Welcome to the second issue of the CentreLGS newsletter. The Centre has now been established for eighteen months. We are funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, with further financial support from the universities of Kent, Keele and Westminster. The administrative base of the Centre is at Kent Law School. Davina Cooper is the Centre Director, and the Associate Directors are Ruth Fletcher (Keele) and Rosemary Auchmuty (Westminster).

Our aim is to bring together, and further, academic work on the relationship between gender, sexuality and the law. In order to do this, we are pursuing a varied programme of research, scholarly exchanges, training, and dissemination. We also have a strong focus on policy issues, responding to government consultations and hosting practitioners and activists working in relevant areas through our associate fellow scheme.

We hope that this newsletter will keep you up to date with what we are doing and what we are planning. If you have any further enquiries, please get in touch. Our contact details are on the back page.

Emily Grabham

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Introduction
by Rosemary Auchmuty

As we approach the end of the Centre’s second year of operation, it is encouraging to note all that we have achieved in such a short space of time. As Associate Director representing the University of Westminster, I view our successes with something more than appreciation – more a sense of wonder. First, it seems amazing that through the support of the AHRC issues of gender and sexuality have received public endorsement as valid and important concerns for legal study. Second, there is the not unrelated recognition that the law is moving fast in this area and that, through our conferences and workshops, our articles and responses to consultations, the Centre is playing a part in this social and legal change.

For us at Westminster there is the additional reward of being drawn into a network of scholars and web of activities we could hardly have believed possible. Westminster is a ‘new’ university without much of a tradition of encouragement for research, let alone collaborations of this sort. That we had already built up the reputation in the area of law, gender and sexuality that led to the invitation to join in the Centre bid was due to the openness of the post-1992 universities to new ideas and the absence of preconceived notions about what was or was not a legitimate field of study. But we lacked the knowledge and experience, and even more the confidence, to make the most of our links with others working in our areas of interest and to gain access to funding opportunities and training for our postgraduates. For law, gender and sexuality scholars at Westminster, therefore, the Centre has opened many doors.

Last year Westminster was proud to host the first Centre Training Workshop for postgraduates and early-career academics working in law, gender and sexuality. Because training specific to this area is so difficult to find, participants came from as far afield as France and Russia. With our central location, Westminster was also the venue for the Centre’s first Annual Lecture. Kendall Thomas of Columbia University delivered a wonderfully apt and incisive address with the title: ‘If there is such a thing: race, sex, and the politics of enjoyment in the killing state’.

In the end, though, while valuing all the conferences, workshops, seminars, and publishing opportunities, I think we have gained most from the Visitors’ programme. Centre funding has enabled a wide range of scholars and artists from all over the world to visit Kent, Keele and Westminster. The scheme offers mutual benefits for visitor and hosts, and our scholarly and social interchanges have always been stimulating.

Rosemary Auchmuty
Here is a summary of our latest news.
You can find more information on our website: www.kent.ac.uk/clgs/.

**Annual Lecture by Professor Wendy Brown on 19 May**

*American Nightmare: Neoconservatism, Neoliberalism and De-democratization.*

For abstract and to book places, see our website. Wendy Brown, Professor of Political Science at University of California at Berkeley will be giving the Centre’s annual lecture on 19 May 2006 at the University of Westminster. Her work in political theory is internationally renowned. She writes in the areas of political identity, political subjectivity and citizenship in liberal democracies, as well as critical and cultural theory. Her books include *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, 1995) and *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (forthcoming, Princeton, 2006).

**Professor Martha Fineman – Leverhulme Visiting Professor**

The Centre was successful in a recent application to the Leverhulme Trust to host Professor Martha Fineman (Emory University) for 10 months over 2006 and 2007. Martha Fineman is a leading feminist theorist and family law scholar and is founder and director of the Feminism and Legal Theory project at Emory. We’re looking forward to working with her over the next year. Her theories on intimacy and equality speak to the Centre’s main areas of focus. In particular, she argues that instead of working to eliminate dependency within families and social structures, families themselves need to change. This requires a shift away from prioritising sexually affiliated couples, towards reallocating responsibility for dependency to “caretaking relationships” of dependence between adults and elderly relatives or children.

