

**WOMEN AND PSYCHOLOGY**  
**An Interest Group**  
**of the**  
**Australian Psychological Society**

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**From the editor**

This year there is a conference theme developing. This edition includes a selection of abstracts from the successful and enjoyable one-day feminist research in psychology conference held by the Melbourne group in conjunction with Victoria University on the auspicious date of Friday 13 August 2004.

Also included are two longer pieces and a reflective note from VU PhD student Michelle Walsh who attended the conference and found it interesting, friendly and inclusive.

As editor I am in the process of requesting slightly longer reflective pieces from each of the presenters for our next issue, keeping in mind the questions asked by Charlotte Bunch in 1974 about any feminist reform, and adapted by Heather Gridley's students for use in their presentation at the conference:

- 1.Does the research have the potential to materially improve the lives of women and if so, which women and how many?
- 2.Does it build an individual woman's self-respect, strength and confidence?
- 3.Does it give women a sense of power, strength, and imagination as a group, and help build structures for further change?
- 4.Does it enhance women's ability to criticize and challenge political systems in the future?
- 5.Does it weaken patriarchal control of society's institutions and help women gain power over them?

Continuing the conference theme, also included here is a preliminary notice for the annual conference once again to be held in Sydney on the weekend beginning **Friday 26 November**. Please contact Rosemary Pynor by email on [R.Pynor@fhs.usyd.edu.au](mailto:R.Pynor@fhs.usyd.edu.au) with abstracts or ideas for papers for inclusion in the conference program.

## **A reminder to vote in the APS elections**

Voting is not compulsory and so the response rate is traditionally very low. EVERY VOTE WILL COUNT at least in this election. This year there are eight candidates contesting three positions on the Board: President, Director of Professional Practice and Director of Branch and Regional Operations.

Presidential candidates are Heather Gridley, Bob Montgomery, Amanda Gordon and Sue Spence, and their statements can be found on the APS website ([www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)) if you have not received a copy in the mail. Voting closes 10am Friday 1 October 2004.

Then of course there is that other election on October 9<sup>th</sup>....

Also on a website note, please keep an eye out for the updated and upgraded Interest Group introductions soon to appear on the APS website. Ours is appropriately in feminist colours – Green, Violet and White. Remember that they were originally suffragette colours and stood for Give Women the Vote. This series of introductions to Interest Groups will make its first appearance at the Conference in Sydney.

Regards

Colleen.

**PS** – to extend the election theme, we have just received this grapevine item from our former editor, Hoa Pham, who writes, “My attempt at civic involvement has begun- I’m running on a Melbourne City Council ticket for the Greens, but in a position that is guaranteed not to win...” Hmm, Bob Brown could do worse than recruit our Hoa – put her higher up the list, we reckon!



**Jane Ussher shares her wisdom at the Feminist Research Conference**

## **From the Convener's Desk**

Congratulations to the Victorian branch of Women and Psychology on their very successful one-day conference **Doing Feminist Research In Psychology** held Friday 13 August 2004. Professor Jane Ussher from University of Western Sydney joined other distinguished speakers from Victoria and South Australia. Feedback from participants was very positive and all who attended would have found the presentations and lively discussions interesting.

NSW Branch has organised a dinner on Friday 1 October (6:30) for all interested Women & Psychology members and friends at the **GENGHIS KHAN** Mongolian Restaurant. The Khan caters for all tastes – carnivores and vegos. Besides the wonderful Mongolian BBQ stir fry, there is quite an extensive à la carte menu. I hope that members and friends in Sydney will make time to come to the dinner. It is an excellent opportunity to catch up with old friends and to meet new ones. I will have to extend my apology this time because I will be overseas.

**Women & Psychology Annual Residential Conference 26-28 November 2004.** Members from New South Wales branch are busy planning this year's Women and Psychology Annual Residential Conference. Scheduled for the last weekend in November, the Conference will take place at the Women's College at Sydney University. Registration and the inaugural activities take place on Friday evening, 26th November. Saturday's full day session will feature several papers on emerging feminist research and will be followed by a dinner and entertainment at the University. The Sunday half-day session will focus on issues arising from the government's strategies for the treatment of depression. There will also be a segment on current methodologies which have proved useful for local practitioners.

