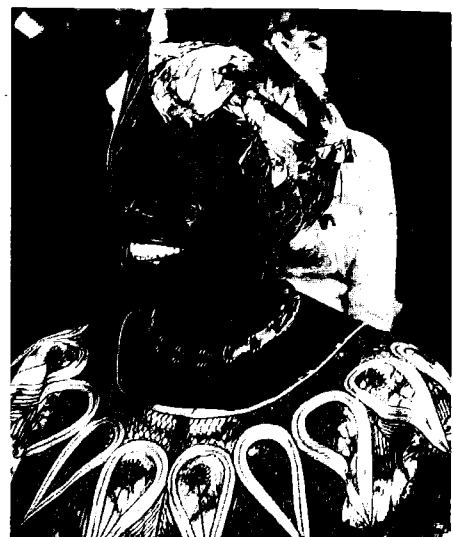
For Wangari Maathai of Kenya, an internationally recognized environmental leader and human rights advocate, being a trailblazer seems to come naturally. She was the first woman in central and eastern Africa to hold a Ph.D., the first woman to head a university department in Kenya in an era where it was a rarity for women to access higher education, and now Maathai has become the first woman in Africa to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Born in 1940 in Nyeri, on the slopes of Mt. Kenya, Wangari Maathai has become a household name as an eco-activist and a champion for democracy, both at home and internationally. Maathai founded Kenya's Green Belt Movement, through which she has mobilized impoverished women to plant over 30 million trees in Kenya since 1977. This project has been replicated in other parts of Africa. The Green Belt Movement was founded in response to needs of rural women who, because they relied on trees

as fuel sources, were particularly impacted by the rapid depletion of indigenous forests. The movement ensures greater environmental sustainability and alleviates women's daily burdens by planting trees and providing a close source of fuel.

Over the years, Maathai has combined her zeal for sustainable development with advocacy for social justice and good governance in Kenya. In December 2002, Maathai was elected to parliament and was subsequently appointed, as Assistant Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Wildlife in Kenya's government.

This is the first time that the Nobel Peace prize has been awarded to recognize work on the environment. Many pundits predict that the next major wars will be fought over natural resources, which are becoming increasingly scarce across the Earth. Thus, it is befitting that the 2004 award went to Maathai who rightly notes, "If we did a better job of managing our resources sustainably, conflicts over them

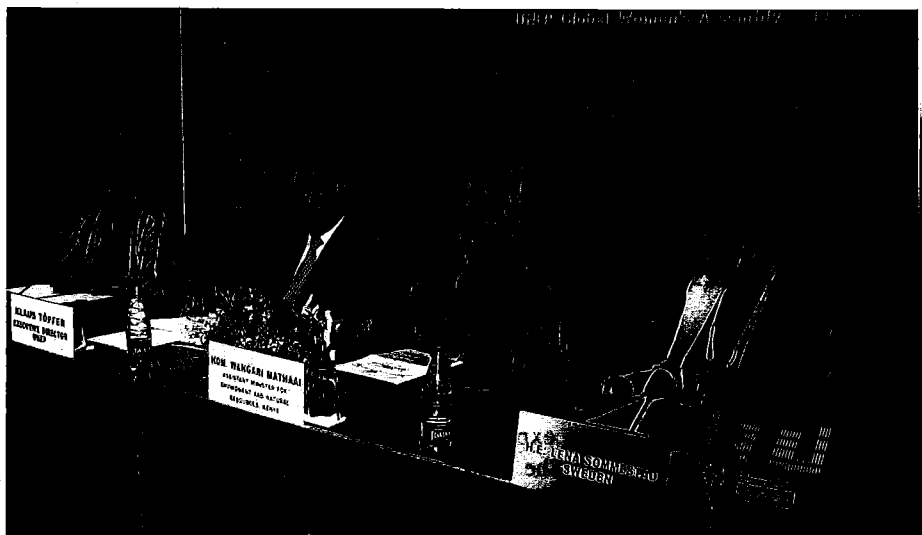


would be reduced. So, protecting the global environment is directly related to securing peace." By winning the world's most prestigious prize, Maathai continues to be a source of inspiration for those fighting for sustainable development, democracy, and global peace. For the many young women working in local and global environments, this victory can only strengthen our resolve to continue organizing for a more sustainable and equitable world! ❧

**Catherine Kilelu** currently resides in Ottawa and works at the International Development Research Centre. She graduated with an M.A. in Sociology from Lakehead University. Her thesis was titled "The Green Belt Movement of Kenya — a Gender Analysis"



At the opening of UNEP's Women as the Voice of the Environment conference, Nairobi, October 11-13, 2004.



At the Women as the Voice of the Environment conference. Left of Maathai is the executive director of UNEP and Anna Tibajuka, executive director of UN Women. Right of Maathai is Sommestad, Sweden's Minister of the Environment.



# Sewing Creativity

## A Look at the Art and Teaching Style of Annie Thompson

Sonja Greckol and  
Ann Danilevich

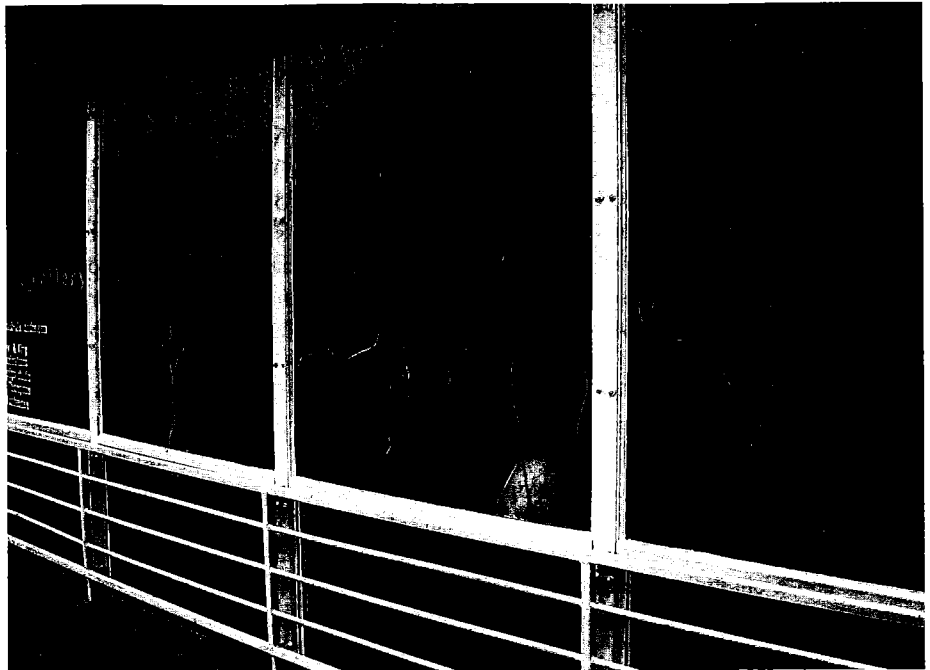
Sonia observes: *Annie's soft muslin sculptures, activate and amuse me as I approach. My first response is visceral, I want to move and yammer at them, then I want to explore the lines of the frayed fabric and follow them around from eye-level outside, and through the gallery door to the inside, past the window, down the stairs. Inside, looking up, they impose on me authoritatively and show me loft on a tether.*

Annie Thompson buzzes in resonance with her hanging forms. Displayed at the Shift Gallery as part of their second annual group exhibition titled Winter Shift, which ran from Nov. 28, 2004 until Dec. 19, 2004 in Toronto, these soft mobiles are quite different from Annie's signature work. She is best known for her innovative fashion designs, which are bright, colourful, with a variety of textures and patterns. If there was one word to describe her work it would be vibrant, but the monotonic mobiles at Shift are no exception.

There is something comforting, yet exciting, about these cream-coloured muslin mobiles.

Ann comments: *They remind me of organic bulbs or underwater creatures, neophytes; they seem pure, optimistic, and lend themselves easily to the imagination. Annie created the mobiles by sewing together pieces of material and stuffing them, which gives them form, a third dimension, life. This speaks to the essence of artistic creation.*

Anchored between her store on Queen Street West and her studio behind the Shift Gallery, a short walk down the alley, Annie shows us her painstaking experimentation with fabric and form. She is a lifetime designer with a passion for the extraordinary, for thinking outside the box and inviting others to join her outside in the fabrication of life. Driven by her



childhood revulsion with the ready-made that did not fit, she learned to sew and has been threading her needle since.

Inspired by life, Annie can be enchanted with the cracks in the road, which will no doubt become part of a new textile pattern. Nature, colour, landscape and texture come into her work, all of which is unique; her work does not mimic the current trends, colours and styles.

Annie has a great eye for detail. She can see past the black and white and see more in things than their face value; it is exactly this approach to life and fashion that Annie tries to show her students at Ryerson University, where she teaches a textile course biannually. At Ryerson, Annie sows the seeds of creativity for a future generation of designers. She teaches students to think for themselves, to create, to go "outside the box."

Annie Thompson does not try to dictate fashion. "I make clothes. I am not a fashion designer," she says, "I try not to be too influential."

Annie wants students to experiment

and do what they want rather than conform to an existing view of fashion, which will provide them with bread and butter — this is what Annie herself has always done. People in the fashion world can be closed minded. They work from a model, follow a pattern, and many students are taught to fit the mould, to copy the latest designer fashions and to use the current season's colours. They are pushed into a box.

No one tells students to just create. They are conditioned to think in terms of a formula, a business plan; in Annie's course this "formula" does not apply. She tells her students to go out and do "your" thing. "There will always be people who love what you do," she says. Some students are perplexed by this way of thinking, others find it liberating and inspiring.