**Postgraduate Network**

Rosie Harding (Kent) and Rosemary Auchmuty (Westminster) have been working hard on building the Centre’s postgraduate network. The second Postgraduate Workshop was held on 26 and 27 April at the University of Westminster and included a workshop on theory in the context of PhD work, featuring Brenna Bhandar (Reading), Anne Bottomley (Kent), Martha-Marie Kleinhans (Reading), Les Moran (Birkbeck) and Hilary Sommerlad (Leeds Metropolitan), as well as a Postgraduate Student Mini-Conference.

Rosie is developing an international network of postgraduate students and early career academics interested in gender, sexuality and law. This network has an e-mail list, which allows students to contact each other and post relevant information. She is also creating a directory, which will allow students and early career academics to share information on their research interests.

Please visit the website if you’d like to join the network and/or put your information on the directory.

**Rosemary Hunter**

We’re delighted that Professor Rosemary Hunter (currently at Griffith Law School, Australia) will be moving to Kent Law School in September 2006. Her research interests include women’s employment, anti-discrimination law, access to justice and dispute resolution. We’re looking forward to her taking an active role in the Centre.

**Consultation responses**

In November 2005, Monica Mookherjee (Keele) and Rupa Reddy (Westminster) co-ordinated the Centre’s response to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s consultation on forced marriage. They argued against the proposal to introduce a separate criminal offence of forcing
someone to marry’. They argued instead for the provision of more effective outreach services for women “at risk” and a culturally sensitive dialogue with ethnic minority communities.

Again, in November 2005, Ruth Fletcher (Keele) co-ordinated the Centre’s response to the public consultation on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act. This detailed consultation focused on the regulation of human reproductive technologies in the UK. Issues included the use of artificial gametes, the regulation of internet services supplying gametes, and problems arising from provisions taking account of the welfare of children born as a result of treatment.

As the newsletter goes to press, Sharron Fitzgerald (Keele) and Zoe Pearson (Keele) are co-ordinating the Centre’s response to the Home Office consultation entitled ‘Tackling Human Trafficking: Proposals for a UK Action Plan’.

We’re very grateful to all those involved in co-ordinating and contributing to the consultation responses. You can find the responses on our website.
Upcoming events

Please visit our website for details of how to register for the following events.

Revisiting Governing from Feminist and Queer Perspectives, University of Kent, 29 June 2006.
This workshop will explore the contribution that feminist and queer theory can make to how we think about the character and practice of regulation and governance. Keynote speakers will be Mariana Valverde, Judith Squires, Janet Newman and Jon Binnie.

Up Against the Nation States of Feminist Legal Theory, University of Kent, 30 June – 1 July 2006
This international conference will address the changing and multi-faceted relationship of the nation state to feminist legal theory. This event includes a stream entitled ‘Equality and the State’, funded by the British Academy and the Feminism and Legal Theory Project (Emory University, USA). Plenary speakers will be Ratna Kapur, Margaret Davies, and Ziba Mir-Hosseini.

This series, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, aims to bring together academics, legal and medical practitioners, NGOs, graduate students, activists and people living with HIV and AIDS to explore the ways in which the law impacts on people living with HIV and Aids.

The third, and final seminar in the series will be held at Keele. There will be presentations from a number of eminent international scholars, activists and practitioners. The focus will be on strategic initiatives to eliminate discrimination against people on grounds of their HIV status.

For further information, please contact Dr Matthew Weait – m.weait@law.keele.ac.uk.

Please contact Anisa de Jong (a.j.de-jong@kent.ac.uk) for further information.

Other Events Include
Healthcare and Bioethics Workshop, University of Kent, 24 – 25 November 2006
For further information, please contact Ruth Fletcher – r.fletcher@law.keele.ac.uk.

