

Abortion Ban Spurs 'Free Choice' Move in Congress

BY ALLISON STEVENS
WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF, WOMEN'S ENEWS

April 19, the day after the Supreme Court upheld a controversial abortion ban, pro-choice politicians mounted a counteroffensive from the legislative branch of government. Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY)—two leading supporters of abortion rights in Congress—reintroduced the Freedom of Choice Act, which would codify in federal law the rights established in *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court ruling that found abortion was part of a woman's constitutional right to privacy.

If passed, the Freedom of Choice Act would likely lead to court challenges that could overturn the ban upheld by the court. That ban does not include an exception to protect the health of the woman, a precedent laid out in *Roe v. Wade*.

The Democrats' bill would also bar government at any level from passing laws that outlaw abortion before the fetus is viable or after viability if the woman's health or life is endangered. It is unclear how the law would apply to future or past restrictions on access to abortion.

Supporters of the bill say the legislation will help inoculate women from a wave of new restrictions on abortion that is expected to follow the court's decision. Advocates on both sides of the issue agree that the court's ruling gives a green light to further chipping away at reproductive rights and could even embolden efforts to ban abortion altogether.

Response to Court Ruling

At a press conference in the Capitol Building April 19, pro-choice activists rallied around the Democrats' bill as a way to counter the Supreme Court decision. Seven states have passed their own versions of the Freedom of Choice Act: California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Nevada, and Washington.

At the federal level, prospects are cloudy for the bill, which has been introduced in previous Congresses but has failed to win passage. For starters, strongly anti-choice President Bush would almost certainly veto any legislation that codifies *Roe v. Wade* into law. Meanwhile, even though Congress is now controlled by the Democrats, pro-choice activists cannot count every member of the majority as an ally.

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Immigrant Women Live in Shadows

In recognition of the need to reform the failed immigration system, the National Coalition on Immigrant Women's Rights (NCIWR), represented by NOW and four other women's groups,* held a briefing in the Dirksen Senate Office Building in mid-April. Its mission is to review and respond to the immigration proposals on the legislative table and to educate Congress on the dire need to improve the lives of immigrant women.

Currently, Senate Democrats are striving to bring comprehensive immigration reform legislation to the floor. Majority Leader Harry Reid has cleared the Senate calendar for the last two weeks of May for this issue. In the House, the STRIVE Act (HR 1645, "Security Through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy"), a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill, has been introduced by Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) and Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.). Both houses of Congress need to move the legislation if it is to be passed, conferenced, and signed into law this year before the presidential race of 2008 consumes attention.

Many groups feel that STRIVE provides the best starting point for a legislative debate in both the House and Senate. NCIWR has studied the STRIVE bill and finds its structure complex and detailed enough to cover most, but not all, immigrant issues. Specifically, it notes that immigrant women slip through the cracks of labor and other laws

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Who Said That?

"I never heard Imus's broadcast because I am a long-time fan of NPR's 'Morning Edition,' which is on at the same time. I was stunned to learn how many of the journalists I admire had been regular guests on the program. Many are now having a hard time explaining their association. It turned out that many of them had heard Imus ridicule and insult women, gays, African Americans, Hispanics, Jews, Catholics and others. Some had been targets of his unfunny slurs and came back for more. Their rationalizations were lame. Some said the 'jokes' were just part of his exaggerated way of speaking. ...Others said they found him a savvy, insightful interviewer. ...And some were honest enough to say that they valued his big audience, especially when they were promoting their books."

(See answer page 6)

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MC NOW Co-President's Message

BY JEANNETTE FELDNER

Women's Fair a Nice Success for MCNOW

I'd like to share with you the wonderful time I had "woman-ing" a table for MCNOW at the Montgomery County Women's Fair on March 31.

First of all, we had many MCNOW member volunteers to help at our table. **Fran Porter** and I set up the table very early in the morning before the event started. And were available to chat with other exhibitors, many of whom were members of NOW. During the day, MCNOW's being there also opened up discussion of women's issues in the county and around the country. Women stopped by our table and were so glad to see us, felt reassured by our presence, glad that NOW is still here looking out for and taking care of women.

Other members who volunteered time at our table were **Carole Rayburn, Carolyn Pasti, Linda Amendt, Diane Gubernot, and Shawn Berryman**. They greeted attendees, answered questions, signed up new members and those interested in more information, received donations for T-shirts, hats and buttons! The keynote speaker, **Dr. Candace Pert**, dropped by, found a nice outrageous button to her liking, and even mentioned MCNOW in her keynote speech! We were quite pleased.

We all had a wonderful time, enjoying each other's company as well as attending workshops and being with the hundreds of women at the Fair.

Thanks so much to all of our volunteers and attendees for taking the time to join us at the Women's Fair!

L. Jeannette Feldner
Co-President, MCNOW
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Fran Porter "womans" the MCNOW table at the Montgomery County Women's Fair



(from left clockwise) Linda Amendt, Candace Pert (keynote speaker), Diane Gubernot, Jeannette Feldner, and Shawn Berryman, at the MCNOW exhibit table.

