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On Reproductive Rights and Citizenship

By Alison Bailey

In her book *Pregnancy and Power*, Ricki Solinger asks whether women can be full citizens if they are prohibited—by law, public policy, or community and family attitudes—from controlling their own bodies, including their fertility. Furthermore, she wonders what the consequences for citizenship are when women with race and class privilege have far greater access to the resources and services required to control their fertility on their own terms than others do.

I have been thinking a great deal about the connections between reproductive rights and citizenship these days. A few weeks ago the Bush administration appointed Eric Keroack as the new chief of family-planning programs at the Department of Health and Human Services. He will be in charge of overseeing the distribution of Title X funding, which amounts to \$283 million per year in grants designed to provide access to contraceptive supplies and information to all who want and need them, with priority given to low-income persons. This funding typically supports 4,600 family planning clinics and serves five million clients annually.

Until his recent appointment, Keroack served as the medical director for A Women's Concern, a network of crisis pregnancy centers in eastern Massachusetts that supports sexual abstinence until marriage and does not distribute or encourage the use of contraceptive drugs and devices. According to the mission statement, these centers follow the belief that "the role of women as childbearers is ordained by God," that abortion is "inherently destructive and demeaning to women," and that "the crass commercialization and distribution of birth control is

demeaning to women, degrading of human sexuality, and adverse to human health and happiness."

In a scary way, these proclamations echo Comstock-era arguments against birth control and pornography. The Comstock Act (1873) was a federal law that made it illegal to send "obscene, lewd, and/or lascivious" materials through the U.S. mail. The men and women who campaigned against explicit sex and sexuality during this time did so because they thought that these practices were degrading to women and because they trivialized the importance that love should have within married sexuality. The argument goes something like this: The true expression of human sexuality is only possible within a loving relationship between a married man and woman. Contraception provides men and women with the means to have sex without feeling love. Therefore, contraception is degrading to the true sense of human sexuality. The argument is neither sound nor valid, but never mind.

With the enactment of Comstock, the medical profession of that era adopted the stance that it was a physician's duty to uphold morality by controlling information about contraception, its uses and its benefits. Today most so-called "crisis pregnancy centers," including the ones Keroack directed, adhere to this practice and the 19th-century account of human sexuality that supports it.

There is a profound difference between presenting a woman with limited reproductive health choices that an organization deems appropriate, and the choices to which she *legally* has a right! The former is profoundly undemocratic and treats the woman as a subject of the state and not as a full citizen. When clinic doctors constrain the choices available to women making reproductive decisions, they do two things. First, they

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create a gendered standard for who does and does not get to make medical decisions about their bodies. Next, they exacerbate the gap between women who have access to private medical services that present them with legally recognized options, and those who must accept the politically driven choices presented to them at federally funded clinics. They make decisions about who does and does not get to be a full citizen, which leads me to consider. . . what would citizenship look like in a United States that allowed full and equal access to reproductive choices for all women? ☼

Sources:

Reed, James W. 1978. *From Private Vice to Public Virtue: The Birth Control Movement in American Society since 1830*. New York: Basic Books.

Solinger, Ricki. 2005. *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America*. New York: New York University Press.

Faculty Spotlight

May I Present: *Madame et Monsieur*

By Becca Chase

Dr. Michelle Vought, soprano and member of the College of Music vocal faculty, has developed an innovative musical and performance piece, “Madame/Monsieur.” She performed previews on September 30 and October 7 before making her debut in Provincetown, MA at the Fringe Festival Theatre. After she returned, she performed the show again on November 13 at the Normal Theater.