Governance and Cultural Studies Workshops, University of Westminster, 25 – 28 April 2007
Please contact Joanne Conaghan (j.a.f.conaghan@kent.ac.uk) for the Governance Workshop, and Lieve Gies (l.gies@keele.ac.uk) for the Cultural Studies Workshop.
Law, Cartooning, and ‘Dykes to Watch Out For’: An Interview with Alison Bechdel

Alison Bechdel, creator of the well-known ‘Dykes to Watch Out For’ (DTWOF) cartoons, visited the Universities of Westminster and Kent for two weeks in January and February 2006. While at Westminster, she participated in a roundtable, organised jointly between the Centre and the Cartoon Museum, entitled ‘Pleasures, Sorrows, and Ironies: Cartooning the Personal and the Political’. Alison then led a ‘cartooning basics’ workshop for Centre members at Kent (photos on our website) and gave a lecture on cartooning and gender politics.

One of the main aims of Alison’s visit was to begin to explore how we can relate to legal issues through arts methods. Drawing on different disciplines is a key aspect of the Centre’s AHRC funding. Alison’s focus, through cartooning, on a wide range of issues, such as American neo-conservatism, same sex marriage, and global politics, gave us a great opportunity to consider how, as legal academics, we frame our questions, and what convergences exist between the ways that artists and academics work.

Emily Grabham took the opportunity of interviewing Alison about the way that her work has responded to issues of gender, race, sexuality, and neo-conservative politics over the years.

E: You have been doing DTWOF for years now. How do you think the kind of legal issues that have come up have changed?

A: Oh they have changed a lot. One of my first overtly political cartoons was about the Bowers v Hardwick ruling – the anti-sodomy ruling that the Supreme Court made. That just really made me angry and it was the first time that I first started trying to do more editorial kinds of cartoons. Three years ago, that decision was overturned.

E: And then the same sex marriage stuff was just coming in round about the same time.

A: I’ve had this one couple Clarice and Toni who have been together for ever, although I’m not sure how much longer they’re going to be like that. First, they had their commitment ceremony in the backyard, and then Vermont, the state where I live, legalised civil unions. So Clarice and Toni went to Vermont and got a civil union. They were very eager to have this legal legitimacy. And then, two years ago, when cities were doing these civil disobedience gay marriages, they also did that. So they had a commitment ceremony, a civil union, [laughter] a marriage that got annulled and so on.

E: Did you intend to be looking at issues of community in the strip or is [the issue of community] convenient for the characters that you’ve got and their relationships?

A: The truth is I wish that I had a community like that. I create them as my fantasy community, the kind I wished I had but really don’t. And also, in terms of the broader lesbian community, or the gay and lesbian sub-culture, I feel like that has really fallen apart. There really was one when I was younger. The strip reflected that. There were institutions where there were bookstores, concerts.

E: And the discos.

A: Yes, places where you would go to meet people and I loved that. I loved having that structure and I really mourn its passing. Although maybe that’s just a factor of getting older; maybe it’s all still there.

E: I read your cartoon strip and I find myself wishing I could live there, even though they’ve all got problems. That’s kind of a weird feeling. It does seem utopian in some way.
A: Any situation comedy, any kind of narrative you are forced into, a play or a movie, anything, shows an unrealistically social group, I mean, I don’t know I just think like the television show ‘Friends’. All they do is sit around talking. No one really ever goes to work, or has a life.

E: But your characters do things like give birth in the strip.

A: Well true! They do in ‘Friends’ too!

E: When Toni had a baby, it was really…you know!

A: Oh yes it was very communal.

E: But also very explicit.

A: It’s been my personal mission to make the body and sexuality very visible and to get rid of all those taboos. So to show people having sex was just something that well, people do, which it is.

E: There’s a lot about Sydney’s body when she gets cancer.

A: I don’t feel very pleased with the way I handled the whole cancer thing. I think it’s very frightening to me and I haven’t experienced it personally. I was reluctant to really immerse myself in her emotions. But I can get away with that because so is she! Once you have cancer, you live with this fear and anxiety. So it’s not like you are done with it but I do feel I need to do more careful work about that.

E: So I suppose that leads us to another question which is about how do you deal with experiences or situations that the characters go through, but which you have never experienced?