Inspiration can come in many forms and Annie has now employed and collaborated on a project with Corrinna Sherwood, a former student. Annie admires her talent, and this collaboration is a great learning experience for both artists. ❧

# Women, Provisioning and Community

Marge Reitsma-Street

The WEDGE research project (Women on the EDGE of the global economy) examines how women provision for themselves, their families, friends, neighbours and/or other relatives. The term provision is used to capture the wide range of work women do in homes, communities and workplaces to survive and strive in the current economy. Provisioning includes paid and unpaid work, as well as ongoing multi-tasking, networking and coordinating activities.

WEDGE aims to:

1. Describe how women manage to do vast amounts of work in order to ensure people who depend on them

have their needs met

2. Understand the role that community agencies and programs play in women's provisioning
3. Develop better social programs, policies and practices to make it easier for women to provide for others without sacrificing their own well-being.

This is a 3-year project funded by Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council. There are six sites across Ontario and British Columbia involved with WEDGE: a women's employment program, a food coop, a com-

munity resource centre, an older women's group, a family resource centre, and a young women's employment program.

For more information about women's provisioning, contact principal investigator Dr. Marge Reitsma-Street, University of Victoria, email: mreitsma@uvic.ca. ☎

## Further Reading:

Neysmith, S., Reitsma-Street, M., Baker-Collins, S., & Porter, E. (2004). Provisioning: Thinking about all of Women's Work. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 23(3/4), 192-198.

## Glimpses into Me

Ann Danilevich

### Lost 03.18.02

Searching the horizon,  
Overlooking the world,  
Still Lost—  
Even the deepest crevices of Abyss,  
are empty—  
Are you as lost as I?  
A star struck night,  
Offers a glimmer of hope,  
To remerge at dawn/dusk,  
Oblivious to the hustle of the day.  
The search is silenced,  
Only time will tell,  
Or is it like us, Lost—

### Untitled 04.27.03

Nude-I stand before you,  
Staring cruelly,  
Not approachable—reachable/  
You look away.

Losing yourself in the dream,  
you extend your hand,  
Slapped—with intangible reality  
You are naked before me,  
I Laugh,  
exposing my claws,  
But you are still there,  
Watching me walk away.

### Untitled 02.18.04

Impending declaration of departure—  
At summer's peak,  
I wait for the words,  
And see your face,  
fade in the distance.

I am left alone,  
And in love with you,  
Unsure of what to say,  
I stay silent,  
Waiting for your impending

# Ten Years of Federal Budgets

## Double Whammy for Women

**Source: Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action**

OTTAWA — Federal fiscal choices have done little to improve most women's economic security over the last 10 years, says the first-ever analysis of the effects of federal budgets on Canadian women. This ground-breaking report, released in Ottawa by the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, tracks a decade of federal budgets. Written by award-winning economist Armine Yalnizyan, it measures the federal govern-

ment's performance against the explicit commitments it made to gender equality in Beijing in 1995. It shows that massive spending cuts unduly hurt women in the deficit era and women's interests have been largely ignored since Ottawa began posting surpluses.

*Canada's Commitment to Equality: A Gender analysis of the last ten federal budgets*

By Armine Yalnizyan

Complete report: [www.fafia-afai.org/gvt/CanadaCommitmentToEquality.pdf](http://www.fafia-afai.org/gvt/CanadaCommitmentToEquality.pdf)  
Executive Summary: [www.fafia-afai.org/gvt/ExecSummary.htm](http://www.fafia-afai.org/gvt/ExecSummary.htm)

FAFIA is an alliance of over 40 Canadian women's equality-seeking, non-governmental organizations, formed in February 1999 at a national consultation of women's organizations held in Ottawa. ❧

### Further Reading:

Canadian Government Budgets Links page: [www.canadiansocialresearch.net/budgets.htm](http://www.canadiansocialresearch.net/budgets.htm)

Canadian Non-Governmental Sites about Women's Social Issues page: [www.canadiansocialresearch.net/womencanngo.htm](http://www.canadiansocialresearch.net/womencanngo.htm)

# The Fields Institute Responds to Summers' Allegations on Women in Science

**Source: The Fields Institute**

TORONTO — Dr. Barbara L. Keyfitz, Director of The Fields Institute for Research in the Mathematical Sciences, and John Gardner, Chair of the Institute's Board of Directors, reiterated the Institute's commitment to the advancement of women in the mathematical sciences and equal opportunity for all scholars, regardless of gender.

Commenting on recent discussion in the press concerning Harvard President Summers' comments on the suitability of women for advanced work in the mathematical sciences, Dr. Keyfitz and Mr. Gardner said: "In executing its mandate to advance ground-breaking research in the mathematical sciences and to provide Canadian universities, industry and public sectors with access to the world's leading academics and practitioners, The Fields Institute's experience testifies to the exceptional accomplishments of women at all levels of mathematical research. There is no reason to doubt the ability of women to achieve at the highest scientific levels and mathematical science is no different."

Citing the participation of women professors, graduate students and industrial

researchers in numerous Institute programs attracting the top international scholars and researchers on topics of pure, applied and industrial mathematics, Mr. Gardner added: "We need to examine even more of the assumptions that lie behind our evaluation of the potential of young people. To help young women, we need a better, deeper understanding of how women succeed. When successful women participate in our programs, as happens more and more, then everyone benefits by learning how varied are the faces of talent."

Dr. Keyfitz noted well-known institutional and cultural obstacles to the acceptance and promotion of women in many scientific environments and pointed to The Fields Institute's programs and policies aimed at mitigating and overcoming those obstacles. "We are vigilant to ensure that women scholars are afforded the same financial and teaching-release support to enable them to attend and present their research at our year-long thematic programs, our short courses, our summer schools and our other scholarly initiatives. Our program organizers do not overlook these scholars when designing their programs and engaging speakers. For too

long, women have faced an uphill battle in gaining acceptance for their work and their accomplishments in the mathematical sciences. The Fields Institute does not countenance discrimination, overt or covert, of this kind."

The Fields Institute, located in Toronto, is recognized as one of the world's leading independent mathematical research institutions. With a wide array of pure, applied, industrial, financial and educational programs, The Fields Institute attracts over 1,000 visitors annually from every corner of the globe, to collaborate on leading-edge research programs in the mathematical sciences. The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, seven principal sponsoring universities, six affiliate universities and several corporate sponsors fund the The Fields Institute. See [www.fields.utoronto.ca](http://www.fields.utoronto.ca).

For more information, contact:

Ms. Maryam Ali

Telephone: (416) 348-9710 x3024

E-mail: [mali@fields.utoronto.ca](mailto:mali@fields.utoronto.ca)

The Fields Institute, 222 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 3J1

# Renowned Feminist Geographer Joni Seager Appointed Dean of York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies

Source: York University

TORONTO — Celebrated environmentalist, feminist and academic Joni Seager has been appointed the next Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES) at York University. Her appointment is effective July 1, 2004, for a five-year term.

Seager has achieved international acclaim for her work in feminist environmentalism and on the environmental costs of militaries and militarism. She is the author of the *Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (2003). (Previous editions of this book have won national and international awards, including the American Library Association's "Outstanding Reference Book of the Year" award, and the Chicago Geographical Society's Publications Award.) Seager is also the author of nine other books including *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (with Mona Domosh, 2001), and *Earth Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms With the Global Environmental Crisis* (1993). A believer in "writing without borders", her writings often appear in popular out-

lets such as *MS Magazine* and *The New York Times* at the same time that she publishes in academic journals such as *Environment and Planning* and *Gender, Place & Culture*.

Seager comes to York University from the University of Vermont (UVM) where she was Professor of Geography, and held affiliate appointments in Women's Studies, Race & Ethnic Studies, and Canadian Studies. While at UVM, Seager received two of the university's highest awards for excellence in teaching and research.

Seager believes that academic work in feminism and environmental studies is enriched when it remains in conversation with its activist roots. In her own public and personal life, she bridges these commitments. For example, Seager is a director and co-founder of the Center for New Words, a Boston-based organization committed to expanding opportunities for women's engagement with the written word — "wedging open cultural space," Seager says, "for women to become more fully enfranchised partici-

pants in civil society."

She is also a co-founder of the "Committee on Women, Population & the Environment", an international non-governmental organization of scholars and activists committed to developing and supporting feminist analyses in environmental politics and policies.

"Communicating across communities is one of the many strengths of environmental studies, a field that, more than many others, engages people in understanding the material conditions of their daily lives," said Seager. "I am very pleased to be coming to the Faculty of Environmental Studies, which, in my view, is the standard-bearer of environmental education in Canada.

"The importance of environmental literacy has seldom been greater than it is now," says Seager. "The great challenge of our time is to come to terms with the rapid changes in the built and natural environments around us, and to understand these changes in order to craft more sustainable, equitable and healthy outcomes."

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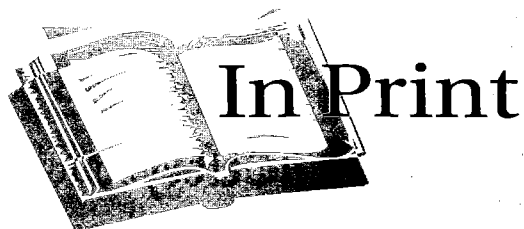
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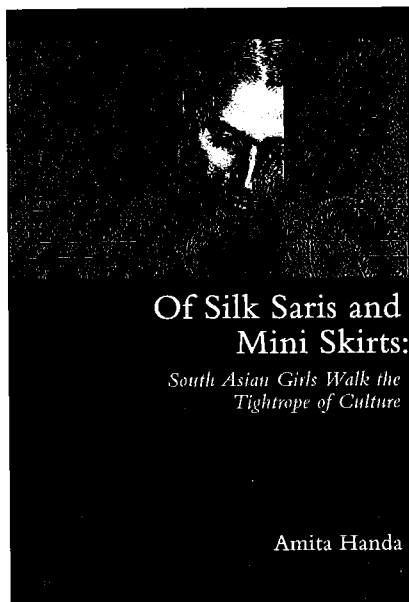


All books reviewed below are available or can be ordered at the Toronto Women's Bookstore, advertised in this issue.