In the show, Michelle sings from the musical theatre and operatic repertoire. First she appears as “Madame Diva,” in a sexy evening gown (very *décolletage*, of course) singing “Habanera,” from Bizet’s *Carmen*, and “Someone to Watch Over Me,” among other songs and arias. Following



intermission, Vought returns in dapper male attire as “Monsieur Divo” to perform from the male repertoire, including “Nessun dorma,” from Puccini’s *Turandot*, and “Be My Love,” which is a highlight of the show. For this number, Mr. Divo sizes up the audience as he sings, then chooses a lady

from the audience to woo, dancing during the instrumental

interlude and, at the end of the number, presenting her with the rose from his tuxedo lapel.

“For years I have longed to perform some of the great songs and arias from the male repertoire,” says Vought. “After learning about the popularity of male impersonation in turn of the century English music halls, I was delighted to have discovered an avenue by which I could at last assimilate some of this male repertoire into my performances.”



Dr. Vought has performed nationally and internationally, and is an authority on contemporary music. Last year, Vought produced and performed the leading soprano role in the world premiere of Austrian composer Nancy Van de Vate’s opera *Where the Cross Is Made*.

Michelle has secured several gigs for “Madame/Monsieur” through October 2007. For more about her and the show, visit www.michellevought.com. Her next appearance at ISU will be in a solo concert in February. ☼

Hispanic Families Work Group Meets

The Latin American and Latino Studies Program, in conjunction with the College of Arts and Sciences, hosted a luncheon and business meeting of the Hispanic Families Work Group of McLean County at the Student Health Service Building on November 3. This is a collaborative community group comprised of leaders from the social service, faith community, government, education, health service, and business community sectors who are dedicated to serving the Hispanic community in McLean County. These professionals advocate for enhanced access to, and quality of, opportunities and services. About 40 community leaders were joined by a number of Illinois State faculty, staff, and graduate students. They came together to review the events of Hispanic Heritage Month, plan events for the coming months, and discuss particular community issues that affect the Hispanic community. Some of the issues addressed were translation services, transportation, work-related problems, and police-community relations. ☼

Thanks to CASNews, November 6, 2006

Student News

Erica Thurman presented her paper “Killing Them Softly: African American Women, Norplant, and Genocide in the United States” at the African American Women Evolving (AAWE) Health Conference on *Black Women: Loving the Mind, Body, and Spirit*, on October 27 in Chicago.

Maureen Anderson was awarded the Ora Bretall Scholarship for her dissertation proposal, “‘Witch’ as Metaphor.” The scholarship is awarded to students whose thesis or dissertation proposals deal “significantly with educational theory or philosophy of religion and who give promise of continued contribution to the development of educational theory and practice.”

Welcome, New Minors!

Christine Hall, Mass Communications
Betty Hampton, General Studies
Danielle Kiefner, Psychology
Jamie Mendez, Family Relations
Elisabeth Otten, History
Brandy Peak, Sociology

Welcome, New Certificate Students!

Gwendolyn Graham, non-degree certificate

Congratulations, Graduates!

Stephanie Butler, Political Science
Talia Menachem, Sociology
Debbie Armstrong, M.A., Family and Consumer Sciences

WGS Grad’s Play *Hopeless Spinning* Premieres

This emotionally powerful, visually stunning, and musically rich one-act play by **Margaret Iha** traces the developing relationships between Sam, a naïve but determined young woman from the U.S., and the people of Rio de Janeiro’s Barbante *favela*. She has come to Rio on a mission to take photos of street children, and finds her beliefs challenged by her experiences. Iha juxtaposes and blends narrative drama, stylized performance pieces by the street kids, and *capoeira* (a martial art and dance form). The Women’s and Gender Studies Graduate Certificate recipient and M.A. candidate in Politics and Government, based the play on her own travels. The show premiered on December 1 at ISU’s Westoff Theatre. It continues through December 8 (see Calendar). Get your tickets now—the play is selling out! ☼



F.L.A.M.E. members at Take Back the Night on October 13

F.L.A.M.E. Sets Campus Ablaze!

