



Society for Menstrual Cycle Research

Newsletter Fall, 2009

~~~~~

### **President's Remarks**

By Elizabeth Kissling

I am truly honored to serve as president of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research. This organization has become a second academic home to me, in many senses of the word. One definition of home is “the place where something began and flourished,” and Joan Chrisler’s 2001 invitation to me to deliver one of the plenary addresses at the Avon, Connecticut, conference brought me home and helped my career to flourish. The seeds of my book, *Capitalizing on the Curse* were germinated at that meeting. I received such a warm welcome from members of the Society that I can’t imagine doing research in this area without the support of SMCR. It is one of few places to escape what Board member Chris Bobel recently called the “You study what?!?” phenomenon, and to find mentoring and encouragement for interdisciplinary research into all aspects of the menstrual cycle. I continue to find our biannual conferences a homecoming, and hope that feeling was experienced by those who attended the 2009 conference that

Heather Robinson and I organized in Spokane.

During my term as president, I want to work on increasing the visibility and strength of our organization. One of the ways I am doing this is through continuing development and expansion of [www.menstruationresearch.org](http://www.menstruationresearch.org), our web site. A blog about current issues related to menstruation, written by SMCR members, is in the works, with an anticipated launch date in mid-September. If you are interested in contributing, either regularly or occasionally, please contact me! We are especially interested in finding a contributor who can address news about physiological and/or medical issues related to menstruation from a scientific perspective, as the present line-up of bloggers all have cultural and social backgrounds and research interests.

Mechanisms for secure online payment of member dues and membership data are also in the works. I welcome your suggestions and advice about other ways to increase our visibility and advance our mission “to be the source of guidance, expertise, and ethical considerations for

researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and funding resources interested in the menstrual cycle.”

~~~~~

2009 SMCR Conference

By Elizabeth Kissling,

The 18th biannual conference of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research was held in Spokane, Washington, June 4-6, 2009. This year’s theme was “Menstrual Moments: Media Messages about Menstruation,” defined broadly to include a variety of media. Presentations addressed various ways menstruation is represented in such media as films, advertising campaigns, magazine advice columns, zines, medical textbooks, and charity campaigns, as well as a range of other topics related to all aspects of the menstrual cycle and women’s health.

Highlights of the conference include two sessions on menstruation in film. Giovanna Chesler, of Marymount Manhattan College, hosted a screening and discussion of several short films about menstruation, including Barbara Hammer’s early 1970s film, *Menses* and the recent *If Men Could Menstruate and Bounce*. Two of the filmmakers were on hand to discuss their films. In another session, Roberta Cantow of Original Digital showed excerpts from her film trilogy, *Bloodtime, Moontime, Dreamtime: Women Bringing Forth Change*.

David Linton’s well-attended keynote address, *The Rise of the Happy Period: From Shame to Humor in Mediated Menses*, included media clips of recent “feminine hygiene” ads from around the

world to illustrate his assertion that as ads for femcare products have presented menstruation with less shame and greater humor, they have featured increased sexualization of women. He left it to the audience to debate whether that is a fair trade-off.

Other popular sessions included *From Girlhood to Girls Gone Wild: Menstruation and Development in a Sexually Objectifying Culture*, a panel organized by Ingrid Johnston-Robledo to examine the relationships between menarche and the increased sexualization of girls in U.S. culture, as documented in the widely read American Psychological Association task force report. Tomi-Ann Roberts, one of the contributors to the APA report, began the panel with a lively presentation of the report’s findings. Peggy Stubbs, Janet Lee, and Joan Chrisler (respondent) rounded out the panel. The Saturday morning session, *Medical Pathologizing of Women’s Bodies*, was also well attended, requiring extra chairs. This session included Jane Ussher and Janette Perz presenting their findings about PMS as a relational disorder, and a preview of Jerilynn Prior’s new book, *The Estrogen Errors: Why Progesterone Is Better for Women’s Health*. Yet another exciting session was Saturday’s workshop by Paula Derry and Greg Derry, *A new menstrual paradigm. Chaos theory and the menstrual cycle: A theoretical framework and evidence of chaotic behavior in menstrual cycle data*. Paula Derry is a psychologist and Greg Derry is an experimental physicist; together, they are developing a new, positive paradigm to understand menstrual cycle and menopausal transition research.

