



Women Involved in
Living and Learning

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Learning**

**SUMMER
2006**

*News from the
WILL Program
of Westhampton
College at the
University of
Richmond
for its alumnae
and friends*

WILL NEWS

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTORS

As the academic year winds down, the WILL Program is happy to announce next year's speaker series. With recent mining disasters, hurricanes, typhoons, and the continual exposure of our bodies to environmental toxins, we find it fitting to follow our 2005-06 Gender and Science series with one focusing on Environmental Justice. The speakers are listed inside. We hope you can join us for another year of exciting programs!

One of our students' favorite events from the spring semester was a meeting featuring four alumnae of the program. It was great to reconnect with Katie Smith (WILL Class of 2000) Kimberly Dean (WILL Class of 2000), Kimberly McKnight (WILL Class of 2004) and Beth Robbins (WILL Class of 1999). Indeed, students are eager to increase connections with WILL alumnae! As a start, we would like to ask your permission to release your name, contact information and current position so that our students could contact you if they are thinking about beginning a career in a similar field or if they are contemplating a move to your area. It would be a WILL network or sorts! We are thinking about having this information available on-line through the WILL website so that current students and WILL alumnae could easily access this information. The site would only be available to current WILL members and WILL alumnae. If you would like to participate, please email the assistant director, Melissa Ooten, at mooten@richmond.edu or call her at 804-289-8840. She will need your name, contact information and your job information.

And, if you are interested in returning to the University or Richmond to connect with our current students in person, please let Melissa know that also! Current students find alumnae connections absolutely invaluable, and hopefully it would be inspiring for you as well to see what WILL members are doing these days.

We look forward to hearing from you as we begin to prepare for the 27th year of the WILL Program!

Holly Blake and Melissa Ooten

WILL ALUMNAE REUNION RECEPTION

As part of Homecoming weekend, WILL alumnae are invited to meet over Einstein bagels and Starbucks coffee on **Saturday, October 28** from **10:30 - 11:30 am** in the **Deanery**.

We look forward to seeing you there!

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WILL SENIOR CLASS OF 2006 - *Our Newest Alumnae Members!*



Front: Lesley Byrd, Amy Woodward, Jessica Searles, Dina Toth
Middle: Katrina Dunkel, Brittany Gardner, Ali Smith, Colleen Carney, Sushyan Duong
Back: Chelsea Rock, Lindsey Ryan, Courtney McRae, Emma Watts, Elena Adamo, Aly Emrick, Philena Gilmer, Stephanie Lally
Not pictured: Lisa Brancheau, Sarah Gretzinger, Amy Thesing

SAVE THE DATE



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WILL/WGSS 2006–2007 SPEAKER SERIES: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

SANDRA STEINGRABER

First Environments: Women's Bodies and Toxic Trespass

Thursday, September 28, 2006, 7:00 pm, Brown-Alley Room, Weinstein Hall

Women's bodies are the first environment for us all. As a biologist, author, and cancer survivor, Steingraber will explore the ways in which low-level exposures to toxic chemicals are undermining women's reproductive choices—from pesticides that sabotage fertility to toxins that find their way into breast milk.

VERNICE MILLER-TRAVIS and ANDREA SIMPSON

A Woman's Worth: Race, Gender, and Class in the Environmental Justice Movement

Wednesday, October 25, 2006, 4:00 pm, Whitehurst Living Room, Richmond College

Vernice Miller-Travis, National Executive Director of Groundwork USA, and facilitator Andrea Simpson, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Richmond, will explore the challenges faced by working-class women of color in the environmental justice movement—a social movement that seeks redress for the unequal distribution of toxic wastes in black and brown communities.

MARILOU AWIAKTA

Weaving Survival with Peace: Selu (Corn) as a Teacher

Thursday, November 2, 2006, 4:00 pm, Brown-Alley Room, Weinstein Hall

Writing in the tradition of "Art for Life's Sake," Awiakta blends poetry, storytelling, and essays with her Cherokee/Appalachian heritages to advocate how Cherokee and other Native American philosophies are applicable to contemporary problems. These philosophies, she advises, help bring balance and healing to the environment and humanity.