**Dori Wisniewski**  
**National Convener, Women & Psychology**

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**STOP PRESS... DINNER WITH WOMEN & PSYCHOLOGY AT APS  
CONFERENCE**

**6:30pm Friday 1 October 2004**

**Genghis Khan Mongolian Restaurant (fully licensed)**

**469 Kent Street (right behind Town Hall Station).**

**Please RSVP to Rosemary Pynor at [R.Pynor@fhs.usyd.edu.au](mailto:R.Pynor@fhs.usyd.edu.au) so that she can firm up the reservation.**

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## DOING FEMINIST RESEARCH IN PSYCHOLOGY

In order to promote and support feminist research in psychology, the Victorian Women & Psychology group, together with Victoria University's Faculties of Arts and Human Development, and with the generous support of APS Victorian Branch, held a one-day conference on August 13<sup>th</sup> that addressed the questions of:

- What is feminist research?
- How is it done?
- What are the challenges?
- What makes it all worthwhile?
- Perspectives of the researched

Our definition of feminist research in psychology was the same as that of the international journal *Feminism and Psychology*: that which acknowledges gender and other social inequalities (e.g. race, class, sexuality) and considers their psychological effects. Included here are some abstracts from the conference, to give those who couldn't be there an idea of the submissions that met this criterion.

Victorian Women and Psychology co-convener Melissa Noonan opened the conference, which was attended by about 40 people at the newly renovated Treacy Centre in Parkville. The first keynote speaker was Jane Ussher from UWS, and it wasn't difficult to get a sense of how Jane's work has come to be revered by feminist scholars around the world. In the course of interrogating the notion of PMS as both social construct and lived experience, Jane took us on a journey through her fifteen-year engagement with the topic, and the history of her epistemological cycles (!) from traditional positivist methods, through social constructionist/postmodern theorising to her current (but not necessarily final) critical realist position.

Fiona Combe and our own Colleen Turner spoke about the ways single mothers have been problematised by researchers and politicians for more than 100 years. Colleen is writing a summary of their presentation here, but what I took away with me was a sharp reminder of the responsibility carried by researchers that extends way beyond what is covered in most ethical codes – that of asking what assumptions underpin research questions, and which groups stand to lose or gain from the outcomes.

Newly arrived from Melbourne University's Key Centre for Women's Health as research professor in psychology at Victoria University, Jill Astbury concluded the conference by reflecting on the day's presentations and emphasising the 'real world' policy implications of well grounded research. Her recent work with the WHO on the demonstrable contribution made to the global burden of disease, especially mental ill-health, by women's experiences of intimate partner violence is a harsh case in point.

**Heather Gridley (on behalf of the conference organising committee, Precilla Choi, Raelynn Alvarez Wicklein and Heather Gridley)**

## **The future looks rosy? Young girls talk about womanhood**

Successful achieving women are now visible in all spheres of society and concepts such as “Girl Power” and “Just Do it” are firmly entrenched in popular culture. Thus, whilst traditional femininity holds women to be passive, dependent, weak and nurturant, this is no longer the only script of femininity available to women and girls today. The aim of this study was to explore young girls understandings of femininity and how it might impact upon their lived experience as they approach womanhood. Focus group interviews were conducted with seventeen 12-13 year olds and forty 15-16 year olds. Thematic analysis using a feminist cultural studies framework to aid interpretation revealed that although traditional femininity remains firmly embedded in our culture, the girls insist that this has little bearing on their lived experience. They strongly believe that they can have it all, unlike when their mothers or other female elders were young. However, alongside this theme of equal opportunity also ran another of inequality, e.g. a sexual double standard, the importance of physical appearance and the underestimation of their abilities. These findings demonstrate how traditional femininity does still strongly impact upon girls lived experiences and reinforces the patriarchal status quo.