Abortion (continued from page 1)

Slim Majority

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Mormon from Nevada, opposes abortion in most cases. And Democrats, with their slim majority of 51 seats, lack the 60 votes needed to override a likely filibuster. In the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) is a solid supporter of abortion rights. But she presides over a chamber whose members oppose abortion by 219 out of 435 seats, according to a NARAL Pro-Choice America spokesperson.

Some members of Congress, however, may make this a priority now that the Supreme Court has demonstrated what many court-watchers see as an ideologically hostile bent on abortion-related issues.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court said it was upholding a ban on a procedure that it identified as intact dilation and evacuation even though the law in question made no exception for women who might require that particular procedure for health reasons.

Under the law, a woman would still be able to access certain kinds of second trimester abortions but would not necessarily be able to have the banned procedure, even if her doctor considered it the safest and best for her individual circumstances. Doctors found guilty of breaking the law could face up to two years in prison.

Offensive Switch

The legislative counteroffensive marks a new era in Congress in which pro-choice lawmakers are taking the offensive, a contrast to the past dozen years when Republicans held the reins of power and presided over a series of legislative efforts to restrict access to abortion.

The April 18 ruling was the court's first major decision on the issue of abortion since the 2006 retirement of Sandra Day O'Connor, whose support for limited abortion rights made her the court's swing vote on the issue. Two George W. Bush appointees – John Roberts and Samuel Alito – have joined the court since O'Connor's retirement and the death of former Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who consistently voted against reproductive rights. "It is clear today," Rep. Nadler said, "that the far-right's campaign to pack the Supreme Court has succeeded and that women and their families will be the losers."

Submissions to Newsletter Welcome

From NOW On reserves the right to edit submissions for brevity. Ads accepted for nominal fees.

Call 301-236-0069

Email Mary Bailey at
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SUBMISSION DEADLINE FOR THE JUNE ISSUE:

MAY 20, 2007

Immigrant Women (continued from page 1)

because they often work in homes and other small workplaces. STRIVE does not adequately address the needs of undocumented immigrant women and the perils they face.

There are approximately 3 million undocumented women in the United States. These women may well care for our children, tend to our ailing parents, clean our houses, sew our clothes, and pick our food. These women are filling essential gaps in the labor market while enduring workplace exploitation, sexual harassment, low wages, and poor working conditions. They live in the shadows of society and many are subjects of violent crimes both inside and outside their homes.

Undocumented women remain physically separated from their children and family members. Desperate to be reunified with them, increasing numbers of immigrant women and children risk their lives to enter this country. The number of border deaths has increased dramatically, now reaching nearly one per day. International traffickers exploit the broken immigration system by trafficking more and more immigrants into the country each year.

These women do not have access to social services and regular health care and are not covered and protected by labor laws. They live in substandard, crowded housing and have little access to public or personal transportation. They do not have a license to drive a car and work for pittance wages paid under the table and in cash. Their children may be in school, but often do not have the vaccination records that are required to stay in school.

Undocumented families are not eligible for welfare support, food stamps, Medicaid health coverage (including prenatal care), and most public services and benefits. Yet they are taxpayers when they buy gas, pay a phone bill, purchase sundries and even food, depending on the state in which they live. Their rent reflects the owner's property taxes. It has been estimated that all immigrants, regardless of status, will pay on average \$80,000 per capita *more* in taxes than they use in government services over their lifetime.

"In the name of millions of immigrants that have contributed and continue to contribute with their blood, sweat, and tears to this country's society," said NOW Executive Vice President Olga Vives, herself an immigrant from Cuba. She further announced: "The National Organization for Women asks the 110th Congress to pass fair immigration reform legislation."

**Besides NOW, NCIWR included the following briefing participants: Legal Momentum (new name of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund), the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, and the Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project.*

How Society Sexualizes Girls

American Psychological Association Report

BY MARY BAILEY

Part II: Culture's Contribution

This report by the American Psychological Association (APA) is unpleasant to read. Because it provides evidence of the sexualization of girls via mainstream cultural messages – television, music videos, cartoons and animation, magazines, sports media, video/computer games, the Internet, advertising, and products – its impact is like being hit by a tsunami. Some of the evidence isn't new, but seeing it all in one place is overwhelming. Following is a sampling of the findings:

“**Media content** responds to demand and is a reflection of culture, but it also contributes to it,” according to a report by the American Psychological Association. Girls, along with boys and everyone else, are major consumers of culture. When the various media are combined, children view 6 hours and 32 minutes a day (Nielson Media Research, 1998). Such massive exposure to content that sexualizes females has to have an effect on girls, and the APA maintains that it does.

