

Celebrating Carole Browner

As she retires, we salute an extraordinary scholar who has done essential work connecting gender, reproduction, and health



“Many of us know Carole formally as an outstanding and much-awarded teacher and mentor. We know her, too, as a committed citizen of the profession—here at UCLA and broadly in the academic community,” noted Sondra Hale in her closing remarks at the recent conference honoring Carole Browner. “However, many of us know her more informally as a person of great integrity, impeccable politics, and sharp mentoring skills.”

The conference, titled “Bodies, Politics, Subjectivities: A Celebration of the Career of Carole Browner,” was organized by Hale, who is a Research Professor in the Departments of Anthropology and Gender Studies, and Jenny Sharpe, Chair of Gender Studies

and a Professor in the Department of English. The all-day conference honored Browner and celebrated her many achievements on her retirement from UCLA. Browner’s friends and colleagues praised her diverse contributions to UCLA’s community, particularly regarding issues of gender.

Speakers include Susan Erickson, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University; Cheryl Mattingly, Professor of Anthropology and Occupational Science and Therapy, USC; and Ramona Perez; Associate Professor, Anthropology, and Director, Center for Latin American Studies, San Diego State University.

The event was hosted by the Departments of Anthropology and Gender Studies and was co-

sponsored by the Center for the Study of Women, Chicano Studies Research Center, Dean of Division of the Social Sciences, International Institute, Latin American IDP, Semel Institute and its Center for Culture and Health, Latin American Institute, and Institute for Society and Genetics.

Browner embarked on a career as a medical anthropologist by earning a B.A. in the Social Sciences from the New School for Social Research in New York, NY, then moved on to UC Berkeley to gain an M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology and a M.P.H. in Health Administration and Planning. She taught at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, from 1977 to 1983.

In 1983, Browner joined the faculty at UCLA in the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral

Sciences in the School of Medicine. She is currently a Professor in the Departments of Anthropology and Gender Studies and at the Center for Culture and Health, which is based in the David Geffen School of Medicine's NPI Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior. She became Chair of the Department of Anthropology in July of 2010.

Browner's research in the area of gender has been comprehensive, strikingly diverse, and groundbreaking. Jenny Sharpe highlights Browner's work in the Department of Gender Studies: "Carole Browner has been an invaluable and contributing member of our department from its earliest inception," says Sharpe. "Her centrality to Gender Studies, whether it be her work with our Ph.D. students or sound advice based on her many years of experience, cannot be underestimated."

Browner has also long been associated with CSW. "Carole Browner has been a longstanding, active, and valuable member of the CSW community since 1986," says Kathleen McHugh, CSW Director (currently on sabbatical) and a Professor in the Departments of English and Cinema and Media Studies. "CSW celebrates and congratulates Carole on all her career accomplishments!" says McHugh.

She first served on the CSW Research Committee in 1986 then joined the Advisory Com-

mittee, serving on and off from 1993 to 2011. She has also served on the committee to select recipients of the annual Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D., Award.

In March of 1984, she co-organized the CSW colloquium on "Gender, Culture, and the Politics of Reproduction." She presented a paper on the role of job-based social support in women's health on the "Women, Health, and Stress" panel at the "Women at Work" conference in May of 1987. She often served as a discussant for CSW events and in May of 1996, she and Emily Abel convened a CSW Feminist Research Seminar on "Women's Selective Compliance with Medical Authority: The Uses of Subjugated Knowledge." In addition, she shared her on "Prenatal Diagnostic Testing: How Women Decide" in the Winter 1991 newsletter.

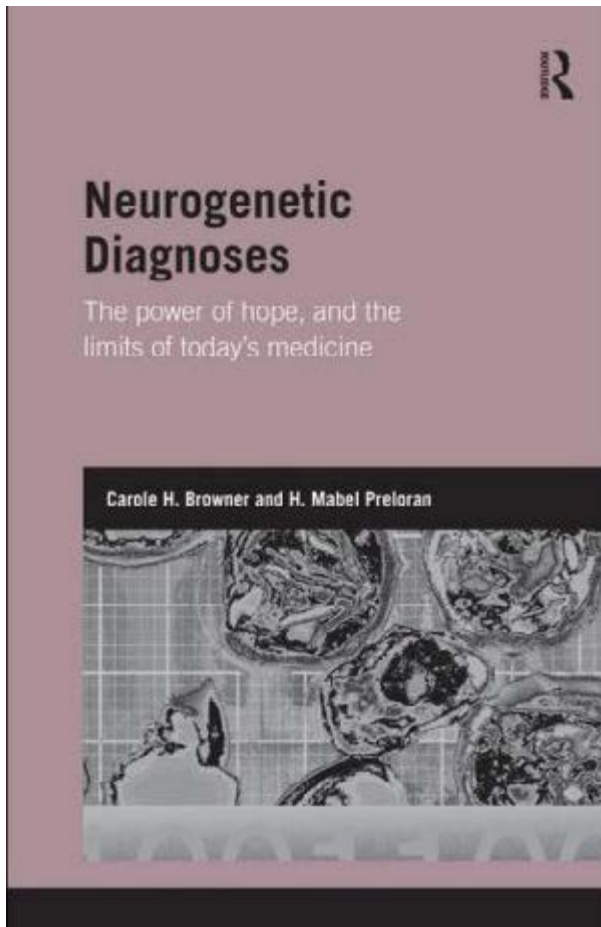
Recently, Browner has been an active member of CSW's Life (Un)Ltd research group. Her articles, "Can Gender Equity in Prenatal Genetic Services Unintentionally Reinforce Male Authority" and "Expectations, Emotions, and Medical Decision-Making: A Case Study on the Use of Amniocentesis," were read and discussed at a recent group meeting.

Throughout most of her career, Browner's research interests have been focused at the intersections of gender, reproduction, and health. She has done field research in urban Colombia,

rural Mexico and with diverse ethnic groups in the U.S. In Cali, Columbia, she investigated the circumstances that led pregnant women with unintended conceptions to seek illegal abortion. In rural Mexico, she sought to understand how local political relations shape gender-based reproductive strategies. Since 1989, she has worked mainly in the U.S. on issues surrounding the medicalization of pregnancy and prenatal care, particularly the ways that prenatal genetic information may alter reproductive experience.

Broadly based on these interests, her collection—*Reproduction, Globalization, and the State* (Duke UP, 2011), coedited with Carolyn Sargent—conceptualizes and puts