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On Sarah Palin: Culture, Race, and the Meanings of Feminism

By Alison Bailey

I just about fell out of my chair when I heard Dick Morris, former senior advisor to President Clinton, publicly declare that "In Palin you have an authentic model of feminism and in Hillary you have a counterfeit one." Such proclamations are not unprecedented: they are part of the culture wars that have been raging in the U.S. since the 1960s in which the meaning of terms like "feminism" are constantly renegotiated. But, as bell hooks observed over 25 years ago, the "anything goes" definition of feminism has rendered the term practically meaningless: Any women who wants social equality with men regardless of her political views can declare herself to be a feminist.¹ Apparently this is Morris's view as well.

Morris confuses *feminism* (a political movement) with *femininity* (gender expression). There is some good girl/bad girl thinking behind this confusion. When Senator Clinton demonstrates leadership qualities she is called a bitch, mass-marketed in effigy as a nutcracker, and portrayed as an unemotional emasculating harpie with the power to make Tucker Carlson cross his legs. As Salon.com's Rebecca Traister explains: "Clinton's brand of femininity is the kind that remains slightly unpalatable in America. It's based on competence, political confidence and an assumption of authority. It's a kind of power that has nothing to do with the flirtatious or the girly. It's threatening because it so

closely resembles the power that men never question their right to wield."²

On the other hand, Governor Palin's leadership qualities are magically amplified by her motherhood, loving marriage, support of her daughter's pregnancy, and the fact that she's thought to be sort of a hottie. Her feminist values, however, are as credible as those of a vegetarian who regularly eats bacon. She's a feminist, but she has no opinion on pay equity, even though Alaska is one of only 11 states without pay equity laws. She's a feminist, but would deny women the right to make their own reproductive medical decisions. She's a feminist, but as mayor of Wasilla she did nothing when the police department charged rape victims and their insurers for the so-called "rape kits" used to collect forensic evidence of sexual assault. She did so despite knowing that states are suppose to pick up the tab for these kits to qualify for federal grants under the Violence Against Women Act. It took action by the state legislature to correct the situation in Wasilla. She doesn't seem to be concerned that Alaska's rape rate is two and a half times higher than the national average, or that the state is in the bottom quartile nationally for providing health care to children. To date she has taken no clear position on immigration, affirmative action, job and housing discrimination, school resegregation, police-minority relations, or shown any concern over the oil industry's impact on Alaska's indigenous communities. If you were a feminist and ran an entire state, wouldn't you be attentive to at least some of these issues? (*Continued*)

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Lesbian Activist Del Martin Dies at 87

By Jenna Goldsmith

On August 27, the LGBT community lost one of its most influential leaders. Lesbian rights pioneer Del Martin died in San Francisco at the age of 87, only two months after her



Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon

history-making marriage to Phyllis Lyon, her partner of 55 years.

Martin's activism began in 1955 when she and Lyon founded the Daughters of Bilitis, the groundbreaking lesbian social and political organization. Together, they envisioned a group that could be used to lobby for lesbian and gay rights, educate researchers and mental health professionals, as well as provide a safe space for LGBT people to come together.

In 1960, Martin took over as editor for *The Ladder*, a magazine that focused on lesbian politics and culture and was the first nationally distributed lesbian magazine in the United States. In 1964, Martin helped found the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, which worked to overturn laws that criminalized homosexual behavior. She was a crucial voice in the successful campaign to remove homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's roster of mental illnesses, and she became the first out lesbian to serve on the Board of Directors for the National Organization for Women. Senator Dianne Feinstein named her as a delegate to the White House Conference on aging in 1995, where Martin brought attention to the needs of aging gays and lesbians.

In February 2004, Martin and Lyon were the first of over 4,000 same-sex couples to marry in San Francisco. Although the marriage was legally invalidated one month later, Martin and Lyon were among the original plaintiffs in a series of lawsuits that led to the California Supreme Court declaring same-sex marriages legal in California in 2008.