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## **Doing (and Supervising) Feminist Research In Psychology**

What makes research feminist? What are the challenges for psychology students seeking to work in feminist, or at least women-friendly ways when undertaking examinable research projects? How can supervisors support, promote and facilitate feminist approaches to psychological research? We adapted Charlotte Bunch's (1974) five criteria for evaluating feminist reforms, and applied them to the research and supervision processes in four student projects:

1. Does the research have the potential to materially improve the lives of women and if so, which women and how many?
2. Does it build an individual woman's self-respect, strength and confidence?
3. Does it give women a sense of power, strength, and imagination as a group, and help build structures for further change?
4. Does it enhance women's ability to criticize and challenge political systems in the future?
5. Does it weaken patriarchal control of society's institutions and help women gain power over them?

The four projects involve the wellbeing of women working in community settings, women's experiences of a mental health mutual help group, a twenty-year retrospective investigation of women's return to study experiences, and an evaluation of an integrated family violence intervention. The presentation will also consider in turn the applicability of Bunch's criteria to current feminist research and practice.

Heather Gridley, Kelly Cooper, Fiona Easton, Belinda Gibson, & Briony Kercheval  
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## **Latinas in the United States: Implications of Cultural Body Image and Attractiveness Ideals**

Women in western countries quickly learn that their appearance is crucial to their social life and social standing. Women who do not adhere to the dominant cultural ideal of beauty or attractiveness risk losing social acceptance and social support from their family, friends, and the society at large. There are also vocational and economic opportunities for those women who do adhere to the dominant white American and western cultural norms. From an early age, women engage in conversations and interactions with their families and caretakers, their peers, and with media that supports the persistent upkeep of appearance. This paper takes a feminist perspective in describing the process of social construction around what is deemed beautiful in western societies, in outlining the social, economic, occupational, and relational implications of adhering to attractiveness ideals for Latinas, and discussing about with whom Latinas socially construct their ideas of beauty. "...individuals, particularly women, are exposed to pervasive, culture-wide ideals and expectations regarding what is deemed attractive" (Thompson et al, 1999, p.14). For Latinas in the United States and westernized countries, at some point in their lives, there is the dilemma: what is beauty and am I a beautiful woman?

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## **Constructions of masculinity in secondary schools: A social network analysis**

Hegemonic masculinity is the central concept of Connell's (1987; 1995) social theory of gender. It expresses the dominance of males over females, achieved at least in part by [the threat of] violence against females, and also against subordinated and marginalised males. Hegemonic masculinity can be seen as occupying the dominant position in a hierarchy of masculinities, with culture/race, sexuality, physical abilities and SES having an impact on the positioning of other types of masculinity within such a hierarchy. Although this theory has gained extensive recognition, the structural relations that underpin it have received little empirical investigation.

This paper presents a social network analysis of hegemonic and other masculinities as they are expressed among adolescent male school students in Australia. Analyses reveal the presence of different types of masculinities within the school setting, lending support to non-unitary conceptions of gender and to Connell's conception of a hierarchy of masculinities. The local level structural relations of these multiple masculinities and the personal attributes of varying types of masculinities will be presented. How violence and ideology may combine to provide certain boys with dominant positions of social power within schools will be discussed.

Dean Lusher, BA, Grad. Dip. Psych (presenter)

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## Performing and interrogating ‘masculinity’

Performing ‘race’, ‘masculinity’, reason, and relationship

I. In 2003 I conducted an artistic and auto-ethnographic inquiry/experiment, walking through southwest WA following my grandmother’s journey from being a ‘black’ daughter to a ‘white’ mother. I documented this walk through daily web postings

II. Seidler contends ‘the crucial aspect about the modern conception of masculinity is that it has been identified with a notion of reason as radically separated from nature’

III. Mathews claims ‘[t]he subjectivity of self is permeable to the subjectivity of other’. She calls for understanding the subject as ‘a special kind of entity’, or more properly,

IV. Identity is fluid, protean, and determined by embodiment, practice, and relationship with human and non-human others. Like Russell, I ‘deliberately choos[e] to not decide [whether I am Aboriginal or white] ... I will be either/or and I will be neither.

