



Gender Matters

Immigration and the Plight of Same-Sex Binational Couples

By K. Aaron Smith

During this time of national debate about immigration reform, the issue about what classes of immigrants are eligible for legal residence in the United States necessarily dominates the discourse. The plight of same-sex foreign partners of U.S. citizens is usually left out of the discussion, however. Such partnerships are commonly referred to as same-sex binational couples. The difficulties regarding immigration for the non-American member of the same-sex binational couple is doubly hidden. First, the plight of such couples has not taken a central place in immigration reform debates. Second, even GLBT activists, including those advocating for same-sex marriage rights, often do not know about or discuss the problems binational gay partners face.

When binational gay and lesbian couples explain their situation, people most often suggest they travel to a state or municipality in which same-sex marriages are recognized, the idea being that having a legitimate marriage would allow the American citizen to apply for his or her spouse's residency. While this is true for opposite-sex marriages, it does not work that way for same-sex marriages. Immigration laws apply at the federal level, and because the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) states explicitly that marriage at the federal level is recognized as being between only men and women, the non-American member of a same-sex couple does not qualify for immigration based on

marriage, even if that marriage is recognized by, for example, the state of Massachusetts.

My partner of 15 and half years is not a U.S. citizen. We met in 1995 when we were both living in New York, and moved to Albuquerque in 1997, where I studied for my Ph.D. and my partner for his bachelor's degree. When ISU hired me as a professor, we moved together to Central Illinois and my partner worked for his M.F.A. After graduating he found employment in his profession. Thus, my partner had always resided legally in the U.S., either on a student visa or a work visa. However, six months ago we learned that his work visa was not going to be extended and that he had just a few days to depart from the United States. Had my partner and I been in a heterosexual relationship we could have married and his legal residency would have been assured, but that option is not available to us.

While ours is a sad story, it is hardly unique. On this campus alone there is at least one other same-sex binational couple in a similar situation. In June of this year I attended a press conference at the GLBT Center in Chicago during which several such couples told their stories. Even though the problems and worries associated with my partner's residency here in the U.S. had been a part of my life for 15 years, I was ignorant of how widespread the problem is. Currently there are more than 51,000 same-sex binational couples in the U.S., meaning that there are over 51,000 stories out there that demonstrate how our current marriage laws actually work against families.¹ DOMA denies legal family status to gay and lesbian couples, even those who are legally married in states or other countries, and even (*cont'd*)

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those who have children. In the case of families of same-sex binational couples, there are children who live in fear that one of their parents may be torn from the family; some children have faced parents' deportations.

My purpose for writing this editorial is to raise awareness. On November 4, I participated in a panel discussion at ISU about the plight of binational same-sex couples and told my partner's and my story. The other two panelists were lawyers who provided good legal and constitutional information about immigration and same-sex couples. During this time of national debate about immigration, I urge all Americans to keep foremost in mind that beyond the legal and political rhetoric surrounding gay marriage, there are actual *people* whose lives are affected by our nation's unfair marriage laws. The legal inequalities that affect gay and lesbian Americans stem from an ideology of intolerance and ignorance.

A few weeks ago I attended an Illinois Wesleyan University screening of *The Pursuit of Equality*, a documentary about San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom's courageous efforts to issue marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples in 2003. Upon learning that her legal marriage had been declared illegal by a California court, one woman in the documentary posed what I consider to be a central question to those who would continue to deny gays and lesbians full marriage benefits, including immigration rights: "Is your marriage any stronger because you have denied mine?"

K. Aaron Smith is an associate professor of linguistics in Illinois State University's Department of English.

1. Uniting American Families, "How Many of Us Are There?" April 15, 2009. Accessed November 30, 2010. <http://www.unitingamericanfamilies.net/status-of-uafa/how-many-of-us-are-there/comment-page-1/> ☼

Indian Surrogacy: Choice vs. Compulsion

By Kelly Donnellan

Alison Bailey presented "Outsourcing Surrogacy to India" at the International Studies Seminar on November 10. She argued that Western frameworks do not accurately assess the situation.

Globalization has enticed businesses to outsource production, and surrogacy is no exception. After new reproductive technologies and pregnancy contracts surfaced in the 1980s, feminists were apprehensive of their potential effects on science and race. Bailey referenced Gena Corea, who in 1985 predicted surrogacy would lead to "a world where the wombs of 'non-valuable' women are used as 'breeders' for the embryos of 'valuable women'."¹



Dr. Nayna Patel, owner of a surrogacy clinic, cradles a newborn. Photo courtesy of Agence France-Presse.