We were also fortunate to have several of our founding members join us on this 30th anniversary of SMCR's charter to discuss the past and future of the Society. This roundtable, chaired by President Jerilynn Prior, included Ann Voda, Alice Dan, and Mary Anna Freiderich.

The conference also featured the inimitable musical performance of Polly Wood, Annie Caridad Lapham, and Nané Jordan, all affiliated with the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. After the Friday evening dinner, the three performers presented a musical and visual performance of a menstrual coming-of-age ritual, complete with audience participation in celebrating with the menstruant.

A limited number of copies of the printed program, which includes abstracts of most presentations and posters, is available on a first-come, first-served basis to those who were unable to attend and would like to learn more about all of the exciting new research presented at this year's meeting. Please contact me at ekissling@ewu.edu, or by postal mail at Eastern Washington University, 229 Communications Building, Cheney, WA 99004.

~~~~~

### **Conference 2009: Ann Voda Lifetime Achievement Award**

By Judith Berg

The Ann Voda Lifetime Achievement Award is given to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to menstrual cycle research. The honor is awarded by the Board of Directors to a

distinguished investigator along with a cash award of \$1,000.00. It is not bestowed every year but at the discretion of the Board. The award was created to honor the lifetime contributions made by Ann Voda, PhD, RN who pioneered research in midlife women's health and the menopause transition. Further, Dr. Voda was entrusted with the Tremin Trust data collected by Dr. Alan Treolar over his research lifetime that began in the 1930s. This vast database was utilized by Dr. Voda and her colleagues to understand the natural history of women's menstrual cycles and their menopause transitions. Dr. Voda's body of work informed an entire cadre of new researchers interested in conducting research in these areas.

At the 2009 conference, the Ann Voda Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Diana Taylor, Ph.D., RN, FAAN. Dr. Taylor's lifetime of contributions to women's health research and to women's right of access to full reproductive health care has been outstanding. She received her BSN from Oregon Health and Science University, her MSN and Women's Health Nurse Practitioner credentials from University of California at San Francisco and her PhD in Nursing from the University of Washington School of Nursing. Early in her research career, she began conducting clinical trials to test health promotion strategies to manage premenstrual symptoms. This work has been widely disseminated along with her descriptive longitudinal studies of the menopause transition of Anglo American, Mexican American, African American and Filipino American midlife women. Dr. Taylor is currently training Midwives, Physician Assistants, and Nurse Practitioners to

conduct medication and aspiration abortions and comparing their outcomes to those of physicians at the same facilities in California. This work will add to the body of literature that demonstrates parity of outcomes among the groups with improved outcomes in patient satisfaction. She has mentored a number of doctorally prepared nurses to conduct menstrual cycle research focusing on health promotion for symptom management.

~~~~~

Conference 2009: Student Research Awards

By Ingrid Johnston-Robledo

At each SMCR conference, a small committee of Board members evaluates each of the student presentations to determine the winners of two student research awards, named in memory of two Society members: Esther Rome and Linda McKeever, whose contributions are described below. From our last meeting in June, the recipient of the Linda McKeever Award, with a monetary value of \$250, was **Nicki Dunnivant**. Nicki, a student of Dr. Tomi-Ann Roberts, recently graduated from Colorado College. The title of her winning paper was, *“Restriction and renewal, pollution and power, constraint and community: The paradoxes of religious women’s experiences of menstruation.”* The winner of the Esther Rome Award, also with a monetary value of \$250, was **Clara Hendricks** for her paper entitled, *“Menstrual education and the construction of womanhood: A study of Latina second-generation immigrants.”* Clara, a recent graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Boston,

was a student of SMCR board member, Dr. Chris Bobel. In an effort to encourage and acknowledge creative projects relevant to the menstrual cycle, plans are currently underway to develop another SMCR award.