The marriage of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon on June 16 of this year marked the realization of their lifelong political goal to attain the legal right to marry for gay and lesbian couples, as well as an individual victory for a personal and political partnership that inspired thousands of lesbians over the years. ☀

For Morris and others, a feminist need not be an advocate for women's rights [read human rights]. A feminist can be an everyday hockey mom who mirrors the cultural expectations of womanhood— that is, white womanhood.

It's no surprise that women of color don't see themselves in Palin. And the fact that the media has not picked up on this is more evidence of how women of color continue to be erased as political actors. Instead, many people of color remind me of how white privilege continues to set a double standard for women struggling in their communities. As C. Nicole Mason, a senior research fellow at the National Council for Research on Women, makes clear, African Americans and Latinas are not usually hockey moms. And "when our unmarried teen daughters get pregnant society does not see this as a blessing" or proclaim that no one has a right to judge you because "every family has its challenges."³ Nor do the media come to these young women's defense and say that this is a private matter. Instead, Latino and Black teen moms are regularly represented as irresponsible perpetrators of social decay. Their pregnancies become matters for public discussion and policy making.

The pro-woman rhetoric surrounding Palin's nomination is a bizarre inversion of everything feminism stands for. Co-opting feminism's woman-focused politics, language and values and cloaking these in the anything goes language of "all things woman = all things feminist" trivializes our work and contributes to the erasure of many of the gains we've made and continue to fight so hard to keep.

¹ bell hooks (1983). "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression," *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, p. 23.

² "Zombie Feminists of the RNC." Available: http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2008/09/11/zombie_feminism/Salon.com. [Accessed: 9.21.08].

³ C. Nicole Mason and Mimi Abramovitz. "Two Views on Sarah Palin and Women of Color," Women's ENews. Available: <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3738> [Accessed; 20 Sept. 2008]. ☀

Dowling Lecture Explores Mexican-American Racial Identity

By Alison Bailey



In her lecture “Racial Alliances, Ethnic Divides: Mexican-American Social and Intimate Ties,” Professor Julie Dowling explored how Mexican Americans negotiate identity in relation to U.S. Census categories.

Interviewing 105 Mexican Americans in Texas,

Dowling found that a person’s family experiences, migration, generational status, social class, experiences with discrimination, and fluency in Spanish all had an impact on how they identified themselves. According to Dowling’s research, 31 percent of Latino/as classified themselves as white, while the other 69 percent checked “other” because they were uncertain.

Racial identification was not tied directly to skin color or experiences with discrimination. Mexican Americans identifying as “white” did so because they connected being white-skinned with being American, or because they were older, or had more formal education. Individuals living in counties directly on the border of Mexico were also more likely to check “white.” A significant number of respondents checked “white” or “other” because there was no Hispanic category offered. Those checking the “other” box also said they did so because they were “not white” or because they understood themselves to be mixed race.

Editor’s note: An article about Susan Obeler’s lecture, “Latino, Hispanic...The Consequences of Ethnic Labels in Contemporary U.S. Society,” will appear in the November/December issue of Gender Matters. ☀

Student News

“Imagine if...”

By Alison Bailey

Who would you be if you married that guy you used to date a few years back? How would you look? Britten Traugher’s “The Mrs. Series,” currently on display in the Women’s and Gender Studies gallery, examines these questions through five self-portraits. These constructed identities are a blend of fact and fiction,
Gender Matters

memory and emotion—speculations about what the future might have been, *if...*

Traugher’s exhibition also features a stunning series of portraits of Illinois County Fair Queens photographed over the past year. She attended the 2008 state pageant and photographed the contestants as they waited to be interviewed by the panel of judges. She asked each contestant to relax, smile and to imagine the crowning moment. Her portraits joyfully and vividly capture that moment.



Photographer Britten Traugher at the opening the “Imagine if...” exhibit.

Britten is not an outsider to the beauty pageant world. As she explains: “I entered my first beauty pageant in Vermont in 2003 as part of my studies at Goddard College.” After dedicating an entire year to researching the history, present culture, and standards of beauty pageants, Traugher decided that entering a pageant herself was the best way to answer the questions she had about this long-standing American tradition. “That’s where the performance/participatory observation part of my study began. My goal was to transform myself—in four months—from a grungy Goddard kid to a viable pageant contestant.”

