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Religion and Violence Against Women



Throughout history women have been fighting violence against women

Sociology professor Nancy Nason-Clark, and a team of researchers at the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Center for Family Violence Research, have been researching the role of evangelical churches in the fight to end violence against women, and other forms of family violence.

"Celebrating family life and family values has really become the hallmark of conservative Christianity," said Nason-Clark. Evangelical churches have tried to define marriage and the family in terms of a fixed gender ideology. Men are declared the spiritual leaders of the home, while women play the nurturing-mother role, taking care of the household, the children, and the family's faithfulness. But what about families who do not match the ideal? Where do they fit into these standards? Nason-Clark asked, "Given their [evangelical churches'] focus on togetherness, does the rhetoric of celebrating family values translate into concrete help for families that are hurting?"

The answers to this question are interestingly mixed. The majority of evangelical clergy in Atlantic Canada report ongoing experience responding to the needs of women and children who have suffered abuse. Yet while many clergy believe they condemn violence from the pulpit, few women parishioners report hearing these messages. There seems to be a discrepancy between the clergy's understanding of condemning violence from the pulpit and what women hear.

On the other hand, women in evangelical churches proved to have very strong by Kim Hannah, with additional reporting by Tony Kennedy

support networks among themselves. Many evangelical women interviewed in focus groups reported offering an abuse victim overnight shelter in their homes; almost all referred to the "listening ear" they lent to abused women, and to other acts such as taking care of an abused woman's children while she sought counselling.

Nason-Clark examines the role of clerical leaders in helping women who are in abusive family environments. She is interested in finding out what advice they give to women who are in these circumstances, and asks, "Do clerical leaders suggest that women go back and be more subservient? More submissive to their husbands? Or do they offer an environment of support to encourage women to find the inner resources to leave and to seek abuse-free lives"?

In order to answer these questions Nason-Clark and her team of researchers listen to the story of abuse from the point of view of transition-house workers, evangelical leaders, and women themselves. They are also doing a series of telephone interviews with members of twenty-four evangelical congregations in Atlantic Canada. This congregational study looks at how evangelical church families resolve conflict. Specifically, from whom do they seek help, and when they sought it were they satisfied with it? Moreover, can clerical leaders and secular caregivers (psychologists and social workers) work together?

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The results of this research so far suggest that partnership between the evangelical and secular communities has not been fully achieved. Naming the problem of abuse has posed difficulties, for instance: the churches tend to refer to "family violence," and the secular population to "wife abuse." To the churches, abuse is a spiritual problem affecting both abuser and abused; in a secular context it is seen as a social problem.

Nason-Clark concluded her talk with three questions about violence and the working relationship between churches and secular society: "Can churches and secular organizations work together in producing violence-free family living? Yes they can. Is there much to be gained from churches and secular professionals working together? Yes there is. Do they work together much now? Not as much as they should!"

Gender Gaps continued from page 12

Eric Leed's No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I, she noted that soldiers at the front are supposed to separate themselves from their accustomed social patterns in order to mold themselves into appropriate instruments for military action. The experience of war thus becomes, in Leed's terms, "an experience of marginality," leaving the soldiers to cope with the sense of powerlessness, and an inarticulate awareness of the fragmentation of both private and public selfhood. It is in trying to come to terms with this marginality that soldiers reach for "cultural repertoires of meaning," including modes of language and behaviour normally coded "feminine."

Analysis of wartime literature such as David Jones's In Parenthesis and Frederic Manning's The Middle Parts of Fortune, Austin suggested, reveals the struggles within the soldiers, whose experience conflicted with the codified values of gender categories. When the soldiers needed some resistance to the rigidly "masculine" world of the military, they turned to an opposite world-that of the "feminine"-and that turn is discernible in the language and style of war literature.

Dr. Austin concluded her talk by saying "I hope that my study will bridge the gendered spaces of the literary discussion of this war material." She wishes to deconstruct the notion that war literature is incontestably male, simply because it was written by males about an activity (war) which is normally defined as masculine.

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Dressing and Redressing in the 17th and 18th Centuries

At the beginning of her talk, Dr. Beverly Lemire noted that the history of the and functional garments. clothing trade has been largely ignored

Revolution.

methods, relying on non-guild labor

and a growing female work force.

Making, mending and sewing clothes

employed more than twenty percent

of the women in London by the early

eighteenth century. Shopkeepers

The growth of the clothing trade, however, did not hinge solely on the by the academic community, and what efforts of these small shopkeepers. has been written mainly addresses The increased size and reorganization changes in clothing styles, rather than how the clothing trade fit in with the of the military also generated an economic growth of the Industrial increased demand for clothes, and the clothing trade was forced to seek out

Making, mending and sewing clothes employed more than twenty percent of the women in London by the early eighteenth century.

To demonstrate the importance of more efficient means of production the clothing trade to the British in order to produce the mountainous economy, Lemire pointed out that quantities of clothing needed for the one fourth of England's annual army and navy. From 1760 to 1762, expenditure around 1700 was spent for example, one contractor sold on apparel. From the mid-\$42,000 worth of shirts to the navy; seventeenth century onward, lower that amounted to over a quarter of a labour costs outside guild-controlled million shirts produced and delivered regions encouraged manufacturers to over a two-year period. reorganize labour and production

The size of the labour force employed to meet the increased demand for clothes can be measured if one understands that it took a single seamstress eight hours to make a single shirt. Pay for those actually doing the employed female servants to provide seventeenth century onward, a largely pawnbroker.

selections of ready-made, inexpensive female work force survived on pennies a day, manufacturing goods that included not only clothes for the military, but also new markets that opened up in England, Europe and North America (including New Brunswick)

> Another important clothing market at this time was the second-hand market. It offered poorer families the option of looking fashionable at a reduced cost. Wealthy patrons were encouraged by tailors to trade in old clothing, not only to update their own wardrobes, but also to provide less affluent buyers with a chance to buy fashionable clothing. Clothes were pawned to raise money, or for shortterm loans. Not all second-hand goods were acquired by honest means, however. The industry became a target for thieves, who moved large volumes of goods to shopkeepers and pawnbrokers.

The second-hand trade guaranteed a certain level of economic flexibility, and a better choice of clothing for labouring families. Clothing and household textiles could be exchanged for cash at any tavern, pawnbroker, or shop counter, and garments became a type of currency. Many poor households, for example, made ends meet by juggling work, however, was minimal. From the a nice gown to and from the



Hogarth captures the dress of the day

By the end of the eighteenth century, men and women of all classes were dressed in washable cottons and corduroys, rather than in leather, wool or silk. The wider ownership of these items marked a greater level of material comfort, and set new patterns of consumer behaviour. Yet changes in the manufacturing of clothes also meant the by Jason Haywood

spread of low-paid sweated labour, which was mostly female. Whereas one side of the Industrial Revolution produced mechanical and technological solutions, the other side produced extensive exploitation of lowtechnology labour.