Esther Rome was a tireless women’s health advocate as a member of both the Boston Women’s Health Collective and the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research. Among other interests, she was passionate about tampon safety: her testimony before Congress on tampon absorbency was influential in pushing the industry to provide some standardized absorbency information on tampon packaging for consumers. She presented regularly at SMCR conferences and served on the SMCR board of Directors until her untimely death from breast cancer in the mid 1990s. Linda McKeever, DNC, WHCNP, was a dedicated women’s health advocate. In her doctoral research she described women’s models of menopause, portraying the normal perimenopausal process. Before her untimely death from a brain tumor in the early 1990s, Linda was an active participant in the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research.

~~~~~

### **Election for SMCR Board of Directors**

As usual, nominations for new members of the Board of Directors were made at the Society’s conference last June, at both the board meeting and the general business meeting. As usual, the election for new members of the Board of Directors will be held this fall. What is unusual this year is that there are only four candidates for the four openings, in

part because a fifth nominee was unable to accept her nomination. Nonetheless, all members are encouraged to read the profiles of the candidates and to vote in the election. Our organization is only as strong as the participation of our members. A second change is that the election will be held electronically. Watch the listserv for information about how to vote. Those of you who are receiving a paper newsletter can mail a ballot to Eliabeth Kissling, as detailed on the ballot attached to your newsletter. Here are the statements by the candidates:

**Laura Wershler**, B. Sc., is a sexual and reproductive health (SRH) advocate with over 20 years involvement with pro-choice organizations, including 10 years on the board of Planned Parenthood Canada (now Canadian Federation for Sexual Health). She is the current Executive Director of Sexual Health Access Alberta (formerly Planned Parenthood Alberta), a non-profit that facilitates access to comprehensive SRH information, education and services, in Calgary, Alberta. Her commitment to menstrual cycle awareness grew from her personal experience with fertility awareness and menstrual cycle charting. This commitment expanded in scope when she joined the SMCR in 2005, and led to her developing the broader concept of *body literacy*. In workshops, conference presentations, the media, and public engagement events, Laura has advocated for full access to information and education to enable girls and women--from menarche to menopause--to acquire full understanding of how the menstrual cycle functions and relates to their sexual, reproductive, and overall health and wellness. Laura is one of

few in the SRH community to be an outspoken opponent of cycle-stopping contraceptives and the use of hormonal contraception as a long-term “standard of care” for all women. She challenges and invites her colleagues to critically assess current practices in women’s health, and to embrace the idea that without access to the foundational knowledge that fosters *body literacy* informed choice for women is not possible. Her contributions to the discourse on a wide range of SRH issues appear in academic publications, newspapers, and reproductive health websites. Laura is frequently cited in local and national media stories on issues related to sexuality and women’s health. Her goal as a board director would be to increase media and public awareness of the work of the SMCR and its members.