A three-time runner-up in the Miss Vermont USA pageant, Traugher currently holds the title of Miss Illinois Galaxy. She received her BA in Visual Arts from Bennington College and is a Graduate Fellow at Illinois State University, where she is pursuing an MFA in photography.

The “Imagine If...” exhibit is open from 9-4 daily in the Women’s and Gender Studies Program Office in 237 Rachel Cooper Hall through November 11. ☀

Fall Semester Is An Active Time For F.L.A.M.E.

By Brandy Peak

This semester FLAME, ISU's feminist RSO, hosted a number of dynamic speakers at regular meetings.

Christina Heffren, from YWCA Stepping Stones, discussed the detrimental effects of pornography from race, class, and gender perspectives. Dr. Karen Pfof, Psychology, administered a test to determine the extent to which the audience members objectified their bodies, with some shocking results. Feminist perspectives on the presidential election were provided by Katie Boundy (College Democrats), Dr. Laurie Bergner (League of Women Voters), and Julie Wachtenheim (Democracy Matters).



Take Back the Night

FLAME (Feminist Led Activist Movement to Empower) and YWCA Stepping Stones organized and led Take Back the Night on October 22. This is an annual event that includes a rally, march, and safe-space discussions designed to speak out against sexual assault and domestic violence. At the rally, the Guerilla Theatre Troupe performed thought-provoking skits on social dilemmas. One speaker, Julie, shared the challenges she faces as a sexual assault survivor and her healing process. Another survivor, Nicole, told her painful story about her ex-husband, who abused her for eleven years. Their testimonies were both heartbreaking and empowering. After the rally, around 50 people marched through nearby streets and around campus, carrying placards and chanting with vigor. After that inspiring march, roughly 70 people attended the women's-only and gender-neutral safe spaces. Other sponsors of TBTN were ISU's Student Counseling Services, Sexual Assault Prevention and Survivor Services, PRIDE, Women's and Gender Studies, and G-Spot. Outside sponsors were Countering Domestic Violence, FCC, Illinois Choice Action Team, and Family Action Network.



The Clothesline Project is a national movement that addresses the issue of violence against women by providing a vehicle for the women to express their emotions by decorating a shirt.



F.L.A.M.E. members and community participants march at Take Back the Night.

Faculty Accomplishments

Pat Badani participated in a panel discussion with her essay “Foreignness as Context: Interculturality in Iberoamerican Digital Art” at the colloquia entitled “Foreigners in Technology and Culture” at the New Media Center: Espacio Fundacion Telefonica held in Buenos Aires, Argentina on Aug.12-13.

Ann Haugo presented a paper at the “Performing Motherhood” conference at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, Oct. 10-11. Her paper is entitled “Decolonizing Motherhood: Images of Mothering in First Nations Theatre.”

Cynthia Kukla had a painting in the Watercolor Honor Society Travel Exhibition at the Fallbrook Art Center, a painting in Watercolor USA 2008 at the Springfield Art Museum, and three paintings in SOS Art: The Peace and Justice Exhibition at the Art Academy of Cincinnati.

Jin Lee had the solo exhibition “Floating World” at Devening Projects + Editions in Chicago, and was part of the group exhibition “Girls and Company: Feminist Works from MMoCA’s Permanent Collection” at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art.

Paula Ressler was reappointed to serve another year as a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Academic Studies Advisory Committee for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).



Students above view “The Well of Horniness” on the Quad, performed by members of The Women’s Project, including Akeila LeClaire and Katharine Strosahl-Johnson (right).



Georgia Tsouvala published an article titled “Integrating Marriage and /Homonoia/(Concord)” in a collection of papers in *The Unity of Plutarch’s Work*, Anastasios Nikolaidis (ed.), Berlin-New York: W. De Gruyter/ Millennium Studies, 2008, and was invited to give a talk for the Ides Series at Illinois Wesleyan University on “Biographer to the Stars: Plutarch and his World” in February.