A: Well I do lots of research and talk to people, have consultants. People are usually very generous about going into great detail about a particular experience. Years ago, [the mother of] one of my African-American characters died and I don’t know much about what this family situation would have been like. So this Black woman talked to me, just gave me a funny inside look at what going to the church or going to the funeral would have been like, in ways that would enable me to make it more particular. And I do a lot of reading and research, especially now that I can look at anything on the internet.

E: Looking through your strip, I just notice how much law there is in there. Sorry that’s a very legalistic thing to say.

A: You see law everywhere….

E: Yes I see law everywhere. I go to sleep, I see law!

A: Well my character Clarice is an attorney and so she has always been an opportunity for me to talk about those legal things. But I never really thought of it as a strategy. It just worked out well. And often I funnel them through her. Like the O.J. Simpson trials, she was imagining what it would be like if she were arguing against him.

I write the strip as a way to understand the world myself because I don’t! [laughter] I really don’t know how things work. I mean I really want to write about these important legal events and I’m forced to pay attention to them and understand them in order to do that, in a way I wouldn’t necessarily need to if I didn’t have to do a comic strip. I’m not very practical. I’m not a very real-world kind of person. I just keep asking all of you: ‘What does this Centre do? And who funds you?’ It’s hard for me to grasp how people and organisations function in the real world or how laws and governments function. It’s a mystery to me and I’m constantly trying to unravel it.

E: We were all aware that when we sent you that e-mail asking you to come over, you would be like: ‘Who the hell are these people?’

A: I also thought: ‘why the hell do you want me?’

E: We have this curiosity about cartooning.

A: But what I do is self-evident!
E: Do you think it’s self-evident?

A: Well it’s a comic strip. You read it, and hopefully you’ll laugh and then, you’ll go on.

E: And that’s what you are thinking while you are doing it? That’s what you think the readers are doing?

A: Yes. If I think about what they are doing at all, which I’m not sure I do.

E: That’s really interesting. This kind of leads to another question: what are your own experiences of activism that inform your work?

A: Yes I want to talk about activism because I still have this very familiar pang of guilt because I don’t think of myself as an activist and I feel very bad that I don’t do more on the ground type organising or protesting. In my youth, I did more, but even then I would feel bad. I would have girlfriends who were rabid activists, who would go off and do civil disobedience and who would get dragged away by the police.

And I was just an observer, not a participant, and I had such awe for those women. I’d love to be brave enough to do that. I am trying to come to terms with the feeling that my contribution is alright. At least I am not making things too much worse in the world. But I guess if everyone were an activist, then we would have the world that we want to have.

E: We would have about 16,000 different worlds! Bearing all that in mind, what is it about cartoon strips that get the message across in a way that other art forms don’t?

A: Well, it’s a very condensed sort of telegraphic form of briefing, getting across a lot of dense information in a pretty immediate accessible way. That’s the beauty of it for me. And I would like to think in a way that my cartoons are educational, that they teach people things. If you haven’t bothered to sort out something happening in the news which you can’t get a handle on, they are a way of boiling it down into a cartoon.

I don’t like the image of, you know, a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down. But I guess, in a sense, it keeps people’s attention. You know there’ll be something funny if you plough through this rant.

E: The other thing I’m really intrigued about is the academic stuff: the academic environments, the conferences, the titles of the papers. There is one experience in DTWOF where Sydney stands up and she’s just about to give a paper and it’s at some great big conference in the States. There’s somebody called Stanley Sturgeon who is the hotshot, and he’s been panelled at the same time as her in a different room, and everyone listens to all the papers apart from hers. And when she stands up, they all they all leave to go and see this Sturgeon guy. Which is just so spot on. Where do you get this stuff from?

A: Well I actually went to an academic conference and saw that happen and felt very bad for the next speaker. And then I was told that’s very common – you just have to take your luck. But I have only been to one academic conference and it was on narratology.