### OF SILK SARIS AND MINI SKIRTS: SOUTH ASIAN GIRLS WALK THE TIGHTROPE OF CULTURE

By Amita Handa. Toronto: Women's Press, 2002  
\$24.95 CDN (paperback), 200 pages

Soni Dasmohapatra interviews author Dr. Amita Handa



Did you hear that bhangra beat in Madonna's new song? Have you seen the new Sari curtains at Ikea? Have you met up with the new henna tattoo artist at the Harbourfront centre? Did you check out the bindis that are at Claire's? Wait a second! What is going on here? Where did all these South Asian cultural nuances come from? We are in Canada still right? Aren't Canadian

teenage girls supposed to be white with blonde or brown shoulder length hair, wearing mini-skirts, hanging out at the mall with friends and listening to Hilary Duff?

Who and what defines a Canadian? Do you want to know why it is that Canadian teenage girls of South Asian origin are exoticized or ignored while their culture is commodified by the Canadian public? If you are interested in these questions you should pick up the book, **Of Silk Saris and Mini Skirts**, written by Dr. Amita Handa.

I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Amita Handa at the CKLN studio on Ryerson University campus where she hosts the radio program Masala Mixx, Saturdays from 4:00 to 6:00 on 88.1FM. Amita was animated as we set up the interview. As the Bollywood tunes playing in the background faded I was able to ask Amita many questions about her

book that will give you an opportunity to get a taste of the many messages to be found in **Of Silk Saris and Mini Skirts**.

#### What are the main messages of your book?

I think the book attempts to explore several issues. Mainly, it explores how second generation South Asian youth in Toronto/Canada negotiate competing sets of expectations — that between Canadian mainstream society and peers and that of their parents, community and culture. It looks at how young women are particularly positioned as responsible for maintaining culture and ethnic identity and explores how their sexualities are regulated by community sanctions. It situates the argument about culture and ethnic identity in 19th century colonial discourses in India around women, nation and cultural difference. British colonialists used arguments about the treatment of women to justify their continued rule of India — **as in, look at how backward you people are, look at the way you treat your women, there are widow burnings, female infanticide etc., therefore you are not fit to rule your own country.** The Indian nationalists in turn constructed their response by using women as central to their argument for self-rule. They argued that "our women" are better than your women; they are more modest, chaste and spiritual. Therefore we are fit to rule. This was a way Indian nationalists constructed a sense of nationhood and Indian identity.

The book argues that the Diaspora uses similar arguments about womanhood, nation and cultural difference to hold itself together. Thus, second generation South Asian women find themselves under heavy community pressure to adhere to strict codes of modesty. But also, idealized notions of western expectations of adolescence are at complete odds with these codes of femininity. Adolescence is a phase that is considered to be one of rebellion and testing of independence. In order to fit in with teens you need to exhibit these kinds of behaviour.

The book places most of this discussion by looking at the modern period itself. What appears to be culture conflict is really about the clash of values between tradition/pre modern and modern times. I also look at the emergence of South Asian jams in the 1990s and both the mainstream Canadian and South Asian community's reaction to this. I look at Bhangra dance, Hindi remixes and South Asian fashion as a means by which South Asian youth in Canada have asserted their racial and cultural prejudice. Another theme explored in the book is racism, particularly looking at the ways in which we negotiate race and how it impacts our cultural esteem. I look at brown schools and white schools and the effects this has on our self-esteem. Like I said, the book attempts to expose the reader to the many complexities that face Canadian and South Asian communities and individuals in these diverse communities. It tries to do a lot!

**What inspired you to write your book?**

My own life, I guess. Trying to make sense of some of the things I went through growing up.

**What do you hope other people will gain by reading and using your book as a tool for education and awareness?**

Well, I hope that South Asians, who have struggled trying to deal with their experiences, by reading this book will feel less lonely. Actually, it's pretty amazing when you write a book; it's kind of weird because it is released into the world and you don't really have any collective feedback. It's not like going to a movie theatre and seeing the immediate reaction of an audience to a film.

I would say the most amazing thing is that I get emails from people, saying thank you so much for writing the book, or your book saved me from depression, or I read your book twice because I totally related to all the experiences. And it's just an amazing feeling to know that it's helpful in that way. Also, I think it's an important tool for those who don't understand the South Asian experience and to help break some of the stereotypes associated with South Asian culture.

**What is one of your favourite passages in the book and why?**

I think the opening passage would be my favourite. Why? Because it kind of sets up the book, arguing that we are not caught between cultures but between omissions. And also because it's written in first person narrative style. In fact, I like those parts of the book best and would like to pursue first person narrative or creative non-fiction style further.

**What inspired the title of the book — Of Silk Saris and Mini Skirts**

It was so difficult to pick a title of the book. I guess I wanted something simple and memorable but also something that speaks to our plight. The plight of South Asian women growing up here in Canada and also something that was pop culture enough so that non-South Asian people could relate to the title as well. I also wanted to capture the idea of being caught between two seemingly opposite things. Silk saris and mini skirts — my next book will be called mini skirts made out of silk saris — just kidding! The fact that we as a second generation walk between these two somewhere. I want the title to compel people to pick up the idea that we are trying to negotiate cultures and identities and all the trials and tribulations and joyful aspects of doing this.

**How do you hope your book will be received and used?**

Well, I like the fact that it has a broad appeal — that it is being used in universities, in English, sociology, women studies, media studies, and anthropology courses. It's also a book of relevance to the South Asian community.

**What population do you hope will access your book?**

Immigrant populations, white Canadians and South Asians. Everybody I guess.

**What are you doing now, Dr. Handa, besides being a DJ, and Toronto media personality?**

I am currently teaching at the University of Toronto in the Professional Writing Program. I teach Expressive Writing and Community and Writing. And I love teaching. I have recently been looking into the experience of students on diverse campuses. I find that most students, whether visible minorities or not, relate to the struggle of identity and belonging.



Those who identify as Canadians seem to feel they have no culture. They are bland and can't really relate to the issue of ethnic identity or they feel that they are now the minorities and don't really fit in on a campus that is diverse. I would like to interview students on diverse campuses to look at the ways in which they understand their struggles around identity and belonging. I am putting together a book that explores notions of community in creative fiction style. I am also looking for a full time university position and hope to continue research and writing.

If you would like to contact Amita, she can be emailed at [amitamasmix@yahoo.ca](mailto:amitamasmix@yahoo.ca) and her book, "Of Silk Saris and Mini Skirts" can be ordered on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or you can get it from Chapters, Indigo or the Toronto Women's Bookstore. Be sure and check out her monthly event, "Besharam," every first Friday of the month. [Besharam.Ca](http://Besharam.Ca).

**Soni Dasmohapatra** is the Community Development Coordinator at the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) in Toronto. For more information, check out CASSA's website at [www.cassa.org](http://www.cassa.org).



## GIRLS WHO BITE BACK: WITCHES, MUTANTS, SLAYERS AND FREAKS

Edited by Emily Pohl-Weary. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2004.

\$26.95 CDN (paperback), 360 pages.

Reviewed by Sally Choi



"Absolute power is coveted most by the powerless, and in our culture, that includes girls. ... [G]irls have a desperate need to identify women who can overcome obstacles," Emily Pohl-Weary writes in the introduction and first essay of **Girls Who Bite Back**, about women's early fascination with female superhero images in mainstream media. Even as adults, women are infatuated with "indestructible superchicks."

Just ask any of the 35 writers and artists who contributed short stories, comic strips, drawings, personal and cultural essays, and other category-defying creative fiction to **GWBB**. With their help, editor/mastermind Pohl-Weary has created a unique anthology about pop culture superheroines that's definitely worth sinking your teeth into.

In the essays, contributors trained their perceptive, analytical and sometimes irreverent eyes on a variety of topics, from the evolution of girl heroes in mainstream media to the value of today's female superheroes as feminist role models for girls and women. The pieces are insightful, thought-provoking, and persuasively argued. Some are downright entertaining and inspiring too.

Read Candra K. Gill's compelling essay on racial representation in "Buffy," and it will be hard not to notice that the superheroines who have dominated our movie or TV screens have almost always been white. Not to mention young, thin, beautiful, uncomplicated and often scantily clad — as noted in several essays, including Lisa Rundle's investigation of girl power as a product of male fantasies and corporate interests. But beyond the criticisms, Gill's essay inspires readers to become vigilant fans challenging oppression (like racism or sexism) in their favourite shows, while Rundle's cultural critique encourages them to demand better female superhero roles in mainstream media.

In her piece, Carly Stasko offers an empowering solution to the scarcity of superheroines in pop culture to whom most women can actually relate (i.e. heroines who look like them or whose powers are rooted in something other than sex and violence), and that is to become your own super-

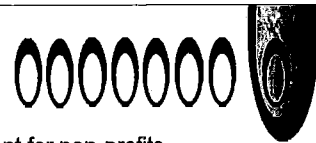
hero — for which she provides a how-to guide. Of course, the superheroines who really count, as the contributors agree, are the everyday superheroines around us: women who, despite being flawed human beings, overcome daily obstacles like poverty, discrimination or depression.

Where the essays identify a lack of strong feminist role models, many of the well-written and enjoyable stories fill in this void by creating alternative female heroes. In "Act of Grace" by Judy MacDonald, the hero is a middle-aged homeless woman; in Pohl-Weary's "Diamond Dame," she's an aging superhero past her prime. The protagonist in Hiromi Goto's lovely and eloquent "Stinky Girl" describes herself as fat, coloured and stinky. She narrates her woes in detail and constantly derides her physical features. Yet, she meets life's daily adversities with grace and inner strength.

