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***Roundtable on Race and Reproductive Justice***

On Friday, February 13th, the Center for Race and Ethnicity hosted a panel, Race and Reproductive Justice, organized by our graduate assistant Grace Howard. Scholars from the fields of history, law, women’s and gender studies, and medicine convened to discuss their research on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, and reproductive care.

“THE PROBLEM OF ACCESS TO CARE”

Professor Margaret Marsh from Rutgers-Camden and IHHCPAR in New Brunswick began with a historical inquiry into in vitro fertilization (IVF) and “the problem of access to care.” Her presentation focused on the early development of in vitro fertilization (IVF) and addressed the ways in which, in the United States, it became a costly technology available primarily to those able to pay for it. Marsh compared today’s disparities to the early 20th century, when black and white couples in Northern cities were able to access free reproductive assistance from some hospital clinics. Later, when IVF was being developed in the 1970s, some researchers provided equal access to black and white participants alike as they sought funding for clinical trials. Scientists were hoping



for a federal ban on IVF research to be lifted, which would likely have brought the technology into the realm of other federally-funded medical developments, helping to make it affordable. The ban, however, was never lifted. In most states today, IVF remains a costly procedure available to the well-to-do.

Margaret Marsh, History, RU-Camden/IHHCPAR, RU-NB

RACE, SPACE, AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE?

Dr. Taida Wolfe, a physician and doctoral candidate in Women’s & Gender Studies at Rutgers-New Brunswick, considers race and reproductive justice through the spatial politics of abortion clinics. Moving beyond a rights-based framework, she cautioned that “reproductive freedom has been narrowly defined,” and asked the audience to consider “who has been denied access to safe motherhood.” In her research as a doctoral student and work as an OBGYN, she explores the work of geography and space in mediating access to

reproductive care. For Wolfe, geography is a condition of freedom, and space is more than a container for social relations: it actively produces them. She explained that space is charged with history and affect, and that spatial politics make constructions of social difference felt. Conversely, she pointed out that subalterns mobilize spatial politics to create sanctuaries. Wolfe’s work considers how space, race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect to produce abortion clinics as physical sites of procedure and protest that may reproduce or disrupt social hierarchies. She argued that some reproduction is valued over others, and that space plays a part in materializing the experience of stratification.



Taida Wolf, Women’s & Gender Studies, RU-NB

Professor David Cohen, from Drexel University’s School of Law, investigates the race-based harassment of abortion providers. His research surveys physicians and administrators of color who have been targeted by protesters for their work and singled out for their perceived identity. He explained that targeted harassment may include stalking, verbal threats, and physical assaults, and has increased dramatically between 2010 and 2014.



*David Cohen,
Thomas R. Kline
School of Law,
Drexel University*

Cohen argued that “the anti-abortion movement is obsessed

with race,” and detailed the discriminating strategies of protesters who harass minority providers. Physicians of color received questions like “How much are they paying you to kill your race?” At the same time, some were able to mobilize their own experience of ethnicity and the racial assumptions of protesters to overcome and subvert harassment. For instance, physicians reported that they drew on their personal history of racial struggle to resist the protesters, or “dressed down” to pass as clients. Cohen’s scholarly work and reporting in mainstream journals highlight an overlooked problem that has become more urgent in the midst of rising violence and intimidation.

DIFFERING MODELS OF PARENTHOOD

Professor Twila Perry from Rutgers’ School of Law in Newark examines the various intersections of race and family law in her scholarship, which includes research on international and transracial adoption. Her presentation focused on the “question of non-marital

mothers”—women who have children outside of marriage. She explained that this experience has been marginalized in a variety of scholarly fields. Dominant feminist discourse remains uncomfortable with this model, while black women scholars have reduced the experience of non-marital motherhood to a function of poverty. Queer



*Twila Perry,
School of Law,
RU-Newark*

academics, engaged in the battle for marriage rights, have marginalized

the issue by holding up illegitimacy as a peril faced by the children of unmarried gay and lesbian parents. Even when framed as an economic necessity, the result of oppression and marginalization, non-marital motherhood remains a moral issue. It is almost exclusively posed as accidental and unplanned. Building on Marsh’s discussion of economic access to IVF services, Perry asked what would happen if a low-income woman of color requested financial aid for reproductive assistance? Perry urged the audience to question “what is wrong” with a model of parenthood that may only become more salient as men continue to lose economic status. She warned against a racial and gendered hierarchy of value in assessing motherhood and reproduction.