Christine Varga-Harris presented a paper entitled “Moving (To)ward Utopia: Soviet Housing in the Age of Sputnik” at the Divided Dreamworlds: The Cultural Cold War in East and West conference at Utrecht University, 26-27 Sept. She also published the article “Homemaking and the Aesthetic and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home during the Khrushchev Era” in the *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 3 (Spring 2008).

Michelle Vought taught a master class as a guest artist of the Orvieto Musica festival in Orvieto, Italy.

Kirstin Hotelling Zona published her poem “Heartland” in *Poet Lore* (Spring/Summer 2007): 29-32 and did a poetry reading at Roque Bluffs Poetry Festival, Roque Bluffs, Maine in August.

Congratulations to Nathalie op de Beeck, Sherrilyn Bilger, and Melissa Oresky on their recent tenure promotion! ☀



Students, faculty, and friends enjoy good food and good company at the WGS annual Meet and Greet.

WGS Spring Course Offerings

Required Undergraduate Courses		
WGS 120	Women, Gender, and Society	TR 9:35-10:50 a.m. TR 11-12:15 p.m.
ENG 160	Women in Literature	MWF 12-12:50 p.m.
HIS 262	History of Women in the U.S. since 1865	TR 2-3:15 p.m.

Undergraduate Electives		
COM/ ENG/LAN 128	Gender in the Humanities	MWF 9-9:50 a.m. MWF 12-12:50 p.m. TR 12:35-1:50 p.m. MWF 1-1:50 p.m. MWF 2-2:50 p.m. MW 4-5:15 p.m.
ENG 206	Cultural Expressions of Women in Social Contexts	MW 1-2:15 p.m. TR 2-3:15 p.m.
ENG 261	Women's Literature in a Global Context	MW 10-11:15 a.m. TR 3:35-4:50 p.m.
FCS/HIS/ SOC 112	American Family: Change and Diversity	TR 8-9:15 a.m. TR 11-12:15 p.m. TR 2-3:15 p.m.
FCS 222	Cultural Diversity in Dress	T 5-7:50 p.m.
PHI 202	Sex, Values, and Human Nature	MW 3-4:15 p.m.
PSY/SOC 123	Human Sexuality	MWF 1-1:50 p.m.

Required Graduate Courses		
WGS 490	Feminist Theories and Methodological Issues	TR 3:35-4:50 p.m.

Graduate Electives		
WGS 391*	Women's and Gender Studies Seminar: Queering Women's and Gender Studies	TR 2-3:15 p.m.
ENG 460	Feminist Literary Theories	W 5:30-8:20 p.m.
HIS 307	Gender and Empire	MWF 11-11:50 a.m.
HIS 308.2	Ancient Greek and Roman Women	TR 2-3:15 p.m.
FCS 327*	Clothing and Behavior	MW 12-1:15 p.m.
HIS 330	The Family in History	TR 9:35-10:50 a.m.
SOC 366*	Contemporary Social Movements	W 5:30-8:20 p.m.
POL 338*	Gender and Public Policy	M 6-8:50 p.m.
PSY 305*	Psychology of Women	T 5:30-8:20 p.m.
SOC 341*	Sociology of Gender	MW 1-2:15 p.m.

*Also counts as undergraduate elective

Check out these special topics courses!

HIS 308, Sec. 2, Selected Topics in European History: Ancient Greek and Roman Women

TR 2-3:15 with Georgia Tsouvala

This course will introduce you to the sources, methodologies, and the current debates focusing on women in the ancient Greek and Roman world. For more info, contact Dr. Tsouvala at gtsouva@ilstu.edu or 438-8407.

WGS 391, WGS Seminar: Queering Women's and Gender Studies

TR 2-3:15 with Becca Chase

This course offers students an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Queer Studies. You will be introduced to queer theory, including the basic theoretical concepts of heterosexism, homophobia, heteronormativity, and performativity, and will apply these to topics in different academic disciplines. For more info, contact Dr. Chase at rchase@ilstu.edu.