But it just fascinates me. I don’t know why I have so much academic stuff in the air. I mean I do have friends who are professors, but it’s not like I hear an awful lot about their work lives. I think I kind of wished maybe that would have been my alternative career. If I hadn’t done this really, that’s maybe something I could have done. It’s really very interesting how ideas shape the real world and whether they do. I have a faith that they do, but I’m not quite sure how. So I’m always trying to figure that one out too.

E: You seem really positive all the way through the cartoon, which is great. That’s why I keep returning to DTWOF.

A: You think it’s optimistic?
E: Yes! I do actually.

A: I think it’s very grim, especially the older I get. Somehow the grim political situation in the States is creeping into the personal lives of my characters. I’m not sure exactly how or why.

E: Which issues worry you the most?

A: That’s a good question. I don’t know! In an interesting way (I don’t know if I’m answering your question directly but maybe still, it’ll come round to it), I think the loss of community in the gay and lesbian world – to me its just a microcosm of this larger loss of community, and a loss of social public space in the US. Everything is becoming privatised and atomised and people live in these cut-off hermetically-sealed suburbs and there aren’t sidewalks, and no one can connect, no one can form a community, even if they could tear themselves away from the television long enough to want to form a community. So that’s a big concern for me, because, you know, people just aren’t organised against this onslaught, this corporate takeover of everything.

This is an extract from a longer version of the interview.

Past Events – 2005

May
A British Academy-funded workshop took place at Keele, entitled ‘Exploring Key Concepts in Feminist Legal Theory: The State, Governance and Citizenship Relations’ and organised jointly with the Feminism and Legal Theory Project at Emory University (US). The Centre’s international conference Theorising Intersectionality enabled participants to think critically about how relations of class, disability and ethnicity intersect gender and sexuality. Professor Sherene Razack (University of Toronto) presented the keynote speech ‘Why is Torture Sexualised?’

September
Professor Susan Boyd (University of British Columbia) visited the Centre for a month on a British Academy-funded research trip. Her research examined the influence of fathers’ rights campaigns on family law reform in Canada and the UK. Susan participated in a workshop at Keele entitled ‘Fathers’ Rights Activism and Legal Reform’, and in a workshop on Cohabitation at Kent Law School. She also attended a research seminar at Keele: ‘Judging Values: Class and Race in Legal Knowledge’ at which Didi Herman (Kent), Helen Rhoades (Melbourne) and Claire Young (UBC) also presented papers.

November
A symposium entitled ‘Engendering Bioethics: Stigmatised Bodies, Citizenship, and Choice’ at Keele brought together scholars working in citizenship, health studies, law and other related fields to discuss topics ranging from new technologies to autonomy, harm and consent in the context of law and bioethics. The Centre co-hosted a workshop with King’s College London on ‘Utopian Legalities’. A ‘How Not To’ workshop took place at Kent advising postgraduate students, through startlingly good performances by (keen actors) Joanne Conaghan and Didi Herman, on how not to present papers at conferences and staff seminars.
Look out for this …

Research Notes

In this section, two Centre members provide short summaries of their own current research…

Policing The Internet: Protecting Vulnerable Children From Sex Offenders In Cyberspace And Exploring Child Victims’ Perceptions Of Police Practice

Dr Julia Davidson and Elena Martellozzo

We are involved in three research studies involving and conducted on behalf of the Metropolitan Police. The first study aimed to evaluate an interactive Internet safety programme which attempts to educate children and their parents about safe use of the Internet. The second study is ongoing, and aims to explore police practice in combating indecent online images of children and in prosecuting sex offenders who use the Internet to target and groom children for sexual abuse. Throughout this study, the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which has recently been introduced to English law and makes the ‘grooming’ of a child for the purposes of sexual abuse an offence, will be closely analysed. The third study seeks to explore the perceptions that child victims of intra-familial sexual abuse have of police practice, following emphasis in the Children Act 2003 upon the importance of seeking service users’ views to inform and develop practice (this is a collaborative venture with colleagues from Royal Holloway, University of London).