New and reinvented superheroines are also depicted in the artwork. One memorable example is Sherwin Tjia's "Slumpyheroes," in which four popular female characters from TV and film are portrayed as women with less-than-the-ideal proportions. There is subversive humour and irony in the drawings, as what you see clashes with what you would expect as a result of cultural conditioning. More than that, the drawings also explore the idea of the everyday superheroine.

Maybe what we really need is not a fantasy, but a reality in which all girls bite back and the best superhero role model for girls and women is within themselves. Perhaps the best way to kick-start the revolution is to place a copy of this book in the hands of every girl, both young and old, and boy (who has the potential to make a good sidekick).

**Sally Choi** has a B.Sc. (Hon.) in zoology and environmental science from the University of Toronto and a certificate in online writing and information design from Centennial College. She has worked as a freelance writer, information designer, volunteer associate editor of a webzine (iDEa/iDEe), and volunteer puppeteer.



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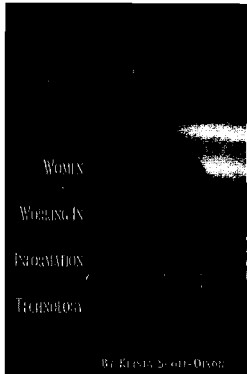
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## DOING IT: WOMEN WORKING IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

By Krista Scott-Dixon. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2004.  
\$26.95 CDN (paperback), 264 pages.

Reviewed by Pat Bird



The author of this vibrant account of women's work in the IT field in Canada supervises the development of a research database on gender and work at York University and also teaches undergraduate courses on work, women and technology at York.

In her introduction, she traces the spectacular growth of IT work in the '90s and describes the impact of the decline that began in 2001.

Women's layoffs were disproportionately high relative to their numbers in the field. If you have wondered whether you could really define the IT sector yourself, Scott-Dixon gives a definition that I found helpful: "IT work, then, is a category of convenience rather than precision, which suggests a loose grouping of work types that can vary by actual tasks performed, by work practices and by the relationship between employer and employee." Her very helpful Appendix A gives 2001 data on IT sub-sectors, percentage of women in IT industries, percentage of women in IT occupations and average salaries for those occupations.

She notes that women often enter IT through unconventional routes. Few of the women she interviewed had degrees or diplomas in computer science. Many of her interviewees use a combination of technical and non-technical skills in their IT work. The claims of the IT industry that there is a severe skill shortage are "unsubstantiated." The issue of whether call centre work is IT work is thoroughly discussed. The role of private schools in churning out new IT grads with certificates and diplomas is also critiqued. Often students learn specific skills, that may quickly become outdated as technology changes, and not the crucial problem-solving and design skills.

In the next chapter, Scott-Dixon gives an overview of standard and non-standard work patterns in the IT sector. The non-standard pattern is becoming more of the norm, partly to meet the demands of consumers expecting 24/7 service, and partly as women juggling childcare and paid work demands opt for tele-working or self-employment at home. Outsourcing of call centre and other IT work to third world countries creates greater uncertainty and downward pressure on wages here in Canada.

Summing up, Scott-Dixon reviews the Nortel fiasco which deprived 60,000 employees of their jobs while

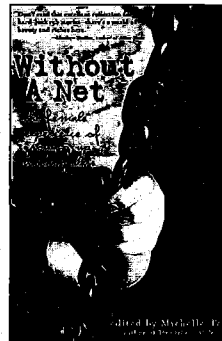
rewarding executives with bonuses, like Frank Dunn's \$2.15 million. The hype about growth came to a crashing halt with the largest casualties being felt by those least responsible for the loose accounting practices of the executives. Scott-Dixon also points to the individualistic culture of IT types as a barrier to effective union organizing to defend wages and working conditions. She certainly feels women have a solid place in IT but it's not a path strewn with roses in the 21st century. Her statistical appendix is very useful and so is the profile of the women she interviewed. For women considering entering the IT field, the diversity of women's backgrounds is hopeful. This book is a very helpful primer on a field often seen as mysterious.

**Pat Bird** works as an educational counsellor at Times Change Women's Employment Service and has been researching aspects of Canadian women's work for several decades.

## WITHOUT A NET: THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE OF GROWING UP WORKING CLASS

Editor Michelle Tea. Emeryville CA: Seal Press, 2003.  
\$14.95 US, 224 pages

Reviewed by Sandra Tam



In this collection of first person narratives, women tell stories of growing up in poor and working-class families. Editor Michelle Tea chose the title **Without a Net** to signify the risk of living young lives knowing that there is no one to catch you in case you screw up and fall. Among these diverse tales of creative survival, and some distinct themes emerged.

First, many authors challenge the notion that being poor is simply about not having enough money. In "Winter Coat," Terri Griffith realizes that growing up "without" means that she can't afford a fancy coat, but cannot enjoy it: "Class is about more than money; it's about safety and security." She notes that what you have today, you will have to live with tomorrow. It's about having faith and feeling safe in the future. "When my coat gets worn out, there will be no one to catch me."

Themes of food and eating run through many of the chapters. Authors write about the comfort of a bowl of potatoes, cooked in every way possible, or a bowl of creamed, chunky soup. One author writes about bruised apples, or like butterscotch. In her story, "Dinner Time," a woman writes that her meals with her mother were different from the meals she ate in the dorms.

only in terms of the types of food and amounts served, but the overall relationship that people from different class locations have to food and eating.

Although many stories covered struggles with health and dental care, "My Season of Paper Dresses" most poignantly illustrates how the health concerns of an entire community of poor residents living in an area contaminated with dioxin were ignored. Instead of real medical attention for her persistent cough, author Colleen McKee is offered condoms, an HIV and PAP test, and Robitussin samples at the public health clinic.

Violence is highlighted in many of the stories. It appears as an immediate strategy for survival in "Fighting," or a prolonged experience of sexual abuse in "Dirty." The violence of poverty is also experienced in more subtle ways. For example, in "My Memory and Witness," Goldschmidt and Spade describe the humiliation of attending a "white trash"-themed barbecue. Many of the writers point out violence at the intersections of sexism, racism and homophobia.

The stories attest to the complexity of working-class and poor identities and lives. In "The Poet and the Pauper," Meliza Bañales tells about her struggle to assert herself as an accomplished poet and writer in reaction to the incredulous disbelief of a stranger. She says: "The famous poet wanted me to tell him how it happened, how I came to this, to be in books and universities, to be the judge of literature when I came from nothing, which really meant I had nothing, which equalled I was nothing." Yet, despite a culture that denigrates all things poor and working class, she insists on writing "real life."

The complexity of working-class identity means that struggles to transcend one's class status are not without complication. Frances Varian recognizes that "Getting Out" likely means having to exploit someone else's labour. In "Ghetto Fabulous," Fakhrid-Deen experiences the ambiguity of becoming middle-class while reclaiming "ghetto" as the space where people can possibly interact across their class differences.

I recall my own childhood in these stories. I remember the dull grey concrete landscape of the inner-city housing project where I grew up. Where there weren't any window

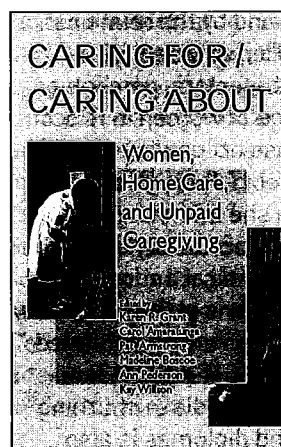
boxes with yellow tulips and orange marigolds. Where you would never see country style welcome mats because no one leaves anything outside except garbage. Where everyone walked briskly and no one strolled. The apartment building entrance, its heavy metal doors with bars across the top, made me think of Siobhan Brooks' descriptions in "The Prison We Call Home."

For me, these stories effectively reflect the nuances and enduring impacts of living at the margins. Reading this book made me think of how I still hang on to my working-class experience like the security blanket I long to throw away but never do, because I still seek its comfort from time to time, even though I know it never really did, or ever will, keep me warm.

### CARING FOR/CARING ABOUT: WOMEN, HOME CARE AND UNPAID CAREGIVING

Edited by Karen R. Grant, Carol Amaratunga, Pat Armstrong, Madeline Boscoe, Ann Pederson, and Kay Willson.  
Aurora Ontario: Garamond Press, 2004.  
\$24.95 CDN, 224 pages

Reviewed by Cynthia Tam



Who cares? Women do. Why should we care? Because almost 80% of paid and unpaid caregivers are women. Because health care cuts and restructuring means downgrading of care without adequate resources to the community, home, and predominantly, to women. Because the gendered nature of caregiving must be understood in order for just and equitable policies and practices to be created.

Because caregiving is a public issue: a social, political, global, and economic issue. Because care affects each and every woman's life. If we don't care about care, who will? **Caring For/Caring About: Women, Home Care, and Unpaid Caregiving** makes people care. The seven chapters in this book will make you think not only about who cares but the conditions that shape the how, when, and where care is given.

First — the big picture. The first chapter discusses how global trends such as free trade, "commodification" of care, "disposable domestics", and first and third world inequalities affect care practices. The state makes the decisions, influenced by market mechanisms such as privatization and for-profit care, and therefore deter-

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mines how resources are distributed. The shift of care from public to private spheres has resulted in the devaluing of paid and unpaid care work.

For women who make up the majority of caregivers and care recipients, this is bad news. Gender-based research reveals that care costs. For women caregivers, care interferes with paid work and, consequently, pensions and benefits. Care affects women's health more negatively than men, with rural and lesbian/gay populations experiencing more stress. As care recipients, women receive less short-term, post-op home care and were found to be at greater risk for violence and personal safety. The author stresses the need for gender-based analysis of home care policy and practices to determine the socioeconomic impact due to structural and gender inequalities.