FILM: SALT OF THE EARTH (1953)

Screening: Wednesday, November 15, 4:00 pm, Jepson 118

This Cold War era film tells the true story of striking Chicano zinc miners and their wives, women who eventually led the picket line. Controversy surrounded the film, for much of the general public viewed striking miners as Communist-influenced, and many who worked on the film were "blacklisted" from working in Hollywood films. Discussion to follow.

LOIS GIBBS

Citizen Activism for Environmental Health:

The Growth of a Powerful New Grassroots Health Movement

Tuesday, February 6, 2006, 7:00 pm, Brown-Alley Room, Weinstein Hall

Nearly thirty years ago, 900 working-class families at Love Canal demanded relocation after learning that their community was built on a leaking toxic waste dump. This grassroots effort demonstrated how ordinary citizens obtained power through community organizing, sparking a new social justice movement which is as concerned with social justice and human rights as it is with public health and the environment.

APPALACHIAN ACTIVISM with Kate Wolf, Rema Keen, and Patricia Johnson

Thursday, April 12, 2006, 7:00 pm, Alice Haynes Room

A musician, a poet, and a storyteller combine their creative expressions and promote activism addressing intertwined issues of land (both its historical destruction and hopes for its future preservation), class, racism, violence against women, sexual identity, and identities as Appalachian women. Their artistry promotes and supports diverse cultures, sustainable living, environmental justice, and grassroots organizing.

From War to Revolution: A Review of *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother* by Miriam Peskowitz, and *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* by Judith Warner

By Elisabeth Rose Gruner

The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother? by Miriam Peskowitz (Seal Press, 2005)

Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety by Judith Warner (Riverhead, 2005)

I think I broke a lot of rules when I came to interview for the job I now hold, an academic job I desperately wanted. Already a mother, with a three-year-old at home, I refused to hide my parental status when talking to potential new colleagues. I had never been able to maintain boundaries between my “private” and “professional” lives; indeed, one attraction of academe was that it seemed to allow me to meld the two. So at dinner with three potential colleagues one February night, when the talk turned to children and parenting, it all seemed quite natural. The only other woman at the table had had a premature baby just four months earlier, returning to work within weeks in order to finish out the semester with her students. “Wow,” I remember saying, “that must have been hard.” She smiled and agreed, though I really didn’t learn how hard until some years later, after we’d been colleagues for some time. I then turned to the man to my right: “And do you have children, too?” “Five,” he answered. He must have seen the question on my face -- or maybe I even asked it -- because he then said, “My wife doesn’t work.” I remember gasping, “Oh, yes, she does. With five kids? Of course she does!”

“Bless you,” he said. “I find that most feminists don’t acknowledge what she does as work.”

I let the comment go then, grateful that we had found common ground, but I find myself replaying that scene in my head now, as I sit down to write this review. His quick assumption of a “mommy wars” style judgementalism on my part was natural enough: I identified myself as a feminist, I had left my toddler daughter at home to come on this interview, I had already clearly connected with a woman who had also returned to work soon after giving birth. But why hadn’t she carried on the conversation further? Why hadn’t I? While I’m glad I displaced one colleague’s easy assumptions about feminists, if only for a moment, why didn’t we go on to talk, all of us, about how hard “it” really was?

Then, as now, such conversations are unusual in professional settings. We share a grimace over how tired we are, how hard things have become, but we don’t take the next step: discussing the relationship between our jobs and our personal lives and the ways in which we are or are not supported in our decisions, in our complex and messy lives.

I’ll come back to that dinner scene later. In writing this review, I have to confess that I was tempted to stage it as some kind of “mommy wars” style competition, too. In this corner, Miriam Peskowitz, formerly tenured professor, feminist scholar of religion, with her small book, *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?* A paperback from Seal Press, noted for their championing of women’s and especially mothers’ writing, *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars*, promises a balanced look at some of the gritty problems facing today’s parents: stay-at-home or work-away? Daycare or Mom-care? And why not Dad?

In the other corner, the heavyweight, Judith Warner. (Disclaimer: I have no knowledge of Warner’s actual body type or size.) Warner, a journalist with four earlier books to her credit (Peskowitz has two), has been on the cover of *Newsweek*, done the talk show circuit, and seen her book reviewed in the mainstream media repeatedly since its publication earlier this year. Warner’s book, *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*, has already been reduced to sound bites. “They do it better in France” is the one I’ve heard most often.