Findings from the first two studies (findings from the child victims research are not yet available) indicate that although the Internet is a vital tool for education and communication, children can, however, encounter dangers when online. Advanced new technologies have provided sex offenders with new ways to exploit children. The second ongoing study suggests that sex offenders will often socialize and groom children over long periods of time as preparation for sexual abuse, adopting children’s computer language and learning about their hobbies and interests in order to groom them for abuse. The children depicted in the online images are vulnerable repeat victims and usually from Eastern European countries. It is believed that viewing such material drastically increases the demand for the production of new indecent images and for the further sexual abuse of children. Recent initiatives undertaken in the UK include mass public awareness campaigns; new legislation; education and research programs; and undercover policing on the Internet.

Women And The Family Home: Social Change and Legal Responses in England and Wales, 1945-2005

Rosemary Auchmuty

I am currently writing a book on courts’ approaches to women’s claims for rights in the family home which, sixty years after they first started to surface, remain an unsolved problem for many. Indeed, the Law Commission is once again addressing this in its current investigation of the position of unmarried cohabitees. The book sets the development of case law and statute in the context of the social history of the time. It examines the rise of home ownership, the growing power of the mortgage industry, the changing economic role of women, the ideologies and cultural images that both gave rise to the legal responses and influenced the practical outcome for women, and the struggles of feminists (invariably left out of legal accounts) to alert society to injustices and to shape the remedies proposed. It also searches out, in fiction and autobiographical writing contemporary to each development, the voices of women, so often suppressed in the case law, expressing their understandings of their relationship to the home and their sense of betrayal that a society committed to a notion that ‘women’s place is in the home’ could so signally fail to accomplish this with legal rights.

I argue that it was not primarily the economic impediments that stood in the way of equality for women. It was the unspoken ideology that property rightfully belonged to men, and that
women’s access to a larger share (or any share) in the wealth generated by the family home had to be limited lest women become too independent. I conclude that the solution lies not in more or different protective legal interventions but in education, changing men’s behaviour; and the economic and psychological empowerment of women.

**Recent Publications**

Here is a selection of recent publications by Centre members:


**Visitors to the Centre**

We run two visitor schemes. You can find further information and details of how to apply on our website.

The **Visiting Scholar Scheme** is targeted at scholars from outside the UK with a record of critical research in gender and sexuality or a related field. These are usually established university academics, but other established researchers are also welcome to apply. Visiting scholars will be expected to make a visit of between 2 weeks and 3 months to the Centre, participate in research seminars and other Centre events, and make a visit to one other Centre institution apart from the main host institution.

The **Associate Fellow Scheme** is targeted at national and international practitioners, professionals, policy-makers, NGO (and other) activists and artists who work in a relevant field and are interested in a progressive/critical approach to the gender and sexuality dimension of legal issues. Visits will usually be between 2-4 weeks. Associate fellows will be expected to share their expertise with academics working in related fields. They will also be expected to visit at least one other partner institution apart from the main host institution.

Visitors to Centre institutions for the academic year 2005-2006 under these schemes are listed below. You can find the names of visitors to the Centre under other schemes (such as Keele Law School, Kent Law School, or British Academy) on the website.

**Alison Bechdel** (author of Dykes to Watch Out For), **Brinda Bose** (Nehru Memorial Museum, Delhi), **Kim Brooks** (University of British Columbia), **Wendy Brown** (UC Berkeley), **Gillian Calder** (University of Victoria, Canada), **Nancy Ehrenreich** (University of Denver, USA), **Judith Halberstam** (University of Southern California), **Prabha Kotiswaran** (Harvard Law School), **Suhraiya Jivraj** (independent researcher), **Toni Lester** (Babson College, USA), **Rina Ramdev** (Delhi University), **Nan Seuffert** (University of Waikato), **Stephen Tomson** (University of Newcastle, Australia), **Ara Wilson** (Ohio State University).
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**AHRC**
The Arts and Humanities Research Council funds postgraduate training and research in the arts and humanities. It supports research within a huge subject domain from traditional humanities subjects, such as history, modern languages and English literature, to the creative and performing arts. The AHRC makes awards on the basis of academic excellence and is not responsible for the views or research outcomes reached by its award holders.