On **television**, it reports, males disproportionately populate the world and the women in it are disproportionately sexy and lacking in intellect. Sexual harassment is a frequent story line. Of 81 programs, 84 percent contained at least one episode of sexual harassment with an average of 3.4 incidents per program (Grauerholz and King, 1997). In workplace-based situation comedies, the dominant jokes refer to women's bodies and sexuality (Montemurro, 2003).

Various studies of **music videos** indicate that 44 to 81 percent contain sexual imagery (e.g., Pardun & McKee, 1995). Sexually objectifying images of women constitute a large portion of the sexual content (e.g., Andsager & Roe, 1999). Women typically serve as decorative objects who

Music videos convey female sexuality through the changing personas of the female artists. Teen artists metamorphose into mature and “edgier” versions of their former selves, exemplified by Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears. Such presentations focus not on an artist's talent but on her sexuality and drive home the point that being a sexual object is the way to be perceived as mature and successful in the music industry.

dance and pose but do not play an instrument (e.g., Arnett, 2002). They are often displayed in ways that emphasize their bodies, body parts, facial features, and sexual readiness (R.C. Vincent, et al., 1987). In 42 MTV music videos, women were objectified in 44.4 percent of the 30-second segments (Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993). Music videos also convey female sexuality through the changing personas of the female artists. Teen artists metamorphose into mature and “edgier” versions of their former selves, exemplified by Christina Aguilera, Faith Hill, and Britney Spears (Andsager & Roe, 2003). Such presentations focus not on an artist's talent but on her sexuality and drive home the point that being a sexual object is the way to be perceived as mature and successful in the music industry.

Degrading **musical lyrics** that teens frequently listen to were

concentrated in rap and R&B music. In 2005, for instance, Ludacris sang, *That's the way you like to f***...rough sex make it hurt, in the garden all in the dirt.*” As many as 70 percent of rap and R&B songs included degrading sexual content (Martino et al., 2006).

Adolescents are the largest segment of moviegoers. Many **movies** with sexual themes have plots that appeal to teens and young adults as, for example, *Cruel Intentions* and *American Pie*. Children are also consumers, with 13 percent attending theaters on a typical day and 39 percent watching a video or DVD. (D. Roberts et al., 2005). In R-rated movies of the 1980s, female nudity exceeded male nudity by 4 to 1 (B.S. Greenberg et al.). One notable trend in movies is the near absence of female characters in top-grossing films (Bazzini et al., 1997). Of the 101 the top-grossing G-rated movies from 1990 to 2004, 75 percent of the characters were male (Kelly & Smith, 2006).

Much of children's programming features **cartoons**. While sexualization of children's cartoons or teen animation has not been systematically studied, there is evidence of sexual content. Recent movies and TV programs for children are “sexier” than the *Snow Whites* of yesteryear. Disney's female characters have more cleavage, fewer clothes, and act “sexier.” *Shrek 2* has a parody of a stripper. *Ella Enchanted's* costumes don't match the characters' roles (e.g., Lamb & Brown, 2006). Most cartoons and animation portray girls as domestic, interested in boys, and concerned with their appearance (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1997).

Adolescents regularly read **magazines**. Among 8- to-18-year-olds, 47 percent reported reading magazines at least 5 minutes a day, while 22 percent reported reading them for 20 or more minutes a day (D. Roberts et al., 2005). One dominant sexual message across teenage girls' and women's magazines is to present oneself as sexually desirable to gain the attention of men (M. Duffy & Gotcher, 1996). Attracting

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Sexualization (continued from page 4)

the attention of boys by looking “hot” or “sexy” is the point of many articles, ads, and photographs (McMahon, 1990).

Nearly everything girls and women are encouraged to do in the line of self-improvement is geared toward gaining the attention of men, even in articles on fitness and health.

(Durham, 1998). Advice in *Teen*, *Seventeen*, *Glamour*, *Mademoiselle*

and *YM* told adolescent girls which attributes were most successful in attracting men (innocence) and which should be avoided (being pushy or bossy, acting like a mom, being too demanding, pushing too early for commitment). Much of the content of mainstream magazines geared to girl teens and young women emphasized the centrality of heterosexual relationships (Durham, 1998).

Sports coverage of women athletes is minimal despite the boom in female athletics since the passage of Title IX in 1972. Thus it is particularly troublesome that when they are featured, the coverage is often selective (Kane, 1996) and the commentary sexually objectifying (e.g., Messner et al., 2003). Available evidence suggests a trend toward increasing sexualization of female athletes comparable to their overall increasing visibility.

Male athletes are rarely depicted solely as sexual objects when they endorse a product, but several female athletes have recently posed nude or in provocative poses in national magazines. Examples include swimmer Amanda Beard in the swimsuit edition of *Sports Illustrated* in 2005 and soccer player Brandi Chastain in *Gear Magazine* in 1999.

In a study of *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women* from 1997 through 1999, only 10 percent of the photographs of athletes in *SI* were of females, and 5 percent were “pornographic/sexually suggestive,” such as focusing on an athlete’s breasts. In *SI* photographs, 66 percent showed men actively engaged in a sport versus 34 percent of women. In *SIW*, the photos were “only slightly better,” with 56 percent depicting female athletes actively engaged in sports and 2 percent pornographic (Fink and Kensicki, 2002).

