

## IMYA

First, I would like to thank Professor Lara Putnam for the kind introduction; I'd also like to thank the Women's Studies Department for the honor of this award, and everyone who has come this afternoon to participate in the ceremony and reception. I did not have the fortune of ever meeting Professor Iris Young, but from everything I have learned about her, she seems to have been a remarkable woman who was active in the community, even as she maintained an academic career of stellar quality. To me, this makes her an exemplary figure, and I feel honored to be associated with her name.

Much in the spirit of Iris Young, I was asked to speak for a few minutes about how I have worked to integrate academic pursuits and activism in my own life. At first, this was a difficult process, mostly because it took me some time to discover what I was most passionate about. As a young person living in Seattle, I worked in campaigns to increase access to family wage jobs and lobbied for changes in immigration law. And while I deeply believed these issues, I think my lack of a personal connection to them limited the impact I was able to make.

In my early twenties, however, I had the opportunity to travel to Bolivia to research the experiences of women working in the tin mining industry. During the year I spent in Bolivia, women spoke with me about the struggles they faced on a day-to-day basis in their families and communities. For most women, these struggles were economic, and centered on providing for their kids every day. But women also linked these economic troubles with challenges they faced at home—such as communicating with their partners about how many children they wanted or could afford to have. Women often told me that, while their husbands were politically progressive and involved in labor movements, they also sometimes exhibited *machista*, or sexist attitudes. These attitudes translated into, at best, the failure to provide for their kids or help out around the house, and, at worst, domestic and sexual violence—sometimes leading to unplanned pregnancies and more economic hardship.

This experience in Bolivia made a profound impression on me—and resonated with me, perhaps, in a way that labor or immigration activism had not. After returning to Seattle, I ended up working for three years at a nonprofit clinic that provided abortions, in addition to a range of other gynecological services, to women. An old-school clinic from the 1970s, my coworkers and I were trained in all aspects of abortion care—we answered phones and counseled women about abortion, but also performed ultrasound exams and assisted doctors during procedures. I deeply loved my job at Aradia; both our women clients and my female coworkers taught me a great deal about humanity, about compassion, and about the importance of reproductive freedom. The clinic's director for 18 years, Marcy Bloom—who wrote a letter to support my award nomination—is an amazing activist and visionary in her own right; her work in Mexico directly contributed to

the legalization of the procedure in the country's capital a few years ago. Marcy has served as a model and mentor for me in my own work.

Up to this point, most of my comments have focused on activism; now, I turn to academics. Although it is not perhaps immediately obvious, to me, the connection between academia—between activities such as reading, writing, and teaching—and activism—or, struggling for positive change—is clear. The truth is, once you find something you are truly passionate about, you want to learn more about it. You want to read about it, write about it, and talk with—and teach—others about it. This is why I came to Pitt.

Currently, I am writing a dissertation on the history of women's experiences with unwanted pregnancy and abortion in Bolivia—a country that, I learned, has the highest rates of illegal abortion on the continent, and where many women die due to unsafe abortion. To conduct research for the project, I returned to Bolivia in 2009 and 2010 where I interviewed women about their experiences with unplanned pregnancy, doctors who provide illegal abortions, and activists working to legalize the procedure. I also authored a blog about issues affecting women in the country and assisted advocacy groups in campaigns concerning reproductive rights and domestic violence. These experiences taught me a great deal about the meaning of being an academically engaged activist—and a socially responsible scholar.

I have learned just as much about the links between activism and academia here at Pitt. Since beginning my graduate studies in the History Department, I have been fortunate to be trained by a number of professors whose scholarship and teaching foster positive change. Although I could mention many, I'd like to thank two individuals in particular who have served as mentors to me. Dr. Reid Andrews, my academic advisor, has published a number of excellent books on Afro-descendant populations in Latin America—and has thus uncovered the history of a people who are often forgotten in scholarship on the region. Dr. Lara Putnam's work on themes as diverse as gender, labor, migration, and music in the Caribbean has challenged many of our assumptions about the ways that sexual, racial, and national differences function. Reid and Lara have consistently challenged me to be a critical and engaged thinker and writer in ways that have made me both a better student and scholar, and a better activist. Thank you both. And thanks to everyone for being here.