V. This paper proposes artistic, auto-ethnographic, research as a method of interrogating ‘race’ and gender identities.

Associate Professor Mark Minchinton

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**Participants sharing collective wisdom**



## **“You don’t speak for me”: Single mothers’ experience of research**

Single mothers are as diverse a group as you can find anywhere. We are united by only two things: we have a child/children and we are no longer in a partnership relationship with the father(s) of our child/children. And even within those broad definitions there is a wide diversity of circumstances and experiences. Nevertheless single mothers and their children are heavily researched, and the research is often based on a set of unspoken assumptions. Most of those assumptions are negative and limiting.

There is a long history of stigma attached to unmarried women with children in the western world, including Australia. The stigma was very real and meant that many women were simply unable to keep their children or to leave their marriage or relationship.

We identified three major types of stereotypes that have been placed on single mothers over the centuries and we argue that though the examples change, the stereotypes remain the same. In all cases the stereotypes are largely unfounded and much of our presentation was spent comprehensively debunking myths.

### *1. FALLEN IMMORAL WOMAN*

This stereotype has begun to fade in the latter part of the 20th century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The new variation on this stereotype is of the immoral women who prevent fathers from seeing their children, or of young women who have children to avoid gainful employment and to collect welfare payments.

The reality is most women actively assist the fathers of their children to remain in close contact with their children. The further reality is that most single mothers are in their thirties and many are employed full time.

### *2. ECONOMIC BURDEN ON THE STATE*

Policy changes in the 1970s made it possible for the first time for women to bring up children without a male partner, albeit in relative or extreme poverty. These changes reflected a fundamental shift in women’s position in society due largely to an ability to control our own fertility and the equal opportunity revolution which increased access to economic independence.

1973 - Supporting Mothers Benefit introduced

1974 - Status of Children’s Act changed in Victoria

1975 - new Family Court and “No Fault Divorce” introduced

This stereotype *now* presents women caring for their children as burdens that must be carried by the state and a group of people whose incomes can be scrutinised and whose work ethic is questioned and questionable. This stereotype is in contrast to the notion of mothers as the educators and developers of the next generation.

### 3. *DOOMED CHILDREN.*

This one is perhaps the most currently prevalent myth and also the one that we as single parents feel the most keenly. We wonder HOW it is helpful to policy, much less to single parents, to continue to find ways and areas in which the children of single parents do less well than those of partnered parents.

We want to point out that statistics about a population do very little to predict the outcome for individuals. The overall statistics also hide the successes of single parents and their children.

#### **Research**

The “problem of sole motherhood” is intensely researched, A short list of those who research single mothers includes: political parties, state and commonwealth departments, welfare lobby groups, support organisations like the Council of Single Mothers and Their Children, journalists, social workers, child, family and youth welfare workers, health professionals, psychiatrists and psychologists, public health analysts, family therapists, child development experts, educationists, architects, policy analysts, economists, home economists, demographers, legal scholars, and sociologists.

As single parents we recommend that any research carried out about us or our children needs to build into the process some unpacking of the assumptions being made in the research questions, designs and hypotheses.

We would recommend that research be both qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative research can explain a lot about *what is*. Who are single parents, where do they live how old are they? It can't tell us why people have made the choices they have. Good qualitative research can provide insight into why people, including single mothers behave as they do.

Research cannot tell us what *should be*. Policy is often about a vision of what should be –in this case for single parents and their children. The ideal is that good research can inform a society's vision about what should be the case for its citizens, including single mothers and their children. Therefore turning research into policy is a political process, and is a rhetorical process that is necessarily about power.

Good research should and can include an exploration WITH single mothers and/or our children about our needs, hopes and desires.