Surrogacy costs roughly one-third in India what it does in the United States. There is no fixed fee to acquire an Indian surrogate, regulations vary from clinic to clinic, and there are no set laws to protect those involved in the transactions. Indian surrogates receive increased medical attention, dormitory style living, and nine months of work, for a salary that would take them

an average of 15 years to earn otherwise. The global press describes surrogacy in India as an opportunity, a choice, and a voluntary exchange, whereas the surrogates see themselves as financially compelled to take this job, while having limited contractual rights.

Bailey reevaluates the cultural concept of "choice" as used by the global press and liberal Western feminists. She cites Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice's (ACRJ's) analysis, which deconstructs reproductive issues into three specific and interrelated areas: reproductive justice, reproductive rights, and reproductive health. In the case of India, where women's access to reproductive health is notoriously poor, ACRJ's model offers an integrated approach that enables activists and scholars to analyze and address the ways that surrogates have and do not have agency.

1. Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 276. ☼

Symposium on Aging

On Friday, November 5, a multidisciplinary Symposium on Aging convened at the ISU Alumni Center. Chris Wellin, WGS affiliated faculty member and assistant professor of sociology, organized this program as a way to bring together professionals from the community and academics from different disciplines to discuss issues and share resources.

The aging of society is driven by several combined factors: longer life expectancies, lower birth rates for some decades, and the aging of "baby boomers." Fully 20 percent of our society will be over the age of 60 within the next decade. In response to this change, community programs, academic and professional fields, and those in the arts and humanities are adapting to new challenges and opportunities. (*Cont'd*)

As Dr. Wellin observed, “The field of gerontology is a vibrant crossroads for feminist theories and analyses. The problems of aging are in good part problems of women. They bear the brunt of care-giving responsibilities, both in families and in the health and social service professions, where women constitute the great majority of those who work with elders. Women are far more vulnerable to poverty in late life. And women are the predominant majority of older people who live in congregate settings such as nursing homes and assisted living facilities.”

Wellin and panelist Maria Schmeckle represented the Women’s and Gender Studies Program.

For more information contact Dr. Wellin at cwellin@ilstu.edu. For the complete symposium program and information on the Gerontology Program, go to <http://sociologyanthropology.illinoisstate.edu/minor/#Gerontology>. ☀

Faculty Accomplishments

Alison Bailey’s article “Locating Traitorous Identities: Toward a Privilege-Cognizant Account of White Character” was chosen for *Hypatia*’s 25th Anniversary Retrospective Virtual Issue (November), a collection of the most influential *Hypatia* articles published since the journal was founded 25 years ago.

Sherrilyn Billger presented “Shedding Light on School Closure Decisions” at the UIC Department of Economics Seminar Series, Chicago, Illinois, October 1.

Cynthia Edmonds-Cady presented “Blurring the Outsider/Insider Divide: Race, Class, and Gender in the Welfare Rights Movement” at the National Women’s Studies Association conference, Denver, Colorado; November 14, and also presented “Oppression and Agency: Detroit Welfare Rights Activists’ Resistance to State Control over Sexuality and Reproduction during the War on Poverty” at the Social Science History Association, Chicago, Illinois, November 21.

Gina Hunter published a book review of *Fit to be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950-1980*, by Rebecca Kluchin, in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 24(4).

Paula Ressler co-authored “Teaching English Together: Leadership through Collaboration” with Thomas M. McCann, Judith Minor, and Dianne Chambers, in *English Leadership Quarterly*, 33(2); presented “Teacher Activism and the Antihomophobic Classroom” at the National Writing Project Convention, Orlando FL, November 18; and was selected for a Grant Writing

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Mentorship Award through ISU’s Research and Sponsored Programs for Spring 2011.

Vanette Schwartz was the recipient of Milner Library’s Outstanding Research Librarian of the Year Award.

Christine Varga-Harris presented “*Khrushchevka, Kummunalka: Socialism and Daily Life during the Thaw*” at the After the War, After Stalin: The Soviet Union of the 1940s and 1950s Conference, St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia, October 7-8. ☀

Congratulations on Tenure and Promotion!