As care boundaries have shifted to the community and home, "home care now more than ever" is vital to the health care system. Vital but not perfect. In an ideal world, people would have more control and choice within a home care system that is flexible to their needs. In Kari Krogh's chapter on "Redefining Home Care for Women with Disabilities: A Call for Citizenship," flexibility means changes to the provision and delivery of home care services. In Shelley Thomas Prokop et al.'s chapter on "Aboriginal Women and Home Care," flexibility means a home care program that incorporates the unique values and traditional healing techniques of the culture. In Nancy Guberman's "Designing Home and Community Care for the Future: Who Needs to Care?," flexibility of resources is key. Formal services are crucial to support the clients and families that choose to be cared for at home. However, if working conditions are poor and financial compensation is inadequate, who would want the job? When home care supports are not enough, then institutionalization needs to be viewed as a viable option.

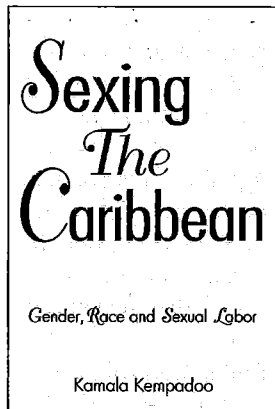
If home is where the heart is, then society must ensure that home care continues to remain active if the entire health system is to function well. It is necessary to think about the context and conditions in which care is done. Care work must be visible and valued, recognized and compensated. Current home care policies and practices must recognize the socioeconomic impact and gender inequalities that exist for women who give and receive care. As is the title of the book, caring about and caring for are not the same thing; each is equally as important, equally as challenging.

**Cynthia Tam** is an Occupational Therapist with experience in the private and public health sector as a community therapist. Previously an in-home (home care) services coordinator, she currently works in placement services at the Scarborough Community Care Access Centre, assessing eligibility and facilitating admission to long-term care homes.

## SEXING THE CARIBBEAN: GENDER, RACE, AND SEXUAL LABOR

by Kamala Kempadoo. London: Routledge, 2004.  
\$24.95 US (paperback), 264 pages

Reviewed by Katherine Verhagen



Kempadoo provides an extensive, but impassioned, exploration into the economic and social motivations of Caribbean sex workers. Though "numerous studies have been conducted on aspects of sex and sexuality in the Caribbean," she states, "little has centered exclusively on Caribbean sexuality or connects racialized sexualized practices with the economy." She backs her claims with a decade of research, placing herself within Third World feminism as practiced by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Himani Bannerji.

She explores the inevitable link between tourism and the sex industry, simultaneously oppressing and liberating Caribbean sex workers. On one hand, workers "confirm racializing and exoticizing ideas about the hypersexual nature of the Caribbean" and thus often reconstruct the limits of obtained financial mobility. Nevertheless, Kempadoo asserts that, by taking such work, "they transform racialized, exoticized bodies into resources for freedom, betterment, and economic development." As well, her discussion of migrant sex work opens up challenging questions about the possibilities of globalization for empowerment or for dissolution into invisible, underground economies that compromise personal freedoms.

Her treatment of male and female sex workers alike presents a comprehensive view of Caribbean economies that facilitate such economic opportunities. By breaking the gender boundary in her discussion, she treats her subjects more like agents in a global economy than as aggressors or victims. I see an attempt at objectivity that is most effective and adds to the persuasiveness of her argumentation. She doesn't make a concise argument about how we, as readers should feel about the evidence that will be presented. This book, until the last chapter, seems to be less a call to action and more of a resource of documentation.

However, she doesn't fully explore "what sex workers as agents constitute a 'rebellious pillar' in Caribbean history" until her last chapter on "Resistance and the Future." This results in the last chapter being a different tone unlike any other presented. In her discussion of Caribbean sex workers, she covers everything from the "fiery" sex workers of the Caribbean to the communities of Amazon.

sion of women's subversive bodily actions in dance hall culture and to Tesjaswini Niranjana's explorations of constructions of Indian womanhood and self-representation. I found this section to be disjointed and it slowed the momentum of work achieved by the preceding chapters. Also, I find it odd that she discusses, exclusively, the possibilities for female sex workers in this chapter while male sex workers featured more prominently in her earlier sections. This section is immediately followed by an extensive discussion about sex-worker organizations such as the Stichting Max Linder Association (SMLA) in Suriname and MODEMU (Movimiento de Mujeres Unidas — the Movement of United Women) in the Dominican Republic. Therefore, I remain confused about why Kempadoo waits until the last chapter to get into this much detail about collective action within sex worker organizations, if she has spent most of her book talking about the possibilities for their social and economic empowerment.

I found this to be a challenging and insightful book, regardless, of the shift in tone in the last section. Ending with a focus on resistance, rebellion, and futures for sex workers is a much needed and appreciated gesture on Kempadoo's part, one that she earns the right to pursue given her extensive research into the subject. However, I wish that she had not varied as much in her tone as it compromises her persuasiveness and innovation in discussing such a challenging topic.

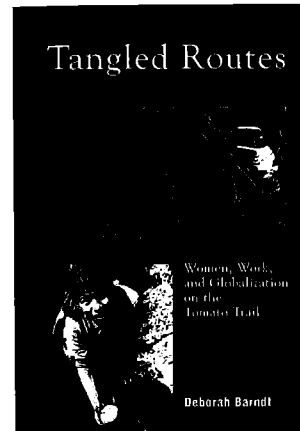
**Katherine Verhagen** is a doctoral candidate in English and in Book History and Print Culture at the University of Toronto. She is doing a publishing history on Caribbean-Canadian women writers, focusing primarily on their distribution and reception in Canadian and international publishing markets.

## TANGLED ROUTES: WOMEN, WORK AND GLOBALIZATION ON THE TOMATO TRAIL

By Deborah Barndt. Aurora, Ontario: Garamond Press, 2002

\$34.95 CDN, 256 pages

Reviewed by Lisa Jackson



Have you wondered where your food originates? In pre-industrial societies, peasants produced, prepared, and consumed their own sustenance. But today, most citizens of industrialized nations have little control over the means of food production, with the supermarket serving as the originating point of food. In **Tangled Routes**, Deborah Barndt uses the tomato to “demystify” the North

American global food system — the process whereby multinational corporations dominate the production and consumption of food across international borders. Through the stories of women workers, she places a “human face” on globalization by showing the impact of work reorganization based on neoliberal principles that seek to maximize profit at all social costs.

Looking “from above,” Barndt analyzes three corporations involved in the global food chain: agribusiness (Empaque Santa Rosa), supermarkets (Loblaws), and fast-food restaurants (McDonald's). She relates how corporate dynamics, strategies, and work structure contribute to gender inequality and the loss of bio-cultural diversity. “From below,” Barndt examines how the system impacts women, as they are “at the centre of the food system” as producers, consumers, and workers in the food industry. Barndt perceives traditional food preparation and consumption as vital to cultural preservation, and regards new technologies and “monocultural production” of agribusiness as a substantial threat to ethnoracial identity. Specifically, family eating traditions have been transformed by the entry of women into the workforce. In the book, Loblaws, McDonald's, and Santa Rosa female employees describe how their erratic work schedules limit their ability to prepare and consume meals, as well as interact with family members. For Barndt, the global food system has forced women to compromise the needs of their families in order to satisfy the demands of their employers.

However, Barndt's perspective reinforces traditional gender ideologies by associating women's absence from the home with the “disintegration” of family and culture.

BRITT SANTOWSKI



First, she assumes that women prefer unpaid domestic labour over a low-paid "menial" job within a corporation. Second, she places expectations upon women to transmit culture and sustain family cohesion through food traditions. Lastly, she fallaciously assumes that the labour flexibility of migrant workers has "shattered" their communities and "disintegrated" their families because their households are fragmented. For instance, Barndt overlooks the possibility that Mexican families maintain strong familial connections — as well as cultural traditions — despite their physical separation. Although households may expand or contract to accommodate the changing needs of the workforce, this does not mean that family solidarity has weakened. In fact, this may reveal the strength of the collective effort to survive. Feminist scholars have to be careful in associating household fragmentation with a lack of social cohesion — an attitude resembling the social theorists of the 1960s, who labelled black urban families as disorderly because they were predominately headed by single women.

Although effectively arguing that the global food system has reinforced gender inequality, Barndt downplays the ways in which the industry provides greater autonomy for some women. Tomasa, a Mexican tomato picker, perceived the introduction of new technologies and "monocultural production" as improving her life. Before, Mexican "women practically killed themselves working, but they don't have to work so much now" due to manufactured tortillas, washing machines, and fertilizer. Tomasa did not consider manufactured food as jeopardizing Mexican culture; instead, she appreciated it as a time-saving device that helps her manage the daily domestic work. However, Barndt interprets Tomasa as dependent on "the family wage" and her husband, and overlooks the ways in which these changes have empowered her. For instance, agribusiness offers some Mexican women the prospect of choosing an alternative lifestyle. But Barndt reflexively criticizes the work structure by claiming that older, unmarried women who have "wedded" corporations have "lost all opportunity to create a family due to their flexibility to meet corporate needs." This approach reinforces traditional gender norms by failing to recognize the independence that women acquire from paid labour — regardless of how menial it may seem to an outsider.

Likewise, Barndt ignores that women might prefer paid labour over family responsibilities and might not want to preserve cultural traditions. As Arlie Hochschild reveals, many female workers feel more fulfilled at work than home: while work serves as a social forum that offers workers a socially-valued identity, many women feel underappreciated for their unpaid domestic labour. Barndt fails to realize that some Mexican women might find greater fulfillment in picking, packing, and sorting

tomatoes than raising children or preparing food. As Juana relates, "I like this work; I'm still here." At the very least, paid labour might offer these women a nice supplement to family life, and facilitate the prospect for them to develop a more complete identity.

