

Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, UBC  
Fall 2010 Lecture Series

Wednesday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010. 12:00 – 1:00  
pm

At the Centre for Women's and Gender Studies  
2080 West Mall (028) Jack Bell Building

“Please note new location of Lecture Series”



## **Susan Boyd, Professor of Law, Chair in Feminist Legal Studies, UBC**

### *What Does Autonomy Mean for Mothers?*

Taking the recent proposals to change B.C. laws on child custody and access as a starting point, this paper explores the tensions between a feminist conception of autonomy and modern expectations of mother-caregivers. It does so in the context of social and legal trends favouring shared parenting. Feminists have criticized the individualist version of autonomy at the core of liberalism, instead often emphasizing the significant of relationships. The very relationship between mother-caregivers and children illustrates the connection between relationships and autonomy: the caregiving that mothers provide enables children to become autonomous persons yet this relationship simultaneously constrains maternal autonomy. In the current normative climate, the potential for maternal autonomy is further compromised – even when mothers choose to live apart from a child's biological father or to parent alone (single mothers by choice). A responsible mother is expected to nurture a child's relationship with the father, unless he is proven to be harmful. The dominance of the heterosexual and patriarchal family – always a challenge for women's autonomy – is thereby reproduced. How the legal system can better promote responsible yet autonomous motherhood will be the question asked.

**SUSAN BOYD** is a Professor and holds the Chair in Feminist Legal Studies at UBC Law. She teaches courses in the fields of family law, feminism and law, and law and social justice. She is Director of the UBC Centre for Feminist Legal Studies. She researches gender and sexuality issues in the fields of parenthood law and family law and has numerous publications in these fields, including *Child Custody, Law, and Women's Work* (2003) and *Reaction and Resistance: Feminism, Law, and Social Change* (2007). Her latest article is “Autonomy for Mothers? Relational Theory and Parenting Apart” (2010) 18(2) *Feminist Legal Studies* 137-158.