One study found much of the coverage by the sports media to be subtle, such as favoring an athlete’s face rather than her athletic performance. Less subtle, however, were commentators’ remarks, as when Brandi Chastain removed her jersey [not her sports bra] after scoring the winning goal of the World Cup. Although this specific behavior was identical to that of male soccer players in the same circumstances, in Chastain’s case, sportscaster called it a “striptease” and deemed her “the owner of the most talked-about breasts in the country.” In several media sources, the team was referred to as “booters with hooters.” The sports commentary was also vigilantly heterosexual, placing female athletes in family settings to suggest they were not lesbian, regardless of their real-life sexual orientation. Thus female strength is redefined as male pleasure. (Shugart, 2004).

Eighty-seven percent of children and 70 percent of adoles-

cents play **video/computer games** (Palk, 2001). In a sample of 80 teen-rated games, 27 percent had sexual themes and were significantly more likely to depict female rather than male characters as partially nude or engaged in sexual behaviors. The percentage rose to 46 percent when pronounced cleavage, large breasts, or provocative clothing were

included in the study. (Haninger and Thompson, 2004).

Recent studies have shown that girls lead boys in **Internet** use in the early middle-school years (Lenhart, et al., 2005). Now that blogs and sites such as MySpace encourage young people to describe themselves, some girls are presenting themselves in provocative clothing and posting their sexual availability online. No research as yet has assessed the danger inherent in such sexualized self-presentations (Kornblum, 2005). As for pornography, it is readily available on the Internet (Griffiths, 2000). A Kaiser Family Foundation (2001) study found that 70 percent of teens ages 15-17 years had accidentally encountered pornography on the Internet, with 23 percent saying this occurred somewhat or very often.

Sexualization of girls is particularly prominent in **advertising**. Out of 72 randomly selected TV commercials, 75 percent of beer ads and 50 percent of non-beer ads were labeled “sexist,” featuring women in very limiting and objectifying roles (Rouner et al., 2003). Women in magazine ads were suggestively dressed, partially clad, or nude about half the time in women’s magazines such as *Redbook*. Almost four out of five women were depicted in this manner in men’s magazine ads (e.g., *Esquire*). A whopping 80.5 percent of photo ads in two popular men’s magazines, *Maxim* and *Snuff*, depicted women as sex objects (Krassas et al., 2003). Female models in fashion and fitness magazine ads were posed in submissive, sexually exploitative, and violent positions in approximately 80 percent of the sampled ads (Rudman and Verdi, 1993).

Numerous studies document that such patterns in advertising have been increasing over time. For instance, 28 percent of women were shown suggestively dressed, partially clad, or

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Sexualization (continued from page 5)

nude in ads in 1983 compared to 49 percent in 2003 (Reivherth and Carpenter, 2004). Such patterns differed depending on the women's race, however. White women more often than black women were represented with faces hidden, thus placing emphasis on their bodies, in both women's and men's magazines (Baker, 2005). In *Cosmopolitan*, 42 percent of ads contained suggestive body exposure, compared to 13 percent in *Ebony*, 32 percent in *Essence*, 21 percent in *Latin Girl*, and 0 percent in *Filipinas* (Sanchez-Hucles et al., 2005).

Despite evidence that ads are more sexual than ever, an *Adweek* poll showed that 70 percent of respondents thought there was too much sexual imagery in advertising (Dolliver, 1999).

Marketers encourage girls to create an "identity" through clothing. They point out how girls can be "punk" one day and "innocent" another. Given that girls are in process of developing their identity, it is of concern that girls of increasingly younger ages are invited to try on and wear clothes that highlight sexuality.

Products designed for children and teens are big business, accounting for over \$21 billion in 2005 (Ackman, 2006). Marketers present schemas to young people for life events about which they have little experience and which become cultural models for them. If sexualization is limiting for adolescent girls, it is even more so for very young girls. The Bratz dolls, designed for girls ages 4 to 8, are presented as older girls in miniskirts, fishnet stockings and feather boas. Hasbro was ready to release dolls for the 4 to 8 group modeled after the music group The Pussycat Dolls (a former burlesque group) before it was pulled after a grassroots protest.

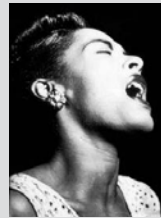
Marketers encourage girls to create an "identity" through clothing. They point out how girls can be "punk" one day and "innocent" another. Given that girls are in process of developing their identity, it is of concern that girls of increasingly younger ages are invited to try on and wear clothes that highlight sexuality. Limited Too, which focuses on ages 7 to teen years, sells camisoles and lace panties once marketed solely to adults. The thong, an item based on what a stripper would wear, is now offered in "tween" stores and children's clothing departments.