Overall, **Tangled Routes** presents an interesting, yet flawed depiction of the impact of globalization on women. Although I emphasize the negative aspects of Barndt's findings, on the whole, she provides a valuable contribution by offering unique insight into the mechanisms of gender inequality. Barndt convincingly illustrates how capitalist work organization strains families, and provides strong evidence for the state to assume responsibility for the family. Nevertheless, Barndt should exercise more care in her interpretations of interviewees' testimonies, and re-evaluate her conceptions of what constitutes family stability. Without sufficient evidence, she concludes that women's absence from the home has "wreaked havoc on families" by leading to the "death [of] many social and cultural eating traditions." Above all, in criticizing capitalism, Barndt and other feminist scholars have to be careful not to impose values that potentially oppress cross-cultural populations.

**Lisa Jackson** is a Masters of Social Work student at the University of Toronto, specializing in women and gender studies. Her current interests include the impact of social policy on women's access to medical services and their overall health and quality of life. As an aspiring social worker, she hopes to improve the status of women through advocacy, social planning, and empowerment initiatives in the field of public health.

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## WHISPER WRITING: TEENAGE GIRLS TALK ABOUT ABLEISM AND SEXISM

By Melissa Jones. New York: Peter Lang, 2004. \$29.95 US (paperback), 216 pages

Reviewed by Bathseba Opintso



In *Whisper Writing*, Melissa Jones reports on an ethnographic study that examined the institutionalization of and service provision for Emotional Disorder (ED) students in one segregated ED schooling environment in the USA. Specifically, Jones documents how three female students (Air, Isis, and Mandy) reacted to the ED culture in which they were submersed and how these girls' sense of

identity was shaped by those reactions. The goal was to have the girls become more cognizant of the forces that contributed to their subjugation and choice of accommodation and resistance.

The book is emphatic. The author opens each chapter with emotive quotes from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. These incredible openings are not only thought provoking but also key connecting threads of each chapter. One is seduced, hooked, and left hankering for the emergent issues in the book.

*Whisper Writing* is organized into fourteen chapters. The introductory section explores the complexities of working with ED adolescents. Jones critiques the developing of programs for adolescents from adult perspectives. The author argues that such an approach ignores the adolescents' lives/experiences. In a bid to resolve this problem, Jones suggests that professionals and parents tap on their own adolescence experiences and memories and listen to the adolescents in order to understand what they are facing.

Chapter one gives an overview of the ED schooling environment: history of the program; eligibility criteria; partners in the program; organization and everyday routine of the program. The author illustrates how various apparatus, such as school administrators, teachers, teaching assistants, police officers, mental health workers, and school nurse, work to police ED students.

In chapters two and three, Jones documents Air's lifestyle; social relations; hobbies; home life and parental relations; relationships with teachers; encounters with the juvenile court system; and the various ways she gets to "survive" socially, physically and emotionally. Employing the victim syndrome concept, Jones describes Air as a

victim of abuse, although Air does not see herself as a survivor.

Chapter four and five feature Isis, a fourteen-year-old bad tempered "tomboy". Isis's narrative highlights how she exerts control over her environment through strategic negotiation; manipulation; "straight talking"; avoidance; and interruption. Jones also divulges unforeseen findings on racism. Although the author had assumed that race could not be an issue in the ED environment because of the homogenous race and culture of the school population; Isis's story revealed racist and stereotypic attitudes towards blacks, Mexicans, and non-English speaking immigrants in general.

Chapters six and seven review Mandy's story. Like Air and Isis, Mandy was prone to victim blaming. She dealt with uncomfortable situations by way of avoidance; begging assistance from peers or teachers; developing a "don't care" attitude; or feigning injury or sickness. Perhaps disquieting in these chapters is the way the school team dealt with Mandy's behavioral problems by privileging the medical model of disability. Mandy was institutionalized in a residential treatment facility and later hospitalized. She finally ended up in a juvenile detention center where she was "figuratively absorbed by the organizational structures of the juvenile court system and mental health services".

In chapter eight Jones explores the question of identity by centering the notion of "self." The author discusses different ways of viewing identity formation and affirms that identity formation of girls with ED is rarely explored; the traumatic experiences of abuse, neglect and failure in their classrooms and their responses to these experiences influence their sense of cultural and gender identity. Jones emphasizes that ED girls' identity ought to be studied in relation to the historical, material, and political influences that had an impact on how these girls view themselves.

Chapter nine is about power and the construction of individual identity. Jones examines ways societal, organizational, interpersonal and individual power control and structure these women's identity and lives as a whole. The analysis is propped with specific explorations of power in the school context, presented in chapter ten. The author provides examples of school structures that are created to regulate students (rules; systems of punishment; systems of rewards and privileges; curriculum and instruction; police and juvenile justice system; detention and suspension). Jones critiques these forms of power, arguing that they are often designed to benefit educators, not students.


In chapter eleven Jones analyzes the impact of interpersonal power on the girls' gender identity. The author explains how teachers, family members and peers exercised interpersonal power on the girls in ways that marginalized them. Chapter twelve examines the girls' use

of individual power to challenge control by organizational and interpersonal power. Jones noted that instead of individual power liberating the girls, it oppressed and marginalized them.

Chapter thirteen discusses the girls' efforts to empower themselves. Jones argues that although Air, Isis, and Mandy lacked the tools needed to emancipate themselves; their ability to recognize oppressive power structures indicated that they were on their way to personal empowerment. The final chapter reveals the intricacies of segregating disabled students and primarily those with behavioral issues. Jones views such segregation as colonizing and isolating. She argues that many of the students involved in the ED program are casualties of oppressive practices. Moreover, girls in the program are marginalized further because of gender. Jones concludes with an examination of the relevance of the study to educational settings and the wider society and also suggests strategies for restructuring segregated ED programs.

Writings have limitations and Melissa Jones's is no exception. There are several reductionist assumptions that are debatable. Even so, **Whisper Writing** has rich inspiring stories that leave one questioning segregated service provision for disabled students. The book is a must read for students, teachers, parents, policy makers, and stakeholders interested and involved in special education and disability studies.

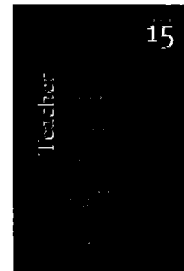
**Bathseba M. Opini** is a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

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Since 1984, *Feminist Teacher* has been at the forefront of discussions about how to fight sexism, racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression in our classrooms and in the institutions in which we work. A peer-reviewed journal, *Feminist Teacher* provides a forum for interrogations of cultural assumptions and

discussions of such topics as multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, and distance education within a feminist context. *Feminist Teacher* serves as a medium in which educators can describe strategies that have worked in their classrooms, institutions, or non-traditional settings; theorize about successes or failures; discuss the current place of feminist pedagogies and teachers in classrooms and institutions; and reveal the rich variety of feminist pedagogical approaches. The journal also remains committed to addressing issues that face educators today, including anti-feminism, anti-academic backlash, and sexual harassment.

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Frequency: Three times a year (FALL, WINTER, SPRING).

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# Updates

## Women's Global Charter for Humanity

R. Modlich



Still marching: "The World March of Women, of which we are part, views patriarchy as the system oppressing women and capitalism as the system that enables a minority to exploit the vast majority of women and men... We reject this world," states the Women's Global Charter for Humanity. On December 10, 2004, about 80 delegates from around the world adopted this charter in Kigali, Rwanda, as the culmination of consultation, discussion and debate among women's groups in 60 countries. The World March of Women chose Kigali to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the genocide.

"We propose to build a world where exploitation, oppression, intolerance and exclusion no longer exist and where integrity, diversity and the rights and freedoms of all are respected. This charter is based on the values of equality, freedom, solidarity, justice

and peace." Each of these values is supported and elaborated by several affirmations. The full text is included in the World March's website: [www.marchemondiale.org](http://www.marchemondiale.org).

Throughout 2005, the Charter will rouse women in 53 countries. It began its pilgrimage on International Women's Day, March 8, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and will come to rest October 17 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, the world's poorest country. At every stop, women will contribute to a solidarity patchwork quilt illustrating the values of the Charter. It will be in Canada, May 1 to 5 and in Quebec, May 6 to 8.

The Federation Feministe de Quebec (FFQ) initiated the World March of Women of 2000. The political platform of that march was presented to the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the United Nations without even one concrete response. It has since grown into an international feminist action network, connecting 5500 grass-roots groups in 163 countries. It works to eliminate poverty and violence against women, to build "...a world filled with hope and life..."

For further information contact World March of Women, [info@marchemondiale.org](mailto:info@marchemondiale.org), or look up their website: [www.marchemondiale.org](http://www.marchemondiale.org).

## IWS&S

### Institute for Women's Studies & Gender Studies University of Toronto

The Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies is pleased to announce the following undergraduate courses for Summer 2005. For more information visit our website at [www.utoronto.ca/iwsgs](http://www.utoronto.ca/iwsgs).

#### SUMMER 2005 COURSE TIMETABLE\*

Course Number	Course Title	Section	Lecture Time	Lecture Location	Instructor
NEW160Y1 Y	Introduction to Women's Studies	L0101	TR10-1	WI 1017	Z. Newman
NEW365H1 S	Gender Issues in the Law	L0101	TR3-5	WI 523	J. Sealy-Burke
NEW365H1 S	Gender Issues in the Law	L5101	TR6-8	WI 523	J. Sealy-Burke
NEW367H1 F	Women and Health	L5101	TR6-9	WI 523	TBA
NEW368H1 F	Gender and Cultural Difference: Transnational Perspectives	L5101	MW6-8:30	WI 524	L. Manicom

\*Please note that the Summer 2005 Course Timetable will be finalized in March, 2005 and officially posted in April, 2005. Small changes or updates can occur up until that time.

