

Media Release

Nov. 13, 2015

Annual Science and Technology Studies Lecture
“Caught on their Own Hook? Chimerism Conundrums and the Perils of
Popularizing Science” by Dr. Aryn Martin, York University
Wednesday, Nov. 18 at 7 pm

York University’s Dr. Aryn Martin will speak about the perils of popularizing science when she delivers the annual Science and Technology Studies Lecture at St. Thomas University on Wednesday, November 18 at 7 pm in Brian Mulroney Hall, Room 101.

Martin is an associate professor of Science and Technology Studies whose research interests are in the areas of health, sex and gender, and the social studies of biomedicine.

In her lecture, “Caught on their own hook? Chimerism conundrums and the perils of popularizing science,” Martin will discuss how sporadic scientific research papers about microchimerism have in the past decade spawned popular accounts that suggest profound meaning in the phenomenon.

“Microchimerism is when small cell populations derived from ‘other’ appear to live in ‘self’ indefinitely; for example, when cells from a growing fetus linger in the mother after birth. While scientists studying microchimerism are mostly concerned with studying the possible health effects from this cell ‘traffic,’ their work is being taken up publicly in bizarre terms, ranging from the Virgin Mary’s Ascension into Heaven to pro-life politics to racial contamination of white women,” Martin said.

“In their effort to render their work ‘catchy’ to lay audiences, scientists slip seamlessly between cells and persons, and I will argue that this is a genetic reductionist move that threatens to let the real story get away.”

Martin’s research is anchored by theoretical attention to language, classification, individuation (and its opposites), and the entanglements of social relations and biological materiality. She has written about human genetic chimaeras, maternal-fetal microchimerism, immunology and pregnancy as phenomena that trouble biological and political notions of the individual.

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