On a final note, it is worth remembering that for single mothers the myths about us are deeply felt and remain our deepest fears – especially the one about doomed children!

Fiona Combe and Colleen Turner  
Council for Single Mothers and Their Children

## **‘Doing Feminist Research in Psychology’ What a wonderful experience!**

When I first received an email advertising the ‘Doing Feminist Research in Psychology’ conference, I thought to myself, “sounds interesting, but it doesn’t really relate to my area of research in health and exercise psychology.” When I received another email, I thought, “the reason I don’t think this relates to me is that I know very little about feminist research and feminist theories. Maybe it will be of some relevance to me and at the least, I can use it as professional development.” I decided to attend the conference, and I’m very glad I did. What a wonderful experience! The Treacy Centre in Parkville was the perfect setting for an enjoyable, enlightening day.

The conference began with the Opening Keynote, delivered by Jane Ussher. Jane discussed her research into premenstrual experiences of women and highlighted the differing views of PMS. Jane spoke about the importance of understanding more thoroughly the experiences of women with PMS, to break the cycle of self-silencing and repression of emotions, and the need for women to increase self-care. Jane opened the conference with a wonderful presentation, and set the scene for the high quality presentations to come.

One of the highlights for me was the round table discussion on ‘Doing (and supervising) feminist student research in psychology’. Four honours and masters students from Victoria University provided us with an insight into their research projects, and each of the students had a great deal of emotion and personal interest in her work. It was fantastic to see feminist research ‘in action’, and to hear first hand about the joys (and challenges!) of their research. All four students were very passionate about their research and this was reflected in the energy of this session.

The free papers and other sessions ranged in topics from constructions of masculinity in secondary schools to young girls’ perceptions of womanhood, and a particularly interesting session on single mothers’ experiences of being researched. All papers were presented at a very high quality, and discussions surrounding each project were open and encouraged.

I have been to a number of conferences over the past few years, and have always come away from them having gained a little bit more knowledge or a new contact. The ‘Doing Feminist Research in Psychology’ conference, however, was a little different. Not only did I come away slightly more knowledgeable on feminist research, but I also came away with another very positive feeling. I felt entirely welcome and supported. I have never been to a conference where everyone has been so friendly, encouraging, and supportive of each other, both in a research and personal sense. This is a very special group of people, and I thank all of the presenters and fellow delegates for making this a most enjoyable and informative day. If you missed the conference this year and if it is held again next year, make it a priority to attend! You will not be disappointed.

By Michelle Walsh

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## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2004**

### **NSW Women & Psychology.**

**The Venue** -First floor – the Women’s College – Sydney University.  
First building off the Carillon Avenue gate. (See UBD Street guide for map).  
5:30 for refreshments and networking. 6:00 pm for discussion.  
Meetings are usually followed by lively discussion over a friendly meal in Newtown.

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Sept 24 <sup>th</sup>   | No W&P meeting.   |
| Oct 1 <sup>st</sup>     | APS Conference Women’s Dinner.<br>Genghis Khan Mongolian BBQ Restaurant<br>469 Kent Street Sydney (6:30PM). |
| Oct 22 <sup>nd</sup>    | Rosemary Pynor leading Forum discussion<br>“The values we bring to our research, practice and work”.        |
| Nov 26-28 <sup>th</sup> | Women & Psychology Conference – Women’s College,<br>Sydney University.                                      |

### **Anniversary - Twenty Years of Women & Psychology**

In Sydney, Dori has been reminding us that it is twenty years since the formal foundation of the Women and Psychology Interest Group. We are proposing to include an informal celebratory “birthday” dinner in the Sydney Group Conference in November.

Two other Groups, Psychologists for the Prevention of War and Psychology of Ageing, were also formed in 1984. It is difficult to decide which one is the oldest as they were all set up informally, and then confirmed as Interest Groups of the APS, about the same time.