#### Details about Course Numbers:

"F" courses run from May 16 - June 24, 2005. The official exam period for F courses is June 27 - June 30, 2005.

"S" courses run from July 4 - August 12, 2005. The official exam period for S and Y courses is August 15 - August 19, 2005.

"Y" courses run from May 16 - August 12, 2005.

#### Details about Lecture Times:

M = Monday, T = Tuesday, W = Wednesday, R = Thursday, F = Friday.

#### Details about Lecture Locations:

"WI" stands for Wilson Hall, New College, 40 Willcocks Street.

Room 1017 is located on the first floor of Wilson Hall. Rooms 523 and 524 are located on the basement level of Wilson Hall.

#### Details about Course Instructors:

"TBA" stands for "to be arranged." Final details will be known by April, 2005.

# Announcements

## The Karen Hadley Memorial Bursary

Karen Hadley was a passionate feminist educator and researcher whose work centred on issues of women and work, gender, workplace restructuring, training and labour unions. She completed her undergraduate studies at York University in 1976 and received her Ed.D. from the University of Toronto in 1994.

Karen's publications include papers on women's economic inequality, the implications of restructuring on women workers in electronics manufacturing, and women and global restructuring, as well as on the changing nature of workplace training and restructuring in the printing industry in Canada.

Karen was active in both the women's movement and the labour movement despite a two-decade struggle with cancer. She died in May 2004.

The Karen Hadley Memorial Bursary, an endowment fund in the School of Women's Studies at York University, is being set up in memory of Karen Hadley and to support further feminist research into women and work. It will be awarded each year to one student in the School of Women's Studies at York University. One bursary of at least \$1,000 will be made each year.

Applicants to the Karen Hadley Memorial Bursary must: be in their final year of undergraduate studies in the School of Women's Studies; be Canadian citizens and residents of Ontario; demonstrate financial need on a bursary application; submit a one-page essay linking their studies, interests and future academic work to the work of Karen Hadley.

To Contribute to the Bursary:

All contributions made to the Karen Hadley Memorial Bursary before March 31, 2005 will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the Ontario government through the Ontario Student Opportunity Trust Fund.

To contribute to the Karen Hadley Memorial Bursary, please contact:

Pamela Quirk  
Chief Development Officer  
Faculty of Arts  
York University Foundation  
416-650-8145 or [quirkp@yorkfoundation.yorku.ca](mailto:quirkp@yorkfoundation.yorku.ca)

Your contribution to the Karen Hadley Memorial Bursary qualifies for a charitable tax credit for income tax purposes. The York University Foundation will issue charitable tax receipts.

## Labouring Feminism and Feminist Working Class History in North America and Beyond

An International Conference at the University of Toronto

29 September-2 October 2005

[www.utoronto.ca/csus/labourfem](http://www.utoronto.ca/csus/labourfem)

This conference aims to create intellectual and political space for dealing with issues of major importance to scholars and activist

academics working in the areas of labour feminism and female activism across multiple sites and contexts. We particularly desire to address feminist theoretical and political debates and facilitate dialogue across the generations within a context of mutual respect. Ultimately we seek to explore ways of moving beyond current polarities in labour history and towards more inclusive ways of re-conceptualizing working-class studies.

The conference themes include:

- Labour Feminism and Female Activism
- Feminism & Working Class History
- Race/Ethnicity
- Sexuality and Bodies
- Home, Workplace & Community Struggles
- Critical Conversations Across Boundaries

Sponsors: University of Toronto: Centre for the Study of the United States; Munk Centre for International Studies; Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies; Bissell-Heyd Chair of American Studies. Journals: Feminist Studies; International Labor and Working-Class History; Journal of Women's History; Labor: Working-Class History in the Americas; Left History, Atlantis. Organizations/Institutions: Labor and Working-Class History Association; International Federation for Research in Women's History; Canadian Committee on Women's History; Canadian Committee on Labour History; Left Feminist Working Group; York University Department of History, University of Manitoba Labour and Workplace Studies Program

Contact Information: Labouring Feminism Conference  
c/o Centre for the Study of the United States  
Munk Centre for International Studies  
University of Toronto  
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[labour.fem@utoronto.ca](mailto:labour.fem@utoronto.ca)

## Imagining Public Policy to Meet Women's Economic Security Needs

October 14-15, 2005 — Vancouver, British Columbia  
[www.sfu.ca/esconference2005/](http://www.sfu.ca/esconference2005/)

The conference is sponsored by the Economic Security Project ([www.sfu.ca/economicsecurityproject](http://www.sfu.ca/economicsecurityproject)), a multi-year research initiative funded by the SSHRC-Community-University Research Alliance grant. The principle partners in this alliance are the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-BC and the Women's Studies Department at Simon Fraser University.

The Economic Security Project looks at three major areas to understand the changes in public policy and their impact on vulnerable populations. The three major areas of research are:  
1. employment standards and barriers to labour market participation;  
2. welfare and social policy reform;  
3. restructuring of community-based services.

The intent of the conference will be to explore alternative public policy as it pertains to economic security. While some critique of existing public policy will be a key point will be to try to advance

**Anthology — Rise and Resist: Young Queer Women Do Activism**

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

Submissions must be received by June 30, 2005.

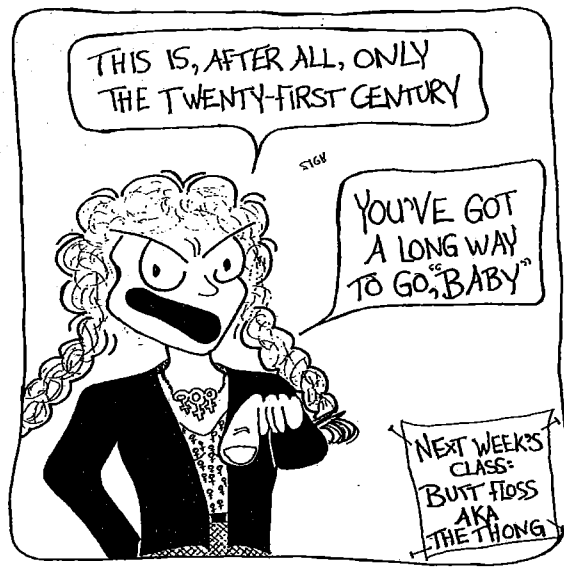
I am looking for personal essays written by lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women (in their late teens to early thirties) on their participation in queer activism(s). I want to create a snapshot of what young queer women are doing to resist the current oppressive political climate that engulfs our lives. This is an outlet for creative queer women's resistance and an offering of hope for future endeavours in queer activist struggles. Possible topics may include, but are certainly not limited to:

- How one became involved in queer activism/learning how to become an activist
- Everyday activism(s)
- Historical presence of activism

- What we've learned from lesbian separatism/the current place of lesbian separatism
- Queering the queer: bi and trans-activisms
- Coalition-building politics
- Gender activism as queer activism
- Experiences in activist organizations/circles
- Activist families (chosen or biological)
- Support networks in queer activism
- The importance of street activism(s), radical activism(s), etc.
- Queer activism in this particular political climate

Send one hardcopy of your submission to:  
 Maura Ryan  
 Department of Sociology  
 University of Florida, Turlington 3219, P.O. Box  
 117330, Gainesville, FL 32611  
 e-mail queries to: mryan@ufl.edu

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**Update on Pay Equity in Canada:  
National Association of Women and the Law and  
New Pay Equity Network (PEN) Launch Campaign  
for Federal Pay Equity Legislation**  
www.nawl.ca

On February 14th, 2005, NAWL and the Pay Equity Network launched our campaign for proactive pay equity legislation at the Famous Five monument on Parliament Hill. We sent a Valentine's Day card to every MP and Senator to remind them that Pay Equity is at the Heart of Equality. Over 160 women's groups, labour unions and community organizations have signed on to this call to action. A press conference was also held in Moncton and our partners in Québec issued a press release.

More than 25 years after the adoption of the Canadian Human Rights Act, women working full-time still earn 71% of men's salaries, regardless of our age, occupation or education. The wage

gap is even greater for Aboriginal women, racialized women, and new immigrant women.

In response to pressures from organized labour and the women's movement, the federal government created the Task Force on Pay Equity that submitted its final report in May 2004. This report proposes pro-active, stand-alone, federal pay-equity legislation and expanded coverage of pay equity to Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and visible minorities. Although the Task Force recommendations are good news for women, they have not yet been implemented.

NAWL and partners have formed the Pay Equity Network and will be lobbying the federal government to adopt the Task Force recommendations. We have drafted a backgrounder on the issues and we are mobilizing women's groups and other equality-seeking organizations to sign a declaration statement. In this statement, we call for the immediate implementation of the Task Force recommendations.

In the spring of 2005, NAWL will also begin a series of popular legal education workshops around women's equality in the workforce and the federal pay equity system. Our goal is to share information with women's organizations about the current pay equity framework, to learn from women's experiences, and to mobilize different communities to lobby the federal government.

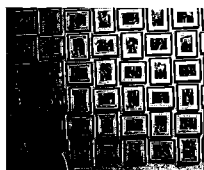
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Vol. 30, Nos. 3/4 (2003)

Guest editors:

Himani Bannerji and Shahrazad Mojab



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**Sustainable Planning 2005  
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Paper Deadline 13 May 2005**

The meeting is organised by Wessex Institute of Technology, UK, and sponsored by WIT Transactions on Ecology & the Environment. The Conference will address the subjects of sustainable planning and regional development in an integrated way as well as in accordance with the principles of sustainability. It has become apparent that planners, environmentalists, architects, engineers, policy makers and economists have to work together in order to ensure that planning and development can meet our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations.