HIS 307, Gender and Empire

MWF 11-11:50 with Christine Varga-Harris

This course will discuss the place of gender in the construction and preservation of empires by exploring such topics as imperial prescriptions for femininity, masculinity, and family life, citizenship concerns, civilizing missions, and the various ways in which colonial subjects contested imperial power. For more info, contact Dr. Varga-Harris at cvargah@ilstu.edu.

Plan ahead for fall, 2009!

WGS 120, Women, Gender, and Society: Gender in Education

TR 11-12:15 with Becca Chase

WGS 120 provides an overview of how gender, along with other intersecting identity factors such as race, class, ability, and sexual orientation, affects our society. In this section, the emphasis will be on how gender, intertwined with other factors, impacts children's educational experiences, with an emphasis on urban high-needs public schools. Among the topics we will study are: gender bias and gender differences in teaching and learning, arguments for and against sex-segregated schools, bullying and other forms of violence, sex education, and LGBTQ issues. For more info, contact Dr. Chase at rchase@ilstu.edu.

Illinois State University Women's and Gender Studies Program

Faculty—please encourage your students to submit outstanding papers or presentations that they complete for your classes to the Women's and Gender Studies Programming Committee for consideration for the spring symposium.

Fourteenth Annual Women's and Gender Studies Symposium

Friday,
April 3
9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

University
Galleries

Illinois State
University

For more information contact Rozel White
at: (309) 438-2947 or wgstudies@ilstu.edu
or visit our web site at:
www.womensandgenderstudies.ilstu.edu

Call for Papers

Panels on Friday morning and afternoon
Lunch at noon
Keynote Address at 1:00 pm

Dr. Susan Bordo

"Beyond 'Eating Disorders': Why We Need to Rethink Everything We Thought We Knew"

Undergraduate and graduate students are invited to submit complete papers or works in progress; full descriptions of other types of presentations (e.g. performance pieces and artist's talks), including scripts, images, and the like; or abstracts of papers or presentations. Papers and presentations are welcome on any topic related to the study of women and/or gender. Students must have a faculty sponsor.

Send submissions with a coversheet providing the following information:

Title of paper or presentation
Name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address
Sponsoring professor and, if relevant, the course for which you wrote the paper or developed the presentation

The deadline for submissions is **March 6, 2009**.

Send to:
Women's and Gender Studies Programming Committee
Illinois State University
Campus Box 4260
Normal, IL 61790-4260
or by e-mail to wgstudies@ilstu.edu

Gender Matters
Illinois State University
Women's and Gender Studies Program
Rachel Cooper 2nd Floor
Campus Box 4260
Normal, IL 61790-4260

Welcome, Newcomers!

New minors:

Christine Bauman, English
Caitlin Keturi, Art
Lane Lampert, English Education
Ned Marto, History
Tanya McLean, History
Breana Mull, Mass Communications
Stacey Nielsen, Political Science
Brittany Schwien, Criminal Justice
Scott Southard, English

New certificate students:

Jenna Goldsmith, English
Tara Courtney McKinney-Whitaker, English
Chad Woolard, Communication

Calendar

Nov. 5 Women's Mentoring Network Pizza Party, Resource Center, RC 237, 4-5:30 p.m.

Nov. 10 Third Annual AAUW-BN Women Book Authors' Forum. Barnes and Nobles Bookstore, Bloomington, 5 p.m.

Nov. 17 "The Road to Eating Disorders," presentation by Shannon Schmidt and Lydia Wiede. RC 2nd floor lounge, 8 p.m.

Nov. 19 Dr. Ramona Curry, "Mulan Re-Made: A Legend of 'Transculturation.'" International Seminar Series, 3rd Floor East Lounge, BSC, 12-1 p.m.

Dec. 8 A Local Women's Organization: 100 years of the YWCA. Potluck dinner. 1908 Berrywood Lane, Bloomington, 6 p.m.