

Responsibility to fetus discussed

By Mary Courtis
Of the Emerald

If a woman chooses to abort, what are her responsibilities to the fetus? Can society force a woman to act in certain ways to benefit the fetus?

These questions and others were asked by participants Wednesday in a brown bag discussion in the basement of the law school.

The stimulus for the group's interest and concern is the case of 27-year-old Pamela Rae Stewart of El Cajon, Calif. Stewart was arrested, charged and jailed for "fetal abuse" as a result of not following her doctor's orders. Stewart allegedly used amphetamines during her pregnancy and also failed to go directly to the hospital when she began to hemorrhage. Her baby was born with massive brain damage and died six weeks later.

This landmark case opens up a whole Pandora's box of possibilities.

If doctors' orders become quasi-law, then any woman could be prosecuted for not following her doctor's advice, said some members of the discussion group.

What happens when doctors disagree or a woman refuses surgery or hospitalization? Is it legitimate to put the fetus's rights above hers?

Others wondered how the Stewart case might affect women's abortion rights. If women can be prosecuted and put into jail for fetal abuse, at what point does it become criminally negligent to harm the fetus? The group also expressed concern for women with unplanned pregnancies who may drink, take drugs or take damaging medication prescribed by their doctor before they realize they are pregnant.

"By the time they know they are pregnant, it's too late," Margo Lynn-Hablutzel, a legal research and writing instructor said. "The damage has already been done."

Other participants felt that it was hypocritical to spend so much time and energy debating fetal abuse when one in five children live in conditions of poverty and neglect. Some people also worried that the Stewart case might make pregnancy and motherhood a sentence and an ordeal rather than a joy and a pleasure.

Fears also were expressed that women may withhold important information from their doctors if they are afraid of being prosecuted, which could potentially lead to more problems and deaths than under the present system.

Other participants believed the use of many substances that also have damaging effects, such as sugar, diet sodas and caffeine, could result in a vulnerability to prosecution.

"We can't just talk about illegal drugs," Colleen Miller of the Woman's Law Forum said. "Coffee can be damaging."

Other participants argued that many infants have no chance in life because of the mother's behavior before birth. Once the choice has been made to carry the pregnancy to term, then parents must be motivated to give the fetus adequate care. Holding the mother in some way accountable for the fetus' welfare might accomplish this.

Statistics show that as many as 6,000 infants are born in the United States with fetal alcohol syndrome, and an additional 3,600 infants show less severe effects attributed to their mother's consumption of alcohol during the pregnancy. Would expectant mothers weigh their actions with more responsibility and awareness if accountability was an established practice?

Some participants said no, and they doubted that legal deterrents were legitimate ways to motivate people. They believe better education and increased access to prenatal care were more reasonable solutions. Advocates also stressed that the law discriminates against low-income women and drug users, many of whom may be addicts.

"I think we'd see few cases of middle-class women being prosecuted," said Bonnie, a first-year-law student.

All members of the discussion group did agree, however, that putting women in jail was not an adequate answer to the problem. Fathers are not imprisoned for failing to pay child support, they reasoned. Why should mothers be forced to face this penalty?

Clearly, the Stewart case has far-reaching social, moral and legal implications. Should parental decisions and responsibilities become mandated by law? Or should we oppose legal sanctions in favor of remaining flexible to individual situations?

These are hard questions. As Ellen Goodman, a syndicated columnist in Boston observes in the Oct. 7 issue of the Los Angeles Times: "It's one thing to argue that a woman has a moral obligation, it's quite another thing to turn it into a legal obligation. This is where the slope gets slippery."

Et al.

MEETINGS

Condon Geological Society meets at 4:30 Thursday, October 30th, in Room 47A Geology.

There will be a PRSSA Chapter meeting Thursday, October 30th, at 4:30 p.m. in Room 221 Allen Hall.

The National Student Exchange Program will hold an exploratory meeting Thursday, Oct. 30, at 4 p.m. in Room 111 EMU.

College Republicans will have a work session/meeting today at 4 p.m. in Room 108 EMU. For more details, call Doug Fountain at 342-7346.

WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS

Ever wonder what employers ask at interviews? Come find out at an Interview Workshop, Thursday, Oct. 30, from 1:30 in Room 12 Hendricks Hall. Of-

fered by CPPS.

"In Search of Excellence" Fourth Leadership Workshop will be Thursday, Oct. 30, from 4-6 p.m. in Room 110 EMU. Contact SARO for further information.

"What to do with Cash—A Comprehensive Survey of Alternatives" A free seminar will be held on Thursday, Nov. 6, at the Eugene Downtown Athletic Club, 3rd floor, at 3 p.m. and again at 7 p.m. The seminar is hosted by Dean Witter Reynolds, Inc. Seating for the seminar is limited. To reserve a place, call 683-3737.

MISCELLANEOUS

Attention Secondary Students: If you are planning to apply for admission to the Secondary Education Program (Block I or Block II) winter term, your application is due in 175 Education by Nov. 17. Applications may be picked up in 175 Education.

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imagery and the atmosphere created by Lynch give the films a dreamlike quality (though nightmarish might better describe Lynch's vision).

"Blue Velvet" is dominated by this sense of uneasiness. The opening cross-cuts between the father watering the lawn and water building up in the hose. At first he seems to be setting up a standard gag, but with the extreme close-ups of a beetle scurrying along the lawn and the screeching music, any clear-cut meaning is impossible. Something is wrong, dreadfully wrong, but he's not telling.

Similar touches turn ordinary scenes eerie — exaggerated camera angles, unexpected musical cues, disturbing sound effects and continual cutaways to just plain weird images throw the film into the realm of the supernatural.

It's this weirdness that finally makes "Blue Velvet" so fascinating. Images from Norman Rockwell bang head to head with images from the mind of Lynch, such as an extreme close-up of the severed ear.

Dennis Hooper's manic performance is the opposite of the subdued styles of MacLachlan and Dern. The activities of the night let loose the desires repressed by day.

Because so much is only suggested, it is difficult to make any firm specific conclusions about the work. While images tie certain scenes and events together, it is difficult to understand exactly what the point is sometimes, and sometimes the style seems to overwhelm the narrative. But with Lynch the style is, more often than not, the point of the film.

"Blue Velvet" is a film that will remain largely unwatched by America. Most people like their stories simple, clear-cut and airy. Though flawed, "Blue Velvet" will appeal to the few who like their stories a little more adventuresome — and a lot more disturbing.

Better catch it fast because it won't be playing for long. "Blue Velvet" plays tonight at Cinema World.

Larry Edwards 683-3635
Terry Gonneville 344-2242
Diana Kirkpatrick 211-5013
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