

## heatherault.org/statement

In 2002, I was jotting down notes in class while watching a film about the Suffragist Movement when I was struck by the narrator's words. She referred to a time when abortion was "legal" during the 1800s. I considered myself well-informed, but an uncomfortable feeling overtook me as I realized I knew almost nothing about reproductive rights prior to the "back alley abortions" and early birth control clinics of the 1950s. My intense curiosity led me to the campus library immediately after class. It didn't take long to discover that abortion and birth control methods have been a part of most cultures for thousands of years and women have played a key role in its development. The discovery of this history was, for me, a truly transformative awakening.

My mind was ablaze with new questions as I considered the ethical and political issues of what I had learned. How has this knowledge been erased from our consciousness? How does this history – and its omission from the general discourse – effect public policy and the dialog around abortion? Could it change the internalized shame women feel regarding their bodies? Will *Roe vs. Wade* be understood differently within the context of thousands of years of reproductive choices? I realized that in my own life, this new awareness lent new meaning to my activist and fundraising work at the Women's Choice Clinic and the National Abortion Reproductive Rights Action League because the history was never described in terms of our work. At a deep personal level, an appreciation of the long history of reproductive choice helped me bring closure to an abortion I had the previous year. At that moment, I resolved to make this information more widely available and began developing the "Birth Control History Timeline" project.

Over the past four years, the initial project has expanded and evolved to include a dozen or more public presentations in Women's Studies and Sociology courses at Humboldt State University and College of the Redwoods. Last year, I formed the "Red Tent Media Collective" to perform a dramatization I wrote at a local experimental arts venue. Recently, I began developing a website called "Ancient Choices" to chronicle the history. This past June, my work led me to the Dittrick Museum at Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio to view their recent acquisition of birth control devices. The chief curator explained the museum's plans to design a permanent exhibit space and website, and he was enthusiastic about my stated desire to contribute through my graduate work. The following month, I explored the academic aspects of graduate scholarship at the National Sexuality Resource Center's three-week Summer Institute at San Francisco State University, where I confirmed my aspiration to explore interdisciplinary collaborations at the graduate level.

In a Masters of Fine Arts graduate program, I would like to create visual narratives that, through the lens of reproductive rights history, ask questions about human rights,

politics, censorship, embodiment, choice, sexuality, and women's health care. These explorations will be rooted in the academic research of scholars such as historian Linda Gordon, sociologist Michel Foucault, and feminist Judith Butler. The basis of my work will be a timeline that portrays birth control and abortion artifacts over four thousand years. One idea I've been working with is a database with an interactive user-interface for online exploration. Another idea is an installation piece; a clothesline representing 4000 years hung with historical artifacts alongside forty items of red lingerie, each representing one century. To provide depth and variety to the content, I would like to capture narratives from voices old and young to incorporate into performance art, social documentaries, or puppet shows. Other ideas include illustrated history books, informational 'zines, and thought-provoking posters to distribute to coffee shops, waiting rooms, college campuses, and other appropriate venues for increasing awareness of this history. I would also like to organize a retrospective collection of pharmaceutical advertisements, pro-choice and pro-life materials, and curriculum from sexuality education programs across cultures. I am seeking to begin a graduate program in Fall 2007 so that I may best understand the reproductive choice history and its implications, provide legitimacy to my work through a higher education degree, and explore the full scope of my artistic potential within an academic community.

I believe my project holds great potential for making original contributions to the fields of digital media, history, and women's studies. A Masters of Fine Arts program at a research institution provides an optimal place from where I can develop meaningful work based in art, activism, technology, and scholarship and add unique perspectives to the discourse on reproductive rights.