**Mindy J. Erchull**, Ph.D. is a social psychologist who works as an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. She says: I’ve been an SMCR member since 1999 when I attended the Tucson conference to present my undergraduate thesis about educational booklets about menarche. As a graduate student I continued to study menstrual cycle issues with my attention turning towards women’s attitudes about hormone therapy at and after menopause as well as their comfort with information from their doctors. I continue to study the menstrual cycle and currently have a number of projects in various stages of completion about doctors’ attitudes, women’s attitudes, and about menstrual product advertisements. As I’ve developed a professional identity, my involvement with SMCR has become very

important to me. I value the interdisciplinary nature of the organization and welcome the opportunity to talk with others who share my interests. The fact that colleagues I meet at conferences or through the listserv hold different perspectives and use different methods to study menstrual cycle issues only adds to my enthusiasm. I feel that I would be a valuable addition to the board because I have a lot of energy and a great deal of passion for keeping smaller organizations such as SMCR alive with an active membership. I'm known as a person who gets things done, and I bring this determination and organization with me as well. Finally, I hope to work to keep the conference affordable and accessible to students and early career professionals so that they can become regular attendees and active members.

**Alexandra Jacoby** says: I'm a self-taught artist, and an SMCR member since the 2005 conference, where I presented *vagina vérité*<sup>®</sup> – an unabashed exploration of the plain, ordinary, mysterious matter of vaginas. It's a photo-documentary for women: so we can see ourselves for ourselves. *vagina vérité*<sup>®</sup> was conceived in a conversation with a friend that began: "Do you like the way your vagina looks?". Neither of us had actually seen vulvas other than our own and in mainstream pornography. I was pretty sure they were all different, but had nothing to point to when talking with my friend, who clearly thought there was something wrong with hers. I decided right then to publish a book of vulva portraits. To date, I've made 82 v-portraits, organized and participated in solo and group exhibitions, held salons, established a companion website, and produced two

*Vagina Festivals* – visual and performance art weekend experiences in NYC. The website, [vaginaverite.com](http://vaginaverite.com), includes over 1000 pages of questionnaire-responses and has received over 2.6 million visitors. My underlying aspiration is to create spaces for conversation: about our bodies, self-image, sexuality, health and wellbeing. Moved by the concept of the menstrual cycle as a vital sign, and by how little I know about my own body, I seek to connect individuals with the questions posed, and the information and research generated, by the SMCR. I would be honored to serve on the board and expand the audience for, and participation in, our conversations.

**Paula S. Derry**, Ph.D., is a health psychologist who works independently as Paula Derry Enterprises in Health Psychology. She says: I have specialized in menopause since 1994, studying a wide range of areas including: analyzing decision-making strategies used by professionals when evaluating the postmenopausal hormone therapy research literature; developing a holistic model of menopause, the Lifespan Biological Model, that integrates biology with psychological and cultural factors; and writing on coping with distress during perimenopause. I am currently collaborating with my husband, an experimental physicist, on research to prove that the menstrual cycle is best described biologically with chaos theory, which is a theory about the nature of the dynamics underlying systems. I have developed educational workshops for midlife women and continuing education for professionals. I have been a member of SMCR since the early 1990s. I think SMCR offers a unique and crucial

perspective on the menstrual cycle, with its interdisciplinary and woman-oriented focus. I became editor of the SMCR newsletter in 2006. As editor, I also became an appointed member to the Board of Directors. My goals as editor have been to present useful information, to provide members with information about each other, and to invite everyone to contribute. I have also been an active and involved member of the board. For example, I coordinated updating the Society's position statement on post-menopausal hormone therapy, and contributed to the group updating the position statement on menstrual suppression. I have enjoyed being editor, but I want to move on to other projects within the Society, and would like to be elected so that I can remain on the board.