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

Papers are invited on the topics outlined and others falling within the scope of the meeting. Abstracts of no more than 300 words should be submitted as soon as possible. We strongly encourage the submission of abstracts electronically. Abstracts should state the purpose, results and conclusions of the work to be presented in the final paper. Final acceptance will be based on the abstract paper which, if accepted for publication, must be presented at the conference. To be fair to all participants, each individual participant will only be able to submit one paper. The language of the abstracts will be English.

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- Environmental legislation and policy
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- Rural development
- Waste management
- Transportation
- Urban Landscape Transformations

For further information about abstract submission and about the conference: [www.wessex.ac.uk/conferences/2005/spd2005/3.html](http://www.wessex.ac.uk/conferences/2005/spd2005/3.html)

Katie Banham

Conference Secretariat

SPD 2005

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Southampton, SO40 7AA

Telephone: 44 (0) 238 029 3223

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Email: [kbanham@wessex.ac.uk](mailto:kbanham@wessex.ac.uk)

## Women's Health & Urban Life: An International & Interdisciplinary Journal

### CALL FOR PAPERS

Women's Health & Urban Life Journal is a peer review publication located at the Department of Sociology, University of Toronto. The journal addresses a plethora of topics relating to women's and girls' health from an international and interdisciplinary perspective, and links health to globalization and urbanization issues. General topics include but are not limited to: Women's health in general; Health related to reproduction; Health related to sexuality; Health related to paid or unpaid labour; Health related to parenthood; Health and the environment; Health and social policy; and Health related to urbanization and globalization issues. The orientation of the journal is critical, feminist and social scientific. Both qualitative and quantitative manuscripts, and theoretical or empirical works are welcome. Papers should not exceed 30 pages, and four copies of the paper should be submitted. All submissions will be peer reviewed by anonymous reviewers. For more details about the goals, substantive basis and submission guidelines of the new journal, please contact:

Professor Aysan Sev'er, General Editor

Department of Sociology

University of Toronto at Scarborough

1265 Military Trail, Scarborough

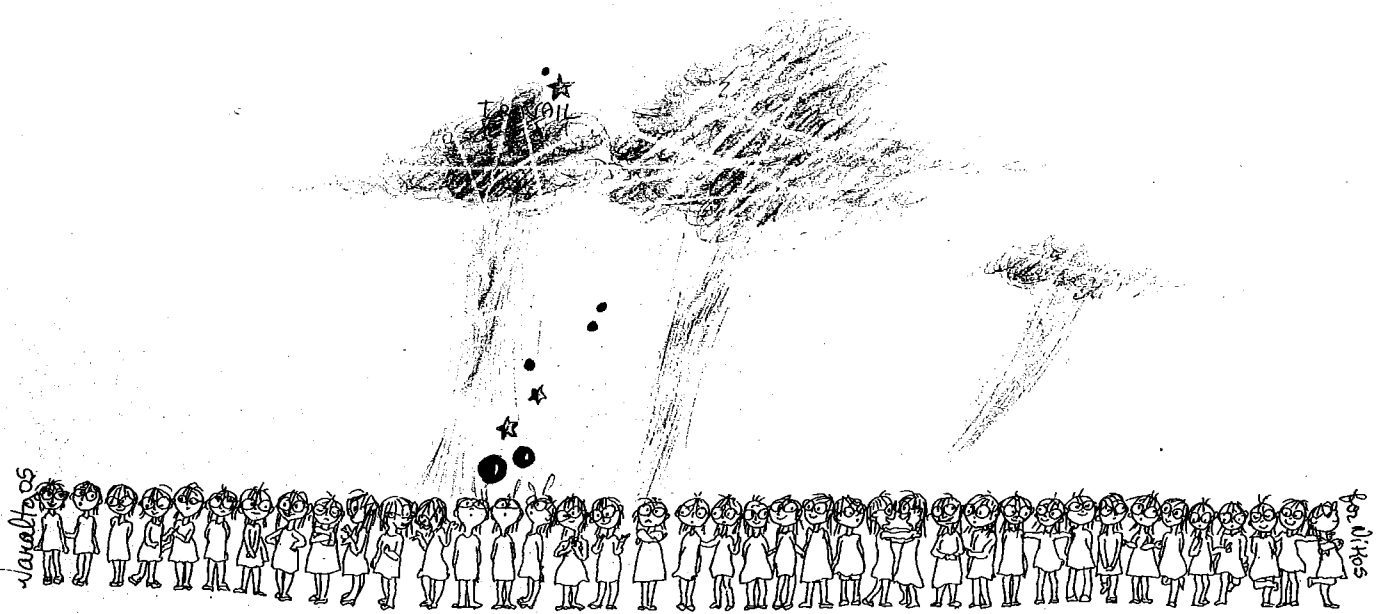
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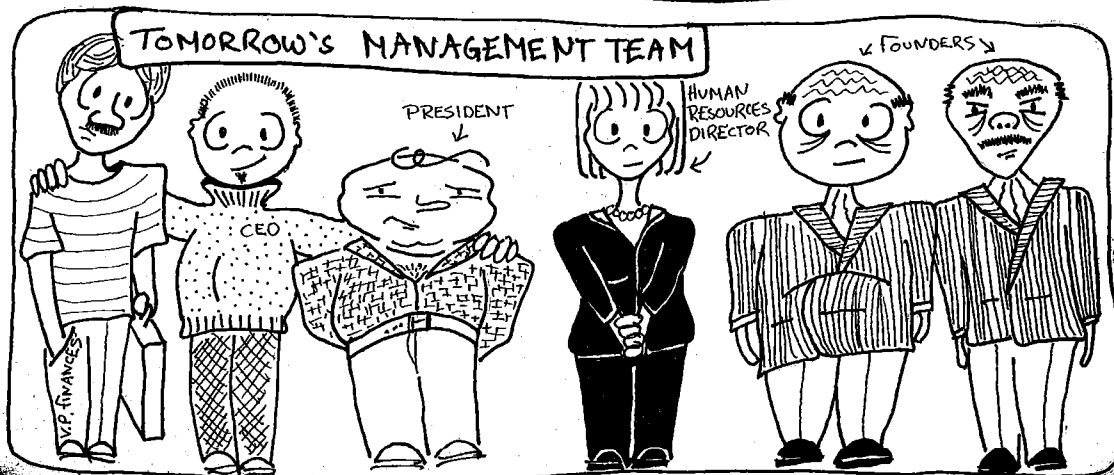
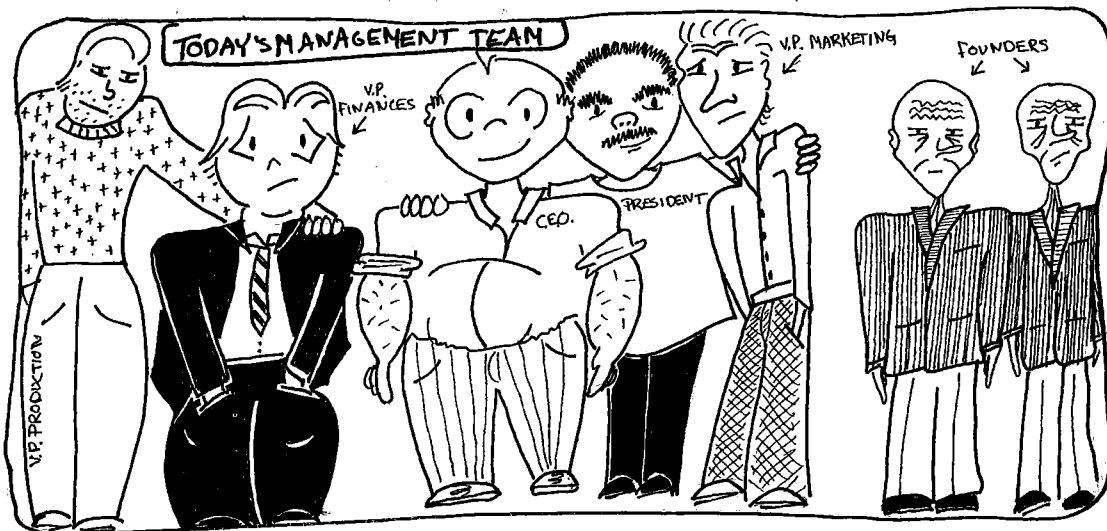
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## World Conference on Breast Cancer

The 4th World Conference on Breast Cancer will be held on June 8-12, 2005 at the World Trade and Convention Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. For more information and registration: [www.wbco.ca](http://www.wbco.ca). This conference takes an international, multi-disciplinary focus on community and global action.



"TRAVAIL" (WORK) BY LOUISA VARALTA, TORONTO ARTIST



**ABOUT THE ARTIST:** Britt Santowski is a Chief Instructor with the Vancouver Island Safety Council, in BC, Canada. She has been drawing cartoons for publication since 2002; her proud feminist convictions and sense of humour have served her well in this endeavour. Olga VanTandenberg is the protagonist in many of Britt's cartoons. Olga is "your basic, average, redneck feminist; she is open to new and innovative ways of thinking, as long as they match with her own uniquely-defined feminist beliefs." To see more of Britt's cartoons please visit: [//victoria.tc.ca/~britt/olga.htm](http://victoria.tc.ca/~britt/olga.htm)

Featured artist **Karen Hibbard**

Karen Hibbard is a visual artist and illustrator living and working in Montreal, Canada. She works with issues of gender, especially with regards to sexual and social stereotypes. Her work often carries a message through the use of humour. The images presented here are inspired by escort want ads at the back of newspapers.

"I think of them as a positive spiritual take on jobs that aren't so glamorous. They are about how women have to do battle spiritually, mentally and physically at all times."