As an academic myself and someone who generally avoids the mainstream media, I figured I’d write a review noting all the ways in which Peskowitz got it right and Warner got it wrong. If she was popular, after all, she must be wrong, right?

Yeah. Turns out my reasoning was as bad as that sentence, and that both books have a lot to offer today’s parents and policy-makers as we consider the thorny problem of improving our own quality of life and bequeathing a better world to our children.

So back to that dinner table. At the time, I didn’t think to ask about parental leave, though I had in front of me two people who could probably have told me something about it. I didn’t ask them about on-site day care, or flex-time arrangements, or even the campus climate for professors raising children. I didn’t want to seem needy, after all. But had I asked, I would have found out what both Peskowitz and Warner document: that parenting in the last 20 or 30 years has become a lonely affair, cast in terms of private choices rather than public responsibilities, and that we are all the poorer for it.

Peskowitz and Warner aren’t writing about exactly the same problem, but they come up with some very similar solutions. Warner’s focus is on what she calls “this mess”: a “widespread, choking cocktail of guilt and anxiety and resentment and regret [that] is poisoning motherhood for American women today” (4). She looks especially at white, upper-middle class mothers, mothers for whom “opting out” may look like a possibility, mothers for whom the gains of 1970s feminism have, she believes, come alongside economic and policy shifts that, in the end, have exacted too great a personal cost.

Peskowitz, on the other hand, is more concerned with the “mommy wars”: the tendency in the media to sort mothers into two camps, the stay-at-home moms and the working moms, without acknowledging, as I did up front, that all mothers work. Or, more importantly, that even most stay-at-home mothers earn money, working part-time or temporarily in a variety of situations. Her consideration of the false dichotomy of the “mommy wars” quickly veers in similar directions to Warner’s analysis of “this mess,” because, as she notes, “motherhood is only partly an issue of identity” (4). Rather, both writers come to realize (as have others before them) that to think and talk and write about American motherhood today quickly engages a host of social, cultural, political, and economic issues.

For example, Peskowitz creatively notes the ways in which our



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seemingly private choices come with public costs and consequences by looking at a pay stub, which starkly demonstrates the connections between her work and “people who collect retirement benefits or disability checks or survivor’s benefits or unemployment, and . . . those on public assistance and welfare” (173). She reminds us that laws and policies that govern health benefits and pensions, as well as pre-tax benefits such as dependent care and health insurance, have profound implications for the way we work today, and how our work choices may in fact be deeply constrained. One simple example: while most parents may want more flexible work hours, or part-time work, part-time work comes with no health benefits. This may push some parents into full-time work that they’d rather not take on, simply in order to provide health care for their families; it may push other parents out of the work force entirely, to help support the family on the single wage with benefits earned by the other parent. Most often those “other parents” staying home, as both Peskowitz and Warner note, are mothers.

For Peskowitz, welfare policy and poor mothers are central to the story. She notes the ways in which the rhetoric of choice and the American ethos of individuality collide in Clinton-era welfare “reform,” which pushed poor mothers into the workplace for thirty hours a week, often at low wages and without good childcare options. While most middle-class mothers may not see how welfare policy affects their choices, Peskowitz reminds us that “mothering happens within the public view, and that it happens within public policy” (199): our cultural assumptions about the value of maternal care are being played out in welfare policy, and they affect us all. If you doubt it, note this: “theoretically, nannies get Social Security, but mothers don’t, despite doing the same work,” and welfare mothers get paid for engaging in child care work, but not for watching their own children (201, 180). As long as the work of caring for one’s own children is undervalued, poor and wealthy mothers alike will suffer both economically and socially (as will unemployed stay-at-home fathers).

Warner also looks towards policy solutions to what initially seem like private problems, and she gets at other reasons than Peskowitz does for why we need to do this. Her big contribution, it seems to me, is in noting the various ways in which 70s feminism ended up focusing on control of the body: she notes that in the struggles for abortion rights, “‘Keep your laws off my body’ became the rallying cry, not ‘Let’s change the body of the law’” (46). At the same time, “feminism, filtered down and diluted by the mass media, came to be, not about a redefinition of womanhood or a reorganization of family life and society, but about questions of performance and control” (46). Thus, feminism became about private choices, not public policy. The language of performance and control plays out, according to Warner, in such disparate arenas as eating disorders, heightened incidences of extreme allergies, and attachment parenting, all of which involve high levels of control on the part of the participants/sufferers.

