



Western

Centre for Research on
Migration and Ethnic Relations

**Winter Colloquium
Series 2017**

*** Dr. Karen Pennesi ***



Karen Pennesi is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Western Ontario. She is a linguistic anthropologist whose research explores how power relations influence naming practices in the construction of individual and group identities within ethnolinguistically diverse societies. She has been working with the London Cross-Cultural Learner Centre and is a member of its Intercultural Education Advisory Committee. She is currently working on a set of guidelines for inclusive naming practices in institutional and social settings based on the Universal Design for Learning approach.

“Where are you from?” and “What kind of name is that?”: Obligatory Conversations and the Regulation of Belonging in Canada

This talk will explore how belonging is negotiated in “obligatory conversations”, in which first and second generation immigrants to Canada are interrogated or feel obliged to explain themselves to members of dominant groups. Obligatory conversations may begin with questions including: “Where are you from?”, “What kind of name is that?”, “Do you speak X language?”, “How long have you been here?”, “What kind of work do you do?” These questions typically emerge during small talk in initial meetings and are prompted by factors such as physical appearance, a foreign accent, or a marked ethnic name. The analysis will show how repeated interactions involving obligatory conversations work to regulate belonging and non-belonging to ethnic, national, racial, linguistic and other social categories. It will then demonstrate how moral evaluations of obligatory conversations as racist, friendly or insignificant are used in the construction of particular identities in other contexts. What do we say (or not say) to new people we meet? How do we respond when obligatory conversations are initiated? And what do the answers to those questions say about who we are?

Thursday, March 9, 2017

4:00 pm, SSC 5220

Refreshments at 3:30pm in SSC 5230

All Welcome!

For More Information email: mer@uwo.ca