

Ashby Dialogues Report: Feminist Theory and Science, 2014–15

Much as we initially planned, our Ashby Dialogues comprised five reading-based dialogues over the course of the academic year, plus one public event, a lecture by theoretical physicist Karen Barad titled, “Dis/continuous Re-memberings: Material Entanglements and Temporal Diffractions.” The lecture took place on 30 October 2014 in the Organ Recital Hall of the Music building, and it drew an audience of about forty-five people. Following the public lecture, the dialogue group convened with Dr Barad to discuss both her lecture and a brief article about teaching science and social justice she had written with her collaborators at the University of California, Santa Cruz (see reading list at end of report). Although we had initially planned to begin our series of dialogues with more prosaic studies of science and gender, leading up to this challenging work toward the end, Dr Barad’s time constraints necessitated beginning our series with her talk: it turned out to be a satisfyingly dramatic way to open up our inquiry to the world of feminist science studies.

The remainder of the dialogues took place during the spring semester of 2015, and although it was difficult to convene at a time when every member of the dialogue group could attend, all dialogues included students as well as faculty, and every member of the group save one was able to participate. A number of us had already read one or more of the books and articles on our list, but it was surprising to some of us how deep the literature actually is, and how well established science studies, social studies of science, philosophy of science, and feminist science studies are, considering how little awareness of these concerns has penetrated the conventional university curriculum. We even have a large number of relevant print sources available in Jackson Library.

The group decided upon a list of readings we hoped would motivate discussion along the following questions: What is the historical basis for current assumptions that science is a field more suited to men? How has science constructed gender and sexuality, and how have those constructions helped to maintain male dominance in scientific fields? How has science de-constructed gender, and what are the social ramifications of that? How have past and recent female scientists posed different questions, used different methodologies, or created new bodies of scientific knowledge? What counts as “science,” and why? How have postcolonial perspectives and practices challenged the hegemony of Euro-American science? Where and when should ethics inform scientific inquiry and education?

We posted “assigned” readings to a dedicated Blackboard site, and also used that space to share other relevant resources we found, such as related articles in *Nature*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the *New York Times* (see sample below), and web and Facebook pages dedicated to women in science or gender and science. There is even a surprisingly good *Wikipedia* article on women in science.

The discussions were lively, and members of the dialogue group came away with more insight into these issues, but also a desire to learn more and to heighten awareness of them among our students and colleagues. To that end, WGS plans to hold more talks and discussions on these and related matters, perhaps linked to prominent news events, and we hope to design and offer a course on feminist science studies.

Reading List

- Maddox, Brenda. *Rosalind Franklin: The Dark Lady of DNA*. New York: Harper Collins, 2002.
- Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962. [selections]
- Harding, Sandra. *Sciences from Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and Modernities*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. [selections]
- Harding, Sandra G. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991. [selections]
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1990. [selections]
- Keller, Evelyn Fox. *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1983. [selections]
- Schiebinger, Londa. *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989. [selections]
- _____. “Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy.” *Representations* 14, *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Spring, 1986): 42–82.
- Science and Justice Research Center (Collaboration Group), “Experiments in Collaboration: Interdisciplinary Graduate Education in Science and Justice” *PLOS Biology* 11, no. 7 (2013): 1–5.

Other Resources:

- Cech, Erin A. "Education: Embed Social Awareness in Science Curricula," *Nature* (22 January 2014)
<http://www.nature.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/news/education-embed-social-awareness-in-science-curricula-1.14549>
- Nature Women in Science Issue* (07 March 2013)
<http://www.nature.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/news/specials/women/index.html>
- Pollock, Eileen. "Why are There Still So Few Women in Science?" *New York Times Magazine* (03 October 2013):
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/06/magazine/why-are-there-still-so-few-women-in-science.html?_r=0
- Schiebinger, Londa. "Scientific Research Must Take Gender into Account." *Nature* (05 March 2014).
<http://www.nature.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/news/scientific-research-must-take-gender-into-account-1.14814>
- Scientista Foundation*: <http://www.scientistafoundation.com/>
- "Women in Science." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_science

Dialogue Participants

Faculty:

Elizabeth Keathley, Music Studies & Women's & Gender Studies
 Heidi Carlone, Teacher Education and Higher Education
 Nadja Cech, Chemistry and Biochemistry
 Cerise Glenn, Communication Studies and WGS
 Verónica Grossi, Languages, Literatures and Cultures & WGS
 Hephzibah Roskelly, English & WGS
 Amy Williamsen, LLC & WGS

Grad students:

Gianina Coturri, PhD student, English Literature (Literature & the Environment)
 Stephanie Hudson, PhD student, Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations.

Undergrad students:

Tyra Callaway, sophomore, Major: Biochemistry and Physics; Minor: German, Math, Pre-Medicine
 Nicole Kuker, sophomore, BM Music Education (instrumental music), minor in ASL.
 Irene Martin, junior, Biology
 Paola Perez, sophomore, Spanish & Speech Pathology (double major)
 Kaitlyn Wagner, junior, BM, Music Performance (composition)