Now, I’m not calling proponents of attachment parenting “sufferers,” though at times Warner seems to. And some will be put off by her easy dismissal of pro-lactivist language, her occasional use of attachment-parenting experts T. Berry Brazelton and Penelope Leach as whipping boys. In other words, Warner sometimes falls into some “mommy wars” language of her own, in which attachment parenting becomes over-parenting becomes “sacrificial motherhood” (61ff.). Some will close the book at page 15, where she characterizes

attachment parenting as “cruelly insensitive to mothers’ needs as adult women” (15). That would be unfortunate, for -- such lapses in rhetoric aside -- Warner is actually quite acute on the ways in which attachment parenting has been “watered-down” and misunderstood in popular representations (81); she is alert to the nuances in Brazelton and Leach, for example, noting that “if you read them carefully enough, [they] were basing their arguments in favor of stay-at-home motherhood partly on the fact that child care in America was so woefully inadequate” (109).

Still, you won’t find such lapses in rhetoric in Peskowitz, whose more careful argument is less susceptible to sound bite but also more difficult to summarize. Her emphasis on the diversity of mothering in America is especially salutary: both race and economic class get full exposure in her book, and none at all in Warner’s. Neither deals with non-heterosexual parents in any significant way, in part because such couples are less visible to the statistics-gathering arms of government and academe. And neither is fully able to focus on fathers, either, though both are (thankfully) aware that as fathers are part of the problem, they must also be part of the solution. (It’s disconcerting to find that “fathers” has only two entries in Warner’s index, however, and the long section listed under “husbands” is mostly about “sexless marriages.” Peskowitz’s book, unfortunately, has no index.)

In the end, the two books complement each other well. Warner has a model for what worked for her in the early years of parenting -- yes, the French do do that better. But she is pessimistic about the possibilities for change, particularly in our competitive society in which so much competition plays out over children themselves, their achievements, and their status. Peskowitz has stories of small triumphs: a pilot program that helped poor women in Montana “stay home with their infants and go through a parent-directed education component instead of signing up for welfare, agreeing to its work requirements, and using a daycare subsidy to make work possible,” for example (177). Peskowitz describes an ad hoc community group that renovated a playground, making a public, integrated space for children rather than retreating into the privacy of their own homes. And she documents the work of former welfare mother Lynn Woolsey, now Congresswoman for California’s Sixth Congressional District and prime mover behind HR 3780, the Family and Workplace Balancing Act that would, if enacted, provide family leave with wage replacement for birth, adoption, family emergency, and even school volunteering, along with childcare grants, scholarships for childcare providers, and more. While the Balancing Act has not yet moved out of committee -- and may not, in its current form -- that Woolsey could sign on 29 cosponsors is in itself a small triumph.

Peskowitz calls these small triumphs the “playground revolution,” and to the extent that parents are making these issues public, that Warner’s book is big news, that we are even talking about these issues here today, we are all part of it. When I’m across the table from job candidates these days, I’m the one who raises the questions of child care and family leave, of flex-time and good schools. That’s my version of the playground revolution, I suppose: like Peskowitz and Warner both, I want to help shift the focus from a “war” that pits mom against mom to a “revolution” in which we’re all on the same side.

This review was first published at the website Literary Mama: <http://www.literarymama.com/>

ON MOTHERHOOD

This March, Judith Warner, author of *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*, spoke at the WILL Mother/Mother Figure – Daughter Weekend. Following Warner’s talk, Dr. Elisabeth Gruner, Associate Professor of English and WGSS, led a discussion based on the themes of Warner’s talk. Gruner, who has researched and written extensively on the topic of motherhood, has had her academic writing featured in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *Children’s Literature*, and other journals. Her personal writing has been featured in several publications including *Brain, Child: The Magazine for Thinking Mothers*. She also writes a column, “Children’s Lit Book Group,” for Literary Mama. You can find her review of Warner’s *Perfect Madness* and Peskowitz’s *The Truth Beyond the Mommy Wars* in the newsletter insert, and below is a list of additional reading for those interested in the topic of motherhood – either personally, intellectually, or both.