It's been 26 years since 15-year-old Brooke Shields appeared in a Calvin Klein jeans ad declaring that "Nothing comes between me and my Calvins." Today, the media's contribution to the sexualization of girls is staggering. But there are other influences at work. Next month we'll cover the sexualizing messages girls receive from their relationships with parents, teachers, and peers, and why girls often actively participate in their own sexualization. Meanwhile, if you wish to read the full report, single copies are available from the American Psychological Association's Women's Programs, at 202-336-6044 or online at www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.htm.

Answer to Who Said That, page 1 David Broder

"These are weak excuses for journalists' participation in this continuing offense to civility," wrote Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Broder in his Washington Post column. "Jokes are not jokes when they wound and humiliate. The claim that Imus's slanders were the price they had to pay in return for his providing a forum for their ideas doesn't wash. Big-name newspaper, magazine and TV journalists have no trouble finding places where they can voice their thoughts. The simple lesson, which some stubbornly are not acknowledging, is that when professional journalists lend their credibility to entertainers or others whose standards are far lower than those of the news organizations for which these journalists work, they not only damage their credibility but also diminish the standards they are supposed to embody." (4-19-07)

Field Trip Great Black Women of Baltimore



Three sites in Baltimore honor the memory of African American women. At 2519 N. Charles St., see the building that housed the first black-owned newspaper continuously published in Maryland. The "Afro" was started in 1892 by Martha Murphy and her husband, and by 1922 it was the nation's largest black-owned newspaper. Elizabeth Murphy Moss and her family ran the newspaper, where she served as vice president and treasurer for the newspaper chain. Elizabeth began working at the newspaper at age 11 and was a correspondent from England during World War II.

Next, swing by 610 George Street, where a monument marks the 1829 starting point for the Sisters of Providence, the oldest African American Catholic order for women. Mary Elizabeth Lange emigrated from Haiti in 1817, founded the order, and became its first Mother. Mother Mary opened a home for orphans and a school for black children and newly freed slaves. She and her sisters also nursed the victims of the cholera epidemic of 1832.

Finally, pay your respects to the Billie Holiday statue at Pennsylvania and Lafayette Avenues. It honors "Lady Day," one of the greatest jazz and blues singers of all time, who is believed to have been born in Baltimore. Billie faced not only racism as a black, but also sexism in the male-dominated world of jazz. She performed in nightclubs and made numerous record albums during her career. Her funeral in New York in 1954 was attended by thousands of friends and fans.

(Source: *Maryland Women's Heritage Trail Resource Kit*)

The MCNOW 2007-08 Slate of Officers

We would really like to get a wide range of thoughts and energy for our Chapter. The Nominating Committee is seeking a diverse group for next year's Board which means inclusion of new members and those who have not held office before.

Have you ever thought of joining the Chapter Board? As a NOW member, you would be most welcome. Would each of you (the requirement is that you have been a NOW member for 6 months) consider taking one of our Board positions? They are listed below, as well as the names of those on the nominating committee. Please share your thoughts and ideas with one of them as soon as possible - as well as any questions you might have as to your future involvement with our Chapter. The slate will be sent to you as an addendum to the May newsletter (as soon as we can get a full slate - so please help us by your favorable response!) The election will be held at the June meeting. Many thanks for your consideration.

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- Action Vice President
- Executive Vice President
- Recording Secretary
- Corresponding Secretary
- Treasurer

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- Community Relations Liaison
 - Membership Coordinators
 - Newsletter Editors (2)
 - Chapter Delegates to the MD NOW State Council (2)
 - Political Action (PAC) Chair
- (The past president is an ex-officio member of the Board.)

2007 Nominating Committee

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- Jeannette Feldner - lj.feldner@verizon.net
- Carole Rayburn - valentine@copper.net

General Members (3)

- Shawn Berryman - Shawn.Berryman@fda.hhs.gov
- Holly Joseph - holly.joseph@verizon.net
- Carolyn Pasti - cpasti@kes-llc.com

**as prescribed by the MC NOW Bylaws, Article VI, Section 10, (1)a.*



Make History with Hillary

"The NOW Political Action Committee proudly endorses Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton for President of the United States in 2008. NOW PAC Chair Kim Gandy says, "NOW PAC's 'Make History With Hillary' campaign will

organize and energize women's rights supporters across the country—urging women and men across this nation to stand up and say, 'I'm Ready' for a woman president—for this woman president." (nowpacs.org, 3-27-07)

Emails to the Editors

Dear Editors:

Excellent [March] issue. Your first in a series on the sexualization of girls resonates. I think anyone shrinks inside at depictions of girls in adult garb, but then bows to the cultural tide found in media. I wonder if there isn't a sort of Nascar mentality as well. By this I am thinking of the audience that watches car races for the crashes. American Idol is watched as a freak show. Reality TV gratifies our desire to deride others. Maybe we more than tolerate the phenomenon. I am looking forward to your next issue.