Full Professor: Alison Bailey (Philosophy) and Jessie Krienert (Criminal Justice Sciences)

Tenure/Associate Professor: Ann Haugo (Theatre), Melissa Johnson (Fine Arts), Richard Sullivan (Sociology & Anthropology), and Amy Wood (History)

Welcome, New Affiliated Faculty!

Julie Jung, Associate Professor of English

Internet Dating Examined

Dr. Susan Sprecher (WGS, Sociology & Anthropology, Psychology) delivered a Distinguished Professor Lecture entitled “Scientific Perspectives on Relationship Compatibility, Compatible Matches, and Compatibility Matching” on Tuesday, November 2. Sprecher focused on three interconnected topics regarding Relationship Science: relationship compatibility, compatible matches and compatibility matching. She defines the concepts and multiple predictors of compatibility using

relationship science while referencing examples from both existing couples and initial interactions between potential couples. While internet dating sites that use “scientific” methods to locate compatible couples enjoy increasing popularity, Sprecher’s research challenges their contention that they generate more compatible matches than the traditional way of meeting partners. ☀



Dr. Linda Bowman, Dr. Susan Sprecher, and President Al Bowman.

Pixar Movies Scrutinized

By Sarah Isett and Jennifer Kim

Dr. Roberta Seelinger Trites (WGS affiliated faculty, English) presented a College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Lecture, “The Pixar Maturity Formula: Sexism, Growth, and Social Responsibility in (*cont’d*)

Children’s Movies,” on October 21. Of the 11 children’s Pixar movies Trites analyzed, only one, Jessie in *Toy Story*, has a female main character. The male characters are almost invariably immature, with important lessons to be learned, while any prominent female character provides the motherly voice of reason for the immature male. Male characters, on the other hand, tend to be more sexualized, while females are innocent. The gender imbalance extends to animals as well. Most of the animals in the films are males. Bearing this in mind Trites asked, in a characteristically humorous aside, how is reproduction supposed to happen?

Not only does sexism occur in these movies, but they also lack racial diversity. Most have white main characters, families, and friends. Children learn from the movies, and these movies do not give the children a wide perspective of the real world. Needless to say, the next time we watch a children’s movie we will be thinking twice and analyzing the characters’ roles more than we ever have.

Sarah Isett and Jennifer Kim are WGS 120 students. ☀



Black Took Collective

Café Soul is a happening place to be! On October 27 the Black Took Collective—poets Duriel E. Harris (English),

Ronaldo V. Wilson, and Dawn Lundy Martin, (shown in photo left to right)—crackled with creative energy when they presented “Live Feed from the Black Unconscious.” Their work embodies a radical poetics that explodes normative aesthetics. As one performed spoken word, the others riffed on computers, their improvisations simultaneously projected onto different screens. During their performance the group showed film, donned masks, and dramatized their poetry as they explored cutting-edge theories about race, gender, and sexuality. The event, sponsored by Diversity Advocacy, also featured powerful performances by ISU students, all of whom delved into their identities through spoken word. ☀

“Tedious Journeys” in Academe

Pauline Clardy (Curriculum & Instruction), Maura Toro-Morn (WGS, Sociology & Anthropology), and Cynthia Robinson (Education, Purdue-Calumet) discussed their

book *Tedious Journeys: Autoethnography of Women of Color in Academe* on October 28 at the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology. In the book, women of color in predominately white institutions explore how the racism embedded in the cultures of their universities affects their relationships and interactions with administrators, peers, and in the classroom. “As a student, listening to the experiences of these women came as a surprise. I’ve always looked at academia as a progressive arena, free from racial or gender discrimination. Listening to these women’s stories illustrates the grave nature of the issue in that injustice exists at all levels,” responded WGS Graduate Certificate and History student Kelly Donnellan. ☀

Student News

Plenty of PRIDE

By Jessica Bales

ISU PRIDE, a registered student organization that serves and represents LGBT students at ISU, has been very active this semester. An average of 40 people have attended weekly meetings, discussing topics as varied as gender and gender roles, representations of gender identity and sexual orientation in comics, and resumes and discrimination in the workplace. PRIDE also has organized or contributed to several LGBT events on campus, co-sponsoring a cultural dinner that featured television and Broadway star BD Wong, and the recent Coyote Grace concert. Members staffed a table and “coming out closet” on the quad for National Coming Out Day, and gave away 1,000 free “Gay? Fine by Me” t-shirts. In response to the wave of LGBT teen suicides this year, PRIDE also encouraged people to wear those shirts in October to show support and raise awareness about LGBT harassment and bullying.

