

The Simone de Beauvoir Institute mourns the passing of Dr. Abby Lippman



Distinguished Professor Emerita from McGill University was an active and prolific Research Associate at Concordia University's Simone de Beauvoir Institute

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The Simone de Beauvoir Institute of Concordia University is in mourning, along with many others in academia and the wider community. Research Associate Dr. Abby Lippman, an ardent feminist, a women's health expert and activist, an anti-Zionist and pro-peace Jewish activist as well as a mentor to so many, died at her home on December 26 at age 78. She is survived by her son Chris, her daughter Jessica, her two grandchildren Seonaid and Maxwell as well as her brother, Marc Lippman. There will be an event to celebrate her life in late April at Concordia University and the details of this event will be shared when available. For the time being, in lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, an organization and cause close to Lippman's heart (<http://www.nwsm.info/donate/>).

Abby Lippman was born on December 11, 1939. She earned her B.A. in Comparative Literature at Cornell University, and worked in New York for many years as a writer and researcher. She moved to Montreal in 1973 and pursued graduate work at McGill University, where she earned her Ph.D. in Human Genetics. Her thesis underlined the importance of taking serious account of the views, needs and wishes of people receiving genetic counselling. This attention to empowerment was to characterize all her academic work.

She later became a Professor in McGill's Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health. Author of numerous articles and sought-after speaker, she became interested in problems linked to "geneticization" and "neo-medicalization" (her own neologisms, the first referring to the tendency to attribute undue importance to genes as a determinant of human health and the second, to the trend of pharmaceutical industry creating illness and disease). She also followed closely the development of new medical technologies, including reproductive technologies. As an expert in human genetics, she was asked to contribute to various committees in Quebec, Canada and the United-States.

A true feminist, Lippman complemented her research career with activism in the areas of women's health and social justice. Among other contributions, she became Co-Chair of the Canadian Women's Health Network, Cofounder of Women and Health Protection, a member of the Advisory Committee for the Council for Responsible Genetics (USA), and Chair of the Board of Directors of Head & Hands, a Montreal community group devoted to youth.

When Lippman retired from McGill University, she never stopped assisting students as a Professor Emerita. She found a home at Concordia University's Simone de Beauvoir Institute (SdBI), alongside many other feminists committed to social justice. She was provided with a space to do her research, writing, and activist work, and her interest in women's health brought her in close contact with Dr. Geneviève Rail, a Professor of feminist cultural studies of health at the SdBI. As a Research Associate, Abby's days were filled with reading, seeking information, writing articles, reviews and opinion pieces, and walking everywhere day and night to attend multiple meetings, seminars and activist events. According to Dr. Kimberley Manning, Principal of the SdBI, "Abby was one of the first people to welcome me to the Institute. Prior to my assuming my position as Principal, she took the time to walk me through some of the joys and challenges that lay ahead. Warm, generous, and fiercely committed to the rich work that is feminism, Abby was a remarkable presence in the life of the SdBI."

Lippman was active in varied academic events organized by SdBI Research Associates. She was a mentor to many young women who wanted to challenge the biomedical and patriarchal model of health care. She also collaborated on a study funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research with Rail as Principal Investigator. The study focused on discourses surrounding human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination in Canada and its impact on young girls. Interviews across the country with girls and their parents attested to the general lack of information and the rare but very important instances of harm following vaccination.

Lippman and Rail drew on their research to co-author a 2015 opinion piece in *Le Devoir* that called for a moratorium on the HPV vaccine in Quebec until its risks and benefits could be investigated "independently" (i.e., not via the usual manufacturer-funded studies). This piece led to a fierce debate similar to those Lippman, Rail and other feminist researchers have encountered when they have cast doubt on the medical and pharmaceutical communities. As the pair wrote: "the history of women's health is littered with medical advice, often harmful, abandoned only after being questioned by appropriately concerned women." The results of this study will be published in the coming year.

Commenting on Lippman's passing, Rail lamented "losing a meticulous researcher and my friend, my office partner and my role model." She added, "Abby was an ally to so many people in so many progressive organizations. She was a pioneer and a giant in the area of women's health. This is a huge loss for our Institute and for women's health in general."

Keeping her thick Brooklyn accent, Lippman navigated Francophone and Anglophone communities equally and contributed to organizations such as the *Fédération québécoise pour le planning des naissances*, the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec*, the *Réseau québécois d'action pour la santé des femmes*, *À Babord*, *Chez Doris*, the South Asian Women's Community Center, Breast Cancer Action, Concordia's Center for Gender Advocacy, Biojest, and many others. She will also be remembered for championing various social causes. A long time socialist and activist, she devoted time and energy to Palestinian human rights. "She was behind every progressive cause," Rail said, noting Lippman's involvement in the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement directed at Israel. Active in Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) and Palestinian and Jewish Unity (PAJU), she was also a founding member of College and University Workers United (CUWU), which supported BDS in the academic setting. For those who knew Lippman, one constant in her life was being "too busy." In fact, just a few days ago, she could not attend a meeting of the anti-racism working group of IJV Montreal because she wanted to make time for her grandson. However she did take time to contact the Montreal mosque under attack by Islamophobes (during the confusion sowed by scandalously inaccurate reporting on the part of TVA) to communicate her solidarity. Abby Lippman's passion and advocacy will be sorely missed!