*Charles Bailey
Dargan, Maryland*

Dear Editors:

Your sexualization of girls article is a model of clarity and reason, and very persuasive because its tone is so temperate. What WEARIES me is that this is the same stuff I was teaching in Intro to Women's Studies 1980-91, bringing in examples of ads, showing feminist movies about the media as a main tool for sexualization, etc. But I think the problem has reached epic proportions in the last decade, equaled—and I'm sure there's a direct correlation—only by media violence. When I went shopping for a child of TWO, a saleslady tried to sell me a lacy bra and panties for her, saying, "This is what's really hot with the little girls." I almost threw up.

*Margot Peters
Lake Mills, Wisconsin*

From the Desk of...

Nancy Floreen County Councilmember

The Girls in Information Technology Task Force, which I chaired for the past two years and which was comprised of representatives from the education and business sectors, released an update detailing a decrease in girls' interest in IT over the course of their education. In elementary school, boys and girls share enthusiasm for technology, but by eighth grade, half as many girls as boys show interest in technology careers. In high school, boys taking technology-related courses outnumber girls four to one. This statistic reflects the disproportion of women currently working in the technology field.

We know that girls are able to achieve in these fields just like boys, so we need to find ways not only to expose girls to technology, but also to engage them and maintain their interest. We are going to do whatever it takes to show all kids that they can use technology to build an exciting future in sciences, arts, entertainment, communications and just about anything else. Girls really can be anything they want to be, and technology can help them get there.



Montgomery County, Maryland, Chapter of the National Organization for Women

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We've got issues!

Montgomery County NOW keeps you Up-to-date on matters that affect your daily life

We've got issues! This line headed an article in the March issue of *From NOW On*, our chapter newsletter, highlighting the issues that most affect women of Montgomery County, as described at the recent Women's Legislative Briefing. These were the issues, economic as well as social, that were debated during the legislative session in Annapolis. *From NOW On* tracks bills of importance to women and gives you complete information on how to contact all legislators and public officials.

From NOW On reports on matters of importance in the County, such as the sex education debate, in which members of MC NOW's board sat in on meetings of the advisory committee drawing up the new curriculum. They also attended a town meeting of groups opposed to comprehensive sex education, reporting back to MC NOW.

From NOW On also covers significant national and international news of women. A recent issue described a campaign to stop stoning death of women in Iran.

Montgomery County NOW continues 35 years of activism

Since 1972, Montgomery County NOW has lobbied and demonstrated in support of women on every issue of importance including, foremost, the Equal Rights Amendment and Roe vs. Wade. The chapter also

- Helped write the MC and MD state handbooks on the treatment of rape victims;
- Helped pass legislation to remove gender bias from state documents;
- Recommended that MC adopt a gender-neutral curriculum emphasizing female role models, abilities and accomplishments;
- Compiled and distributed widely a bibliography of non-sexist children's books;
- Lobbied MC as a member of the Pay Equity Coalition, resulting in the adoption of a gender-neutral job evaluation process for its employees;
- Effectively initiated MD judicial investigations and encouraged sensitivity training and compassionate courtroom behavior;
- Lobbied MD General Assembly for campaign finance reform, reproductive health funding, and meaningful economic changes, including the living wage on both a county and state level;
- Lobbied for an MC investigation of a domestic violence shelter and actively participated in development of legislation offering additional funding and mandatory community oversight.

Join Montgomery County NOW. Continue the tradition.

Did you know that by joining the National Organization for Women, you can choose to affiliate with a local chapter at no additional cost to your NOW membership fee?

www.mcmdnow.org

Montgomery County, Maryland, Chapter of the National Organization for Women
P.O. Box 2301, Rockville, MD 20847-2301



Elsewhere in the World

ABRIDGED FROM WWW.WOMENSENEWS.ORG

March 24, 2007

Too 'political,' Irish Commission Rules

The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland decreed a Catholic Church TV commercial

must be removed because its gender-equality message was too "political." The ad presented an array of infants and said they will have less education and face more violence because they are female. It urged viewers to help end gender discrimination. Previous ads—which were produced to run during Lent—addressed racism, child soldiers, and slavery.

March 27, 2007

Immigrant Women's Legal Limbo

Advocates for immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence and applying for visas have filed a class-action lawsuit against the Department of Homeland Security. The suit presses the government to enact regulations needed to implement the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act passed in 2000. That law provides that undocumented immigrant victims of certain violent crimes, including domestic violence, may apply for and receive a visa—called a U-visa—after cooperating with law enforcement in the investigation or prosecution of the crime against them. After maintaining a U-visa for three years, the victim can then apply for a "green card" which provides for lawful residence in the U.S. on humanitarian grounds. To date, not a single U-visa has been granted. That's because the federal government has yet to issue the regulations necessary to implement the law. The government has 60 days from March 6 when the lawsuit was filed in San Francisco federal court to give responsive pleading. In bringing the suit, the Los Angeles-based Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law is joined by several organizations that assist immigrant crime victims.