The RSO also runs a speaker’s bureau, a service in which panels of LGBT students talk to classes about their experiences. For more information about PRIDE, visit <http://www.isupride.org/home/index.php>. ☀

Student Accomplishment

Shushan Avagyan (English) received the Dr. Carolann S. Najarian Scholarship from the Armenian International Women’s Association. This fund recognizes women who are emerging professionals in the humanities, social sciences, or sciences, who have significantly contributed to their area of specialization.

“Our Short Eternity”

Chad Wys’s eclectic art exhibit, “Our Short Eternity,” on display in the WGS gallery through the end of the semester, focuses on *objecthood*. We are defined by objects in our daily lives, says Wys, and through his art he attempts to redefine our understanding of those objects.

Methodically Wys plays with composition, color, and form. Collecting objects from thrift stores and garage sales, he reclaims them by creating alterations that represent new narratives. In one instance Wys layers excerpts from textbooks on Native American Art and Euro-American Art to create a new cohesive story. He also reinterprets classic artwork by adding complementary or contrasting color palettes, and /or geometric shapes. For example, he superimposes “aggressive new colors and forms” on portraits, creating obstacles between the viewer and the images they are



seeking to understand and define. Wys’s art challenges the viewer to actively and playfully reinterpret the objects that surround us.

Chad Wys is a graduate student in the Program of Visual Culture with a focus in art business. For more of his art, visit www.chadwys.com. ☀

LGBTQ Students of Color Represent

By Jessica Bales

On Friday, November 5, Safe Zone hosted an event entitled “I am LGBT and a Person of Color.” The five students on the panel began by telling their personal stories. For most, theirs was and continues to be a protracted process over several years of coming out to friends and family and to the world in general. The responses they receive from families, friends, churches, and schools range from total acceptance to denial, rejection, and gay bashing, leading one of the panelists to attempt suicide. The panelists, whose family’s religious affiliations range from Roman Catholic to Pentecostal, generally have developed alternative faiths in response to homophobia in their churches.

The students described how race affects them as queer people of color. Ashley Scott believes that many Blacks are afraid of homosexuality because it is another strike



LGBTQ People of Color Panelists Ashley Scott, Tomas Bolivar, Xavier Grady, Roger Cadena, and Dani Fox.

against them. As her mother said, “You’re already black and a woman—now you want to be gay?” Dani Fox said that many in the African-American community view

homosexuality as a blight within white society, and reject Black queers on that basis. Tomas Bolivar and Roger Cadena, both identifying as Hispanic, discussed how their culture emphasizes traditional macho ideas about masculinity. Similarly, Xavier Grady noted that he is seen as less than a man because he is femme, and thus a threat to already challenged Black male masculinities.

The panelists’ experiences at ISU have been varied. They claimed to have mostly positive relations with friends, but reported that their teachers sometimes rely on them to represent all people of color and queers, which they often resent. For the most part they experience benign neglect on campus, but several gave accounts of hostile dorm encounters. The panel unanimously advocated for more LGBT space at ISU. PRIDE is supportive, they said, but they feel a cultural disparity with the majority of the PRIDE members, and yearn for a QPOC (queer people of color) organization and a safe space of their own. ☀



The **Women’s Mentoring Network** held a pizza party on November 3. This organization provides mentoring, informal support groups, and grants to nontraditional women students.

For more information, go to: <http://mediarelations.illinoisstate.edu/identity/1011/nov11/wmn.asp>

Gender Matters
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Welcome, New Minor Student!

Jazz Coffman, Sociology

Welcome, New Certificate Students!

Amy Hohulin, Speech Pathology & Audiology
Kelly Donnellan, History

Congratulations, Graduating Certificate Student!

Meagan Zeigler, Political Science

16th Annual

Women's and Gender Studies Symposium

Keynote Address by Chandra Mohanty

Save the date: April 29, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.



Student Call for Papers
January 21, 2011 deadline

Submit papers and presentations on any topic related to women and/or gender. Keep this in mind as your semester's work comes to a close!

For more information please visit our website at
womensandgenderstudies.illinoisstate.edu

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