

Women's Voices for Change

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Passing Pay Equity, Again; "Flying" With Jennifer Fox; Pauses Part of the Dance

As Congress enters recess, House members are reminding their Senate colleagues to get serious about pay equity, in the wake of last year's disastrous *Ledbetter v. Goodyear* decision by the Supreme Court. One is 15-year House veteran Lucille Roybal-Allard, who as the first Mexican-American woman to serve in Congress knows a thing or two about societal barriers:

The Paycheck Fairness Act creates a training program to help women strengthen their negotiation skills. It enforces equal pay laws for federal contractors. The measure requires the Department of Labor to work with employers to eliminate pay disparities by enhancing outreach and training efforts. The bill prohibits employers from retaliating against employees who share salary information with their co-workers. Finally, the legislation allows women to sue for punitive damages in addition to compensatory damages now available under the Equal Pay Act.

Lily A couple of weeks before the House passed the Equal Pay Act, I had the pleasure of gathering with many of my colleagues in the House and Senate at a rally on Capitol Hill in support of both this measure and the pending Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. We were joined at that rally by Lilly Ledbetter herself, who provided first-hand testimony about the years of gender-based wage discrimination she endured while employed as a supervisor for a Goodyear Tire plant in Gadsden, Alabama. After nearly two decades, an anonymous note revealed that she had been paid less than male co-workers who held the same job, including recent hires with less job experience.

This measure passed the U.S. House of Representatives with my support on July 31, 2007, but awaits passage in the Senate.

At forty, learning how to fly: Filmmaker Jennifer Fox knows a thing or two about bravery. Her PBS documentary series include *Stories From a Free South Africa* and *Beirut: The Last Home Movie*. But as Britt Wahlin writes this week, her new *Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman* required bravery of a very different kind:

But in her early 40s, she begins to wonder where she fits. Though she eschews marriage, she has a relationship with a married man, and the

way she feels when he's not there for her is anything but liberating. She thinks she may want children after all. All around her, female friends are experiencing parallel struggles figuring out how love, sex and partnership square with often competing desires for independence: professional, financial and otherwise.

To figure it all out, she turns the camera on herself and invites family, friends, and friends of friends to share their stories, too. "Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman" is the resulting tapestry of narratives, a six-hour meditation on the modern female experience. The women in "Flying" cover a gamut of topics ranging from marriage, motherhood, divorce and sexuality to abortion, infertility, virginity and violence.

The germs of "Flying" came to Fox in the mid-'90s, when it struck her that though she tended to be in relationships with men, her female friendships were holding her together. "I was initially interested in female language, how women communicate with each other," she said. In South Africa, where she was working, her water-cooler conversations with the female members of a mostly male production team always hit on the same topics: love, sex, relationships. "Though we were from different backgrounds, we were experiencing the same things," Fox said. She hypothesized that the themes of modern women's lives cut across race, class and culture, but she wasn't sure how to incorporate her ideas into a compelling film...

And in classic old-school feminist fashion, Fox draws out her subjects partly through the power of her own confessions:

In India, Fox initiates a discussion about masturbation with a group of widows. The women ask, "How would one do that?" and then break into hysterics at the mere suggestion that they would touch their own bodies for sexual fulfillment in the absence of husbands.

But the main story in "Flying" is Fox's own, which plays out like a soap opera -- each episode ends with a cliffhanger. She takes a tell-all approach: about her sex life, her relationships, her abortions, her miscarriages, her sexual abuse, and her anger toward her parents and grandmother. She says her decision to share everything, both the good and the bad, was her political choice. As a filmmaker, she wanted the film to show that "this is not a perfect life, but it's a real life." As the film's subject, she believed she was on a journey to self-understanding that required complete honesty.

Newsmix wonders how many other late bloomers, on learning of the film, thought instinctively of the Kate Millett book of the same title. Fox's own website for the film, which is busy winning awards at numerous film festivals, makes no reference to any such thing; perhaps she's instead thinking that by making it this far, we are all superheroes.

The sounds of silence. Adrienne Rosten, the former dot-com CEO who writes and blogs under the name Penelope Trunk (including her book *Brazen Careerist: The New Rules for Success*), writes this week that since she began working with a coach on her public speaking skills, she's discovered the importance of those pauses. And that sometimes, when we think we're stalled, we're just pausing for a bit:

The last time I met with [the coach], she told me to pause. I had to pause and ask her to repeat herself, because of course, I was talking so fast when she told me to pause that I could not pause fast enough to hear her.

"What?" I said.

"Pause," she said.

"I am," I said. "What did you say?"

And I said this in an annoyed voice, of course, because people who do not pause do not pause because they do not like to pause. Lindy says that the impact of what I'm saying arrives during the pauses.

She tells me to start talking again, and pause where it feels natural to pause. I do that, thinking I won't know where to pause, but I'm surprised that I can sort of tell.

Then I realize that I don't pause when I am speechmaking because I'm scared of what will happen in the pause. If I tell a joke with no pause, then people start to laugh, but they can't really laugh because they are laughing on top of me talking, so they stop themselves laughing. That is not a great way to do a joke, but the alternative—that I pause at the end of a joke so that people have a moment to laugh—seems too risky. If they don't laugh, I'll feel so awkward.

The real risk of speaking is in the pause... If I have a big idea, it sounds big when I pause. If it's stupid, the pause gives someone a chance to really notice how stupid the idea is. But the excitement of hearing a big idea is nice, and people will have more miss it if I don't pause.

With fast music, you can hide that you have no style. You just do technique to keep up with the music. The best moves come out when the music slows down and you can't hide behind speed. The same is true of sex. Right? Bad technique always comes with a fast pace.

And what about the pace of a career? I write all the time about how important it is to pause. A career with a slow, rhythmic, but not-

always-constant pace is the best type of career to have. Because we learn about ourselves, and recalibrate our paths when we pause. That month you spend on the sofa, collecting an unemployment check and eating Cheetos between movies. That's not wasted time. It's your pause. You are thinking. And the pause is actually what keeps us on course.