~~~~~  
Members' News

The week following the SMCR conference, David Linton travelled to Tucson where he spoke at the annual conference of the Society for Disability Studies (SDS) on the topic "PMS & PMDD Meet The ADA: Menstruation Through a Disability Studies Lens." He began his presentation with a story that Joan Chrisler had shared with him in Spokane about G. Gordon Liddy's statement that Sonia Sotomayor was unfit to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court because her menstrual cycle would impede her judgment. ("Let's hope that the key conferences aren't when she's menstruating. . . or just before she's going to menstruate. That would really be bad.") Dr. Linton used Liddy's benighted remark to open an examination of how the menstrual cycle is still often

viewed as a disabling condition. He went on to explore the ways that research in both the field of menstrual studies and disability studies can be mutually enriching to one another. This was the second time that Linton has presented menstrual research at the SDS.

Two years ago he demonstrated how the history of menstrual product advertising has repeatedly depicted the period as a "handicap" in need of treatment via the use of the product being promoted.

~~~~~  
**In Memorium:**  
**Randi Kaye Daimon Koeske**  
By Maureen C. McHugh

Randi Daimon Koeske, Ph.D., a feminist psychologist and scholar, died on January 31, 2009, of complications of cancer. She was fifty-nine years old. Dr. Koeske, a member of SMCR, was considered one of the pioneers in the study of psychological aspects of the menstrual cycle. Her publications on premenstrual emotionality in 1976 challenged the biological model of menstruation, and critiqued the existing research for methodological flaws. She continued to publish groundbreaking research and mentored other scholars in this field throughout her career. A member of the Society for Psychology of Women (Division 35 of the American Psychological Association) and of the Association for Women in Psychology, she was, as a result of her interest in and knowledge of feminist methodology, appointed to the Division 35 Task Force on the Establishment of Guidelines for Nonsexist Research. She co-authored (with Maureen McHugh and Irene

Frieze) an *American Psychologist* article on guidelines for nonsexist research in 1986. Her subsequent work focused on issues of health, mental health, spirituality and professional burnout. She published over fifty professional articles, many of which were widely cited by professional colleagues.

Randi Koeske completed her undergraduate degree in Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, and earned a doctorate in Social Psychology from Carnegie Mellon University in 1977. In her early career she was a Research Associate in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center where she worked on health and mental health issues including eating disorders, childhood obesity and diabetes. She co-authored a number of papers in this area, and remained interested in health psychology throughout her career. Since 1989 Dr. Koeske had been an Associate Professor at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg where she taught Health Psychology, Psychology of Health and Illness, Psychology of Gender, and Women and Mental Health. She was awarded the Outstanding Faculty Award in 2002, Distinguished Teaching Award in 2004, and the Distinguished Service Award in 2007.

Dr. Koeske was a mentor to students and colleagues. Both Irene Frieze and Maureen McHugh remember Randi as a passionate scholar who had a critical mind. Colleagues from the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research recall being inspired by her work and receiving advice from her on conducting and presenting research. Giovanna Chesler described Randi as “a passionate

feminist, an educator who made a difference in the lives of many female students who learned, through her, how to be proud of feminism.”

Dr. Koeske was also interested in Pastoral Psychology. From 1995 until 1999 Randi pursued study in pastoral ministry at Duquesne University and the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. In 1999, she received a National Endowment for the Humanities stipend to attend a seminar on the Bible as Literature at Yale University. In 2006 she co-authored a paper on personal religiosity and spirituality associated with social work practitioners’ use of religious-based intervention practices in the *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work*. This scholarly interest was consistent with her personal religious involvement. She was an active choir member for over twenty years at St Maurice and St. John Fisher Churches, and regularly served as cantor for masses. As a member of her Church community, Randi regularly cared for needy parishioners. One of her students commented on the spiritual side of Randi “She was one of the most spiritual people I ever met, who never lost sight of her vision and being a human being above all. ..She inspired me to reach for the simple and spiritual and most meaningful in all that I did.”

A memorial for Dr. Koeske was held on March 2, 2009 at the University of Pittsburgh, Greensburg campus. A scholarship in her name has been set up at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg (For information or to contribute, contact Dr. Diane Marsh or Karen Gavula, 724/836-7497. )



Randi Koeske is deeply missed by her husband, Gary Koeske, Professor of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh, and her adult sons, Matt and Zak, and by her grandchildren and other family members, as well as by her colleagues and friends.

~~~~~  
2011 Conference
By Peggy Stubbs

The next SMCR conference, our 19th biennial meeting, will be held in Pittsburgh, PA from Thursday, June 2nd through mid-day on Saturday June 4th 2011 at Chatham University. The conference committee includes Peggy Stubbs (chair), Heather Dillaway, Ingrid Johnston-Robledo, Judy Berg, Paula Derry, Phyllis Mansfield, Susan Cohen, and our next conference convener (in 2013), Chris Bobel. Holding the conference at the University will reduce the costs significantly. At this time, in addition to housing at Chatham (for a very low fee per day), we are making arrangements to secure a block of rooms at a nearby hotel with shuttle service to the conference site, hoping to be able to accommodate everyone's preferences. Our goal at this point is to make the conference both more affordable in these tough economic times, and intellectually attractive as always! For now, mark these dates on your calendar. We'll be calling on you in the future to ask you to participate in conference related tasks.

~~~~~  
**From the Editor**  
By Paula Derry

As I said above in my bio for nomination to the Board of Directors, I am stepping down as editor of the SMCR newsletter after this issue. It's been an interesting task, and fun, but I've been doing it for a while now and want to move on to other tasks. The Board appoints the newsletter editor. If you are interested in the position, please contact the Board via Elizabeth Kissling at [eak@drkissling.com](mailto:eak@drkissling.com) to let them know this. Anyone interested should feel free to contact Liz. The editor puts out 3-4 newsletters a year and also becomes a member of the Board of Directors. The editor's job includes soliciting material, editing material, and making some judgments about material. The editor composes the newsletter, which is posted online as a .pdf; in addition, paper copies need to be made and mailed to members who have requested this. I would be happy to work with whomever is selected as editor, with information or whatever other assistance would be needed. If you have questions about being editor, please feel free to contact me via e-mail or phone ([paula.derry@gmail.com](mailto:paula.derry@gmail.com), 410 433-7356).

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the newsletter.

~~~~~  
Disclaimer

All articles in the newsletter are the opinions of the authors and not the official position of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research.