By Annaliisa Ahlman

Illinois State University’s Feminist Led Activist Movement to Empower (F.L.A.M.E.) is doing its part to shake up campus life. F.L.A.M.E. ignited during meetings early in the semester, and it is spreading like wildfire across ISU’s campus and community thanks in part to the moving Take Back the Night rally and march on October 18. Over 200 people attended the rally in the Bone Student Center Prairie Room, which featured testimony by three courageous survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. Afterwards, about 75 people marched and chanted through campus and downtown Normal. The night was capped off with safe spaces for further discussion. An intimate discussion in one space birthed a new support group at ISU for sexual assault survivors.

Work has begun for the annual production of *The Vagina Monologues (VM)*, scheduled for February 23-25, 2007, which will be sponsored by F.L.A.M.E. and other organizations. We are still looking for volunteers to assist with fundraising, publicity, technical theatre, ushering, etc. (See Calendar for more information).

Thanks to the support of F.L.A.M.E., Erin Brophy and I were able to attend a conference in New Orleans for *The Vagina Monologues* organizers from around North America. Playwright Eve Ensler met with us at the workshop, where we shared ideas and suggestions with other VM sponsors and organizers and brainstormed ways to incorporate this year’s new monologue into events that reach beyond performances. ☼

For further information about F.L.A.M.E., the survivors support group, or volunteering for VM, contact Annaliisa at amahlma@ilstu.edu.

Faculty Accomplishments

Alison Bailey presented her work on “Strategic Ignorance” to the Whiteness Studies Reading Group at the Center for Multiculturalism and Democracy University of Illinois, Urbana, IL on November 4.

Sara L. Cole presented “Health Education Students’ Self-Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses when Working with Diverse Populations” at the Society for Public Health Education Annual Meeting in Boston on November 3.

Kass Fleisher’s novel *The Adventurous* was published by Factory School Press, New York.

Paula Ressler was a panelist in the session “New to the Profession: Expectations for Success,” a discussion about problems new teachers face, at the National Council of Teachers of English convention in Nashville on November 17. She also served as a co-presenter in the session “Teaming to Teach: Learning to Teach through Collaboration,” at the Conference on English Leadership in Nashville on November 20.

Julianne Trautmann presented “Gender Reversals and Geography: An Analysis of Dress Worn by Participants at the Kentucky Derby Horserace” at the November 1-4 International Textile and Apparel Association Conference in San Antonio, Texas.

Jones Named Chemist of the Year



The Heartland chapter of the American Chemical Society named **Dr. Marjorie A. Jones** of the Department of Chemistry the region’s 2006 Chemist of the Year on October 12. Dr. Jones’s research involves the study of an enzyme that makes heme, the part of the hemoglobin molecule that carries oxygen in blood. A person could

develop porphyria (a group of disorders with symptoms that affect the nervous system) if heme is not made correctly. Single-celled parasites that cause the disease Leishmaniasis (an infection that can have a serious impact on the skin and mucous membranes) latch on to the patient’s blood and use the heme for themselves. Dr. Jones’s research may lead to a cheap and effective drug therapy for patients. “I was overwhelmed and very honored to be selected for this award,” said Dr. Jones. “It gives me a chance to express my excitement about working with my students and with my colleagues.” ☀

Thanks to CASNews, October 16, 2006.

Toro-Morn Named Director of Program

In October, **Dr. Maura Toro-Morn**, professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the Women’s and Gender Studies program, accepted the position of director of the Latin American and Latino Studies Program (LALS). As director, Dr. Toro-Morn will provide leadership to a diverse group of faculty and staff who serve students in a variety of majors. The program is dedicated to enriching teaching, learning, research, and outreach related to Latin America, Caribbean, and Latino/a studies.



