

# The Body Literacy Imperative is Born or Who Stole the Birth Control Pills?

As active minds and imaginations come together at conferences, things can sometimes get out of hand.

In the case of the *Society for Menstrual Research 2005 Conference* last June in Boulder, Colorado, it was one woman's birth control pills that got out of her hands.

In jest, the artificial-hormoneless woman declared that she knew just the culprits responsible for her missing pills: Planned Parenthood Executive Director Laura Wershler and Justisse Healthworks for Women Director Geraldine Matus.

Conference participants had to agree, the woman had pretty solid circumstantial evidence. Matus and Wershler had earlier made an impassioned case for women's rights to self-knowledge and the choice of holistic care to tend to their reproductive and overall health. Their presentation -- *Recovering the Blood Mysteries: Psycho-Physiological Rationale for an Interactive and Affirming Reconnection to the Menstrual Cycle Through Fertility Awareness and Holistic Reproductive Health Care* -- resonated with health care professionals and lay-people alike.

As it turned out, the woman recovered her pills after she reflected on her own reproductive health and determined to chart her menstrual cycle. So, we think it was Goddess who intervened.

Many participants discovered that we women have been missing something far more important for far too long: **Body Literacy**.

The dynamic duo coined the term to help get the message across that discovering our own bodies and responding to them is not a whimsical pursuit but rather an essential knowledge vital to our wellbeing.

## What Does Body Literacy Mean to Me?

*Femme Fertile* contributors speak to what body literacy means to them to initiate what we hope will be an ongoing discussion with you about this provocative concept:

*The concept of body literacy occurred to me after I read a novel illustrating the disempowering impact of illiteracy. The inability to read diminishes self esteem and opportunities to participate in the exchange of ideas. The connection to the lives of girls and women is obvious – the education of girls is a key strategy in all international development work. It struck me that most educated women in developed countries live with another kind of illiteracy -- they are not taught to “read” or understand their own bodies. On the contrary, they are taught to distrust their bodies and accept various artificial means to “manage” them. Learning to observe, chart and interpret her menstrual cycle events is the only way a woman can acquire body literacy. Otherwise, she must hand*

*over power and decision-making about her sexual and reproductive health to medical care providers who themselves are often body illiterate. Body literacy enables a woman to understand how her health and wellness is connected to her menstrual cycle. She can then engage in meaningful discourse with care providers and be a full participant in decisions made about her health.* **Laura Wershler**

*It is my assumption that we acquire body literacy over time through a continued sharing with peers and wise elders. That sharing includes a detailed understanding of how our **whole** body works and how that understanding may be meaningful for us. That understanding includes the science of our bodies, but also its mysteries – beauty, blood, and heart – and our response to them. Body literacy is a deeply intimate and holistic relationship with our bodies and the selves we are that dwell in our flesh.* **Geraldine Matus**

*Those of us who have grown up in Western culture tend to perceive ourselves as being composed of two distinct aspects: a mind and a body. As a consequence, we often have difficulty expressing or consciously experiencing ourselves as embodied, emotional beings. Body literacy, or learning to read and understand the language of our body, is the first step in the marvelous journey of reconceptualizing and then experiencing ourselves as deeply whole, integrated and intuitive beings. It is the beginning of a lifelong dance with/of ourselves.*

**Megan Lalonde**

### Now, Dear Reader:

**Won't you please join in? With words, a dance, a poem, a prayer -- explore what body literacy means to you. And if you're inclined, please write to *Femme Fertile* and share with us at [editor@justisse.ca](mailto:editor@justisse.ca). (Full contact info on pg. 1)**