March 31, 2007

Principles of Lesbian Rights Introduced

The "Yogyakarta Principles" for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights were introduced at the UN Human Rights Council's session in Geneva by a group of 29 advocates. The principles recommend a strategy for how governments should treat lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and address rape and other forms of gender-based violence involving extra-judicial executions; torture and other forms of cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment; medical abuses; repression of free speech and assembly; and discrimination in work, education, housing, immigration, and access to justice.

April 3, 2007

Lesbian Palestinians Break Social Taboos

The group Aswat – "Voices" in Arabic – is breaking the silence for Palestinian lesbians. In March, it held its first public conference and released a groundbreaking book despite opposition by the Islamic Movement. The meeting in Haifa was attended by about 350 people, said the group's co-founder Rauda Morcos. It marked five years of the organization's existence and the publication of a book in Arabic about lesbian and gay identity. The Islamic Movement in Israel publicly criticized the meeting, calling for the conference to be cancelled and urging its community "to stand against the campaign to market sexual deviance among our daughters and our women." About 30 people from the movement protested outside the conference. Despite opposition, the meeting was problem-free. Aswat's book "Home and Exile in Queer Experience," a collection of articles on the lesbian struggle, includes a well-known essay by U.S. poet Adrienne Rich that argues that lesbianism is an extension of feminism. Aswat will soon launch a virtual forum on its Web site for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender individuals of Arab origin around the world.

April 6, 2007

Female Tsunami Survivors Face Violence

Female survivors of the 2004 Asian tsunami face increased violence both in their homes and in relief camps, according to a Reuters report. Women were vulnerable to husbands who drank more and were more abusive after the tsunami. Women in camps were coping with violence, impoverishment, and lack of privacy. The report interviewed 7,000 women and 174 organizations and covered Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Thailand, India, and Somalia. It preceded an April political meeting of South Asian leaders in New Delhi in hopes the governments will provide better protection for female survivors.

April 14, 2007

Discriminatory Ugandan Law Dropped

Uganda's Constitutional Court nullified a discriminatory law that allowed married men to having affairs with unmarried women, but prohibited married women from having affairs with an unmarried man. The ruling also abolished a law that gave men more rights than women after a partner's death.

How It Was

- 2 Women artists in New York organize and eventually form Women Artists in Revolution, 1969.
- 7 At a meeting in Washington to establish an interstate Association of the Commission on the Status of Women, First Lady Patricia Nixon tells the participants she does not feel that "there's any discrimination against women" 1969.
- 11 Associated Press sportswriter Sheila Moran celebrates her 26th

MAY (1950 – 1969)

- birthday, a week after becoming the first female print journalist to sit in the Kentucky Derby Press Box, 1969.
- 12 A 12-block Mother's Day march of welfare mothers is held in Washington, D.C., led by Coretta Scott King and Ethel Kennedy, 1968.
(Slowly, oh so slowly, the women's movement rises from the post-war grave. Selections from Liberated Women's Appointment Calendar, 1972-74 and National Women's History Project newsletter)

The Watchful Eye

BY MARY BAILEY



Sex-Ed in Montgomery. The county's sex-ed curriculum is at the center of a national debate over teaching homosexuality in school. For four weeks, the county field-tested two health classes in six schools using a revised sex-ed component. The 8th grade course discussed tolerance and addressed myths about homosexuality and the 10th grade class covered gender identity, transsexuality, and transgenderism. So how did they do?

Despite the fuss made by opposition groups, 91 percent of the students turned in parental approval slips opting for the program. "I think these kids need as much information as possible," said Melissa Reitkopp Schwartz, whose daughter attended the 10th grade class at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. "Because when kids make these kinds of decisions, we're not there." The state school board will formally review the courses over the summer. (Wash Post 4-8-07)

Images and reality. "The Dolce & Gabbana ad where a group of men appears to be getting ready to rape a woman was pulled after a huge outcry. Graphic and nauseating billboard ads for a new movie glamorizing the abduction and torture of a young woman have also been removed. After a few days of calls and e-mails from Hollywood NOW, the Motion Picture Association of America suspended the movie's rating, which will delay its distribution and cost the producers handsomely. The [Lionsgate and After Dark Films] studio execs? They said it was all a big mistake, and that they didn't even know all those billboards had been put up. Right." (NOW.org, 4-03-07)

Porn in the 1700s. There was a great deal of erotic literature published in the 18th century, according to Ph.D. researcher Jenny Skipp at the University of Leeds. Skipp found that, contrary to expectations, the works were not just solitary amusements, but were read aloud in alehouses and even in the coffeehouses of polite society. "Some texts even came as questions and answers and were clearly intended for groups of men to read together," Skipp said. Much of the literature was derogatory toward women, who are depicted as subordinates, courtesans, prostitutes, carriers of disease, and bearers of deformed children. "When men write this way, or read these texts, it gives them a context for asserting their authority over women," she said. The literature's metaphors reflect the times. "At a time when military power was equated with virility, armed conquest is often used as a metaphor for sex – in phrases such as 'unsheathing the weapon', 'storming the fort,' and 'releasing the cannon.' Dr. Simon Burrows, Skipp's Ph.D. supervisor, said, "Jenny has shown that erotic texts are about much more than sexual fantasy. They can give us genuine new insights into cultural attitudes, sexual norms, and social customs." (Medical News Today, 4-04-07)