Focusing her research and teaching on issues of race, gender, class, and migration, Dr. Toro-Morn has cultivated multiple collaborative relationships with colleagues throughout the Americas, and was awarded the Strand Diversity Award. She is a founding member of the Organization of Latin-American Employees (OLE), and is well known at ISU and in the

Bloomington-Normal community for her commitment to Latino and Hispanic organizations. For the Women’s and Gender Studies Program, Prof. Toro-Morn has taught the “Seminar in Women’s Studies,” “Feminist Theories and Methodological Issues,” and “Minority Relations.” She earned her Ph.D. in Sociology at Loyola University of Chicago and has been a member of the Illinois State University faculty since 1991.

Dr. Toro-Morn was one of the key organizers of LALS, and worked tirelessly to develop the program. She is an activist to the core, and has a deep passion for social justice. We congratulate her on her well deserved appointment. ☀

Thanks to CASNews, October 9, 2006.



On October 11, Dr. Wanda Pillow gave a talk entitled “Searching for Sacajawea: Whiteness Reproductions and Endarkened Representations” at the International Studies Seminar.

Brazilian Street Children's Advocate De Mello Visits ISU

The Brazilian sculptor and human rights activist **Yvonne Bezerra de Mello** came to ISU during the week of November 27 to talk about her work with Brazilian street children and the people of Rio's *favelas*. Her principle effort is to build, fund, and operate day schools for children in lower grades. These schools provide for the children's basic needs as well as literacy education. She has developed what she calls her "methodology": "Through slowly winning their trust, I wean their aggressive impulses and teach them self-respect and how to survive without using violence." De Mello's visit was possible largely thanks to the efforts of Ms. Iha and WGS faculty members Janet Wilson and Maria Schmeekle. ☀



(Left to right) Katie Creyts, Diana Gabriel, and Holly DeGrote



Dr. Nancy Tolson delivered the Center for Reading and Literacy Fall Lecture on November 2. Her subject was the history of Black children's literature.

"Shortest Distance between Two Points"

By Becca Chase

Our second quarterly student art show opened on November 10 in the Women's and Gender Studies Program foyer. The show features impressive and appealing art work by College of Fine Arts graduate students **Katie Creyts**, **Holly DeGrote**, **Diana Gabriel**, **Julia Goos**, and **Pamela Shahtaji**, with DeGrote and Gabriel curating. According to Diana, the exhibit's title comes from the connections and geometric relations represented in her work and those of Julia and Pamela. Diana's "Construction Site" (ink on paper) consists of a network of red lines with drips and splashes at the junctures against a stark white unpainted background. Julia Goos's untitled ink and graphite on paper work features bold geometric forms suspended in washes of

earthen tones. For her untitled piece (acrylic and graphite on board), Pamela Shahtaji has created a pattern of overlapping organic shapes, layering the paints in ways that suggest collage.

By contrast, Holly's "7 for 11 1/2" (acrylic on panel) features seven bold red brushstrokes against a grey background. And Katie Creyts's "Red Interior" is a hanging sculpture made of thin wavering strands of red cane glass suspended on nylon wires.

All of the pieces are visually compelling, and the exhibit has both coherence and variety. Visit us and view them for yourselves! The exhibit continues through January 19.

☀



Dr. James Pancrazio presented "The Case of Henriqueta Faber," a 19th- century Cuban transvestite, for the International Studies Seminar on November 15.

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Calendar

Dec. 6-8: *Hopeless Spinning*, Margaret Iha's play about Rio de Janeiro's street children. Westhoff Theater, 7:30 p.m.

Feb. 23-25: *The Vagina Monologues*. Each performance will be preceded by a silent auction. All proceeds will benefit Neville House, Stepping Stones, and Planned Parenthood of East Central Illinois. To donate auction items, contact amahlma@ilstu.edu.

Apr. 26: Dolores Huerta, "Civil Rights and Social Activism: Sharing a Lifetime of Experience." 7:30-9 p.m.

Apr. 27: Dolores Huerta, "Feminism and Social Action." Women's and Gender Studies Symposium. 1-2 p.m.



Visit our website at <http://www.womensandgenderstudies.ilstu.edu>