



THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES ASSOCIATION PHD AWARD 2014

The AWGSA PhD Award was established to promote and advance feminist scholarship in Australia by recognising emerging research in the fields of Women's and Gender Studies and related disciplines. The first year the award was made was 2010. It is awarded biennially so this is the third time it is being presented. The PhD Award is given to the most outstanding doctoral thesis completed at an Australian university over the past 2 years that clearly and extensively engages with feminist paradigms.

The nominations for this award were doctorates conferred during the period 2012-2013. The judging panel was really impressed by the quality of all the entries which demonstrate the great diversity of feminist research being produced at doctoral level in Australia. The judges short-listed five dissertations to read in their entirety before selecting the most outstanding, and two highly commended. In making these decisions we paid attention to whether/how the theses were innovative (conceptually and/or methodologically); how effectively they advanced feminist debate in the areas addressed; the overall quality; whether their augmentation was persuasive; and potential for publishing.

In this way, we concluded that the PhD Award for the dissertation that represents the most substantial contribution to the fields of Women's and Gender Studies in Australia should be awarded to Dr Erica Rose Millar (University of Melbourne).

The judges also wish to Highly Commend the work of Dr Kylie Weston-Scheuber (ANU) and Dr Catherine Bishop (ANU).

Award Winner:

Dr Erica Rose Millar, 'A Viable Abortion: Emotional Intelligibilities of Choice in Contemporary Australia, 1969-2008'

The committee was delighted to award the 2014 AWGSA PhD prize to Dr Erica Rose Millar, for her thesis 'A Viable Abortion: Emotional Intelligibilities of Choice in Contemporary Australia, 1969-2008'. The committee found this doctoral thesis to be an exemplary piece of feminist scholarship – exceptionally well-written, persuasively argued, and immaculately researched. This thesis is imaginative, astute, and politically engaged, offering a sophisticated analysis of how abortion is rendered meaningful as well as identifying underlying shifts in the late 20th-early 21st century gender regime in Australia. In particular, this thesis makes a significant intervention into ongoing debates around neoliberalism, 'choice', and gender. Mapping how abortion has been discursively constituted over a number of decades, the thesis thoroughly demonstrates how it continues to be positioned 'as a shameful and grievable choice' in public discourse. As Millar so comprehensively demonstrates, in

such a climate alternative narratives come to be elided and the desire to mother continues to be seen as integral to proper womanhood. In addition to women's and gender studies, the thesis confidently canvasses an impressive range of critical literature, engaging with history, philosophy, law, and politics. Moreover, we concluded that the thesis would make the fine basis for a monograph. Congratulations to Erica on a fine piece of feminist scholarship.

Highly commended

Dr Kylie Weston-Scheuber

The committee recommended that 'Reconstructing Domestic Violence as "Terrorism Against Women": Disrupting Dominant Discourse' receive a high commendation. This work offers an ambitious, carefully executed, compelling argument regarding the different ways terrorism and domestic violence are constructed in Australian legal discourse. Politically the thesis does important work through drawing attention to and problematising the ways in which, in terms of legal intervention and response, acts of terrorism are privileged over those of domestic violence. Cogently demonstrating the parallels between the two, Weston-Scheuber concludes that domestic violence needs to be (re)conceptualised as a public, ideological crime, resulting in a potential shift in how it is approached by the legal system. In recognition of the merits of this thesis, the committee found that it should be highly commended.

Dr Catherine Bishop

This thesis, 'Commerce Was a Woman: Women in Business in Colonial Sydney and Wellington', is an engaging account of the significant role women in colonial Australia and New Zealand played as entrepreneurs between 1830 and 1860. The committee found this thesis to be an important piece of feminist work, seeking to write these women and the work they did back into historical accounts of colonial Sydney and Wellington. It is beautifully written and meticulously researched, offering a rich, nuanced account of how these women workers were positioned, and positioned themselves, within these respective communities. The thesis makes important use of primary sources that are now available as a result of digitisation, enabling its author to access, as she tells us, 'previously inaccessible details about ordinary lives'. We therefore concluded that this work should be awarded a high commendation.

Judging Panel for the 2014 Prize

Dr Anthea Taylor, President (University of Sydney)

Dr Margaret Henderson, QLD Executive Member (University of Queensland)

Dr Meredith Nash, Tasmanian Executive Member (University of Tasmania)

Dr Anitra Goriss-Hunter, 2012 Winner (University of Ballarat)

Dr Tanya Serisier, Vice President (Queens University)