The panelists emphasized issues of access and economics, and challenged rights-based discourse to consider questions of exclusion and denial, and

the moral imperative to deliver reproductive care. Marsh argued that without economic access, the right to reproductive assistance is meaningless. She gestured towards countries where sperm and egg donations have not been commodified, encouraging the audience to consider alternatives to the stratified market of reproductive assistance. Fielding questions on space and experience, Wolfe reiterated that abortion remains a business. Clinics are spaces of potential reproductive freedom, but also of racial and sexual oppression. While the spaces of clinics can be strategically organized to protect providers and clients, the geography of abortions is best hidden by privilege: well-maintained hospitals and private doctors are far more secure from harassment than local stand-alone clinics. While Cohen emphasized the vulnerability of clients entering these spaces, audience members shared their personal experience with reproductive care, and challenged the general lack of post-operative services. Perry suggested that this lack implies a directive to forget the experience of abortion, and argued that the issue remains stigmatized in contemporary legal scholarship. She and Cohen called for greater academic influence on public policy and popular opinion.



Full Panel (l-r): Marsh, Cohen, Wolfe, and Perry

The panelists called for dialogue between the multiple frameworks of rights that exist to measure and mediate the experience of reproductive freedom. The investments between human, civil, constitutional, economic, and women's rights, for example, should be mutual and interconnected. On the capacity of reproductive rights to accommodate social issues beyond conception, Wolfe defined social justice as "people living their lives as they want to be lived." This working definition offers a glimpse of the ethical care and material freedom sought by the struggling couples, non-marital mothers, minority physicians, and clinical patients discussed. The visceral reality and political potency of reproductive discourse contains the unparalleled potential to reproduce social disparities of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Accordingly, we must continue to question the political stakes of reproductive justice, and its relationship to transformative social change.

FOR FURTHER READING

Panelists offered the following texts to think through the questions left unanswered in the discussion. We have included these titles to sustain the conversation about reproductive justice on campus and beyond.

David S. Cohen and Krysten Canon, Living in the Crosshairs: The Untold Stories of Anti-Abortion Terrorism (Oxford, 2015)

Margaret Marsh and Wanda Ronner, The Empty Cradle: Infertility in America from Colonial Times to the Present (Johns Hopkins, 1996).

Margaret Marsh and Wanda Ronner, The Fertility Doctor: John Rock and the Reproductive Revolution (Johns Hopkins, 2008).

Katherine McKittrick, Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle (Minnesota, 2006)

Twila Perry, A Gem in Harlem: The Garrison Apartments, Gentrification and the Dilemma of Race (forthcoming)

Dorothy Roberts, Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty (Vintage, 1998)

CRE Graduate Students Hold 8th Forum on Race and Ethnicity

On Friday, February 27th, the graduate assistants at the Center for Race and Ethnicity organized the Eighth Annual Graduate Forum. Presenters came from across the three campuses to share rigorous new research in the fields of Anthropology, Comparative Literature, Education, History, Law, Library and Information Sciences, Political Science, Social Psychology, Sociology, and Women’s & Gender Studies. The conference included five panels and a lively lunchtime discussion that put scholarship on transracial and transgendered passing into conversation.



Crowd chats informally at the 8th Graduate Forum

The first session on “Race and the Academy” drew scholars at the intersections of critical pedagogy and race theory. The second panel, “Women in the African Diaspora,” explored gendered experiences of race across a spectrum of historical and social contexts. Racial theories were deconstructed and reassembled in the service of liberatory ethics in the panel “Theories, Criticism, and Race.” Presenters examined historical, contemporary, and potential strategies



Panel 4, “Institutions and Activism” (l-r): Cliff Dawkins, Miya Carey, Donna Auston, Madison Bruckelmanns

for social justice in their discussions of “Institutions and Activism.” The last panel, “Critical Perspectives on Community Health,” featured scholars who challenged the hegemonic discourses and institutions of public health.



Panel 5, “Critical Perspectives on Community Health” (l-r): Marlene Gaynair, Analia Albuja, Allison Bloom, Miraida Morales

Perhaps the greatest success of the conference was the productive exchange it fostered between students of multiple disciplines, who gathered with common questions and complementary perspectives on race, ethnicity, and scholarship.

Upcoming Film Events at the CRE

The CRE is pleased to announce the next two features in its *Growing Up Raced* film series. They are “The Host” (2006), an award-winning creature feature by Korean director Bong Joon-ho,

which will be screened on Thursday, March 26 at 6:00pm. The movie, a sci-fi action film, concerns a monster kidnapping a man's daughter, and his attempts to rescue her. A week later, on April 2, also at 6:00pm, please join us for a screening of “Mooz-lum” (2010), written and directed by Qasim “Q” Basir, and starring Danny Glover. It tells the story of an African American Muslim family whose lives are changed by the September 11 attacks and their aftermath.

Please join us at the CRE offices, 191 College Avenue on the first floor, CAC. Pizza and soda will be served! Please RSVP to raceethnicity@sas.rutgers.edu.

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