The emergence of Interest Groups is discussed in a section of a chapter of the official record of the APS, “A Meeting of Minds: The Australian Psychological Society and Australian Psychologists 1944-1994”, compiled for the APS by Simon Cooke and published by APS in 2000. Chapter 9, “A Therapeutic Culture or a Political Society? The APS and Social Issues, 1963-1994” includes a section, “Finding a Structure for Social Issues: The Interest Groups” in which the formation of Women and Psychology is described (pages 170-174). The account is built up from APS records and notes of an interview conducted by Simon with Una Gault in July, 1998.

Initial meetings of women at APS Conferences in 1981 and 1982 discussed the formation of a women’s group, and ways of going about it. Cooke (p.172) describes the kernel of the achievement of the formal foundation of Women and Psychology as we now know it:

While these meetings were taking place, negotiation for a Board of Women and Psychology was progressing slowly. The board was intended to promote research about women, women's studies in psychology and professional work with women. Since gender pervaded all aspects, the ambit of women and psychology was necessarily a broad one. Una Gault remembers there being a debate among women about what was the most appropriate structure of the group, and whether structure could be avoided altogether ('structure and structurelessness was a great old debate among women in the 70s and 80s'), and how non-psychologists could be included in the group. In 1983 the new Division of Scientific Affairs refused to form a Board of Women and Psychology on the grounds that its aims were not restricted to research; equally, the Division of Professional Affairs objected that the aim to encourage research by and with women was exclusive. The Executive then suggested that a 'Special Interest Group of Women in Psychology' might provide an alternative to the proposed board structure. In August 1984, the matter was put to Council. One female Councillor recalls that:

The men at that Council meeting evidenced a great deal of embarrassed and confused body language, gestures and sounds. It appeared to me that the men would have possibly 'gone along' with the concept of such a Board if . . .the idea had not early and immediately been attacked by certain female Council members.

Council resolved 'That a Special Interest Group on Women and Psychology be approved'. The minutes recorded 'One vote of dissent'.

Many newer members of Women and Psychology will not be aware of this early history of their Group and that of other Groups, and of the APS generally. Cooke has provided an interesting and sometimes arresting record and a good read of the whole book is recommended. It should be available in your local University Library (perhaps even your local Library) and from the APS (at a price).

### **Una Gault**

#### **Editor's note.**

In 2000 a Men and Masculinities Interest Group was approved by the Annual General Meeting after some debate. CT

**APS Women and Psychology Interest Group  
15<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference 2004**

**Facing the Future Together**

**Friday 26<sup>th</sup> November (evening) to Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> November (lunch)  
The Women's College, The University of Sydney  
15 Carillon Avenue NEWTOWN NSW**

APS Women and Psychology (NSW Group) have been meeting each month at the Women's College during 2004. The College has been very attentive to our needs and so we decided it would be a good venue for our 15<sup>th</sup> annual residential conference. The College is located on the campus of The University of Sydney, close to cosmopolitan King Street, Newtown and a short bus ride into the City of Sydney itself.

Conference registration covers morning tea, lunch and dinner on Saturday and morning tea and lunch on Sunday. Accommodation is in single or twin rooms. Accommodation fees cover bed and breakfast and can be booked directly with the Women's College using a separate registration form.

Participants are encouraged to bring along a book they would like to share with the group on Friday evening. We will also have other activities Friday evening and share a light supper.

| <b>Date</b>   | <b>Agenda</b>   |
|---|---|
| <b>Friday 26<sup>th</sup> November</b><br>(6-9pm)                   | Registration<br>Share a book<br>Creative and fun activity   |
| <b>Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November</b><br>9am-5pm<br><br>7pm-late | Papers<br>Workshops<br>AGM and presentation of Elaine Dignan Award<br>Postgraduate student presentations<br>Conference Dinner and Entertainment |
| <b>Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> November</b><br>9am-12pm<br><br>12:30pm   | Workshop: Issues for practitioners arising out of the<br>Federal Government's initiatives on depression<br><br>Lunch and Plenary                |

It is customary for 12 PD points to be awarded for attendance at a conference of this length and nature.

**For further information, please contact  
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