De gustibus. An Iowa man's letter to the Wall Street Journal lamented "men's willingness to sacrifice personal freedom for the greater good by showing nothing of the personal, except that which has to be uncovered to work: head and hands." Then again, there are women who have the opposite feeling. They'd love to have nothing showing but their hands and head so that people would focus on their humanity, not their anatomy.

What were they thinking? Online pornography is not only protected by the First Amendment, it may be good for children, said U.S. District Judge Lowell Reed, Jr. In assigning responsibility for policing Internet pornography to the parents, Reed added, "Perhaps we do minors of this country harm if First Amendment protections, which they with age inherit fully, are chipped away in the name of their protection" (Wash Post 3-23-07). In this, he echoes U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Richard Posner's pronouncement last year when he un-banned sales to young people of video games such as "Grand Auto Theft: San Andreas" because "to shield children right up until the age of 18 from exposure to violent descriptions and images would not only be quixotic, but deforming, and would leave them unequipped to deal with the world as we know it." These judges dismiss the onslaught of sexually violent and aggressive images available to children and teens, not just for First Amendment reasons, but because it might be good for them! These are images that invite young viewers to identify with the action being simulated and, in the case of interactive video, to direct the action first-hand. Neuroscientists tell us that if someone – especially a teenager undergoing a natural spurt in brain growth – repeatedly goes through the motions seen on the screen, or even *imagines* going through them, the part of the brain devoted to the activity enlarges and takes over adjacent areas. Children practicing the skills of aggression and sexual violence can surely contribute someday to "the world as we know it," but is that the world we really want?

Radio host Don Imus's description of the Rutgers women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hos" is "degrading to women everywhere," Hillary Clinton said. Critic Wendy Kaminer challenged Clinton's statement, saying she should realize that women are "capable of deflecting insults instead of absorbing them." (womensenews.org, 4-16-07) But there is a difference between an insult and a stereotype. An insult is a rude or contemptuous comment ("You have terrible taste"). A stereotype, on the other hand, is a caricature ("nappy-headed hos") that stands in the place of an accurate description ("female student-athletes"). Imus's cruel comment rests on the assumption that his social group (his male audience) shares his point of view and enthusiastically supports it. Since stereotypes are the building blocks of prejudice, it is self-evident that women should not have to quietly deflect or absorb them.

MC NOW Calendar of Events

Chapter Meetings generally take place on the first or second Monday of each month. All members welcome.

MAY

- 7 (Mon) 7-9 PM. MC NOW ALL CHAPTER DINNER MEETING. Hollywood East on the Boulevard (Asian restaurant), University Blvd., Wheaton. RSVP and directions: lj.feldner@verizon.net or 301-942-0938
- 10 (Thu) 6:30 pm. Baltimore NOW chapter meeting. Friends Stony Run Meeting House, 5116 N. Charles St. A chance to meet our neighboring members! Contact 410-668-4399 or info@baltimorenow.org.
- 20 (Sun) 6:30 pm. "Night Out for Equality." Grand Ballroom, N. Bethesda Marriott Hotel, 5701 Marinelli Road, N. Bethesda (1 block from White Flint Metro). Fundraiser for Equality Maryland includes reception, dinner, awards and entertainment such as two stars from the Logo TV comedy series, The Big Gay Sketch Show. This year's awardees: MC Delegate to Annapolis Heather Mizeur and Elbridge James of the MC NAACP. Go to EqualityMaryland.org for tickets and list Equality Montgomery County as your host table.

- 24 (Thurs) 1 pm. "A Sense of Wonder," Maryland Women's Heritage Center, Patuxent Wildlife Center, Prince George's County. Theatrical performance honoring the 100th anniversary of Rachel Carson's birth. Contact lshevitz@msde.state.md.us.

JUNE

- 4 (Mon) 7-9 pm. MC NOW CHAPTER **ELECTION** AND DINNER MEETING. See details May 7..
- 7 (Thu) 5:30 pm. MC Commission for Women's 35th Anniversary Commemoration. Strathmore Music Center, Grosvenor Road, Bethesda. www.Montgomerycountymd.gov/cfw

JULY

- 13-15 (Fri-Sun) NATIONAL NOW CONFERENCE 2007. Detroit, Michigan. To register: www.now.org/organization/conference/2007.



Josie Wells, Linda Amendt, Diane Gubernot, Shawn Berryman, Carolyn Pasti



Niambi Powell, Carole Rayburn, Fran Porter, and Mary Bailey



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