For theoretical and analytical reading, see: Miriam Peskowitz, *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?*; Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*; Ann Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World is Still the Least Valued*; Susan Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood: How Becoming a Mother Changes Our Lives and Why We Never Talk About It*

For Memoirs, see: Rachel Cusk, *A Life’s Work: On Becoming A Mother*; Andrea Buchanan, *Mother Shock: Loving Every (Other) Minute of It*; Louise Erdrich, *The Blue Jay’s Dance: A Birth Year*; Anne Lamott, *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son’s First Year*; Cherrie Moraga, *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood*; Caroline Newman, *Waiting for Birdy: A Year of Frantic Tedium, Neurotic Angst, and the Wild Magic of Growing a Family*; Faulkner Fox, *Dispatches from a Not-So-Perfect Life: or How I Learned to Love the House, the Man, the Child*; Muffy Mead-Ferro, *Confessions of a Slacker Mom*; Ayun Halliday, *The Big Rumpus: A Mother’s Tale from the Trenches*

For Anthologies, see: Buchanan and Hudock, *Literary Mama: Reading for the Maternally Inclined*; Andrea Buchanan, *It’s a Girl: Women Writers on Raising Daughters*; Andrea Buchanan, *It’s a Boy: Women Writers on Raising Sons*; Jennifer Margulis, *Toddler: Real-life Stories of Those Fickle, Irrational, Urgent, Tiny People We Love*; Jefferson and Welch, *Three-Ring Circus: How Real Couples Balance Marriage,*

Work, and Family; Peri and Moses, *Mothers Who Think: Tales Of Reallife Parenthood*; Peri and Moses, *Because I Said So: 33 Mothers Write About Children, Sex, Men, Aging, Faith, Race, and Themselves*; Steiner, *Mommy Wars: Stay-at-Home and Career Moms Face Off on Their Choices, Their Lives, Their Families*; Conlon and Hudson, *I Wanna be Sedated: 30 Writers on Parenting Teenagers*; Christina Baker Kline, *Child of Mine: Original Essays on Becoming a Mother*; Ariel Gore, *The Essential Hip Mama: Writing from the Cutting Edge of Parenting*

For Magazines, see: *Brain, Child: The Magazine for Thinking Mothers* (quarterly print magazine); LiteraryMama.com (<http://www.literarymama.com>); Mothers Movement Online (<http://www.mothersmovement.org/>).

Related Student Research –

WILL student Nicole Conner (who will serve as the student organization’s vice president during the 2006-2007 school year), along with Jaime Settle, conducted a 10 week research project in the summer of 2005 exploring how University of Richmond alumni balance their family and work obligations. They presented their research at the Richmond Alumni Weekend and at the 2005-2006 Arts & Sciences Research Symposium.

They found that issues of childcare, parental leave, workplace structures, and super-parent pressures all impacted reported satisfaction levels from women and men regarding their work and life balance. While UR graduates, overall, tended to report positive levels of satisfaction with their lives, interviews and survey respondents indicated displeasure with the current state of the workplaces and their inability to help modern American families. Women and men are affected differently by government and workplace policies, and many felt they impeded the ability of people to make decisions for their lives and families. Alternative policies globally and domestically were considered within the research as a means of addressing the strain Americans feel in balancing their work and life. To learn more about this research, “Balancing Work and Life and the Role of Government Social Policy,” visit their website: <http://www.student.richmond.edu/~js6vv/balancing/>



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ONE BOOK, ONE CAMPUS

For the second year, students, faculty, and staff at the University will come together to read, discuss, and debate one book across the 2006–2007 school year. The book selected for next year is *Class Matters*, edited by Bill Keller. The book contains fourteen articles from various *New York Times* reporters. According to *Nickel and Dimed* author Barbara Ehrenreich, “*Class Matters* is a beautifully reported, deeply disturbing portrait of a society bent out of shape by harsh inequalities. Read it and see how you fit into the problem or—better yet—the solution!”

On a related note, WILL is co-sponsoring a dramatic reading of the play *Nickel and Dimed* (based on Barbara Ehrenreich’s book) which will take place on **Monday, October 23** at **7:30pm** in the **Modlin Center**. Contact the Modlin Center if you are interested in attending this production.

WILL News is published twice a year to share ideas and information with WILL graduates and others interested in the University of Richmond’s WILL program. We welcome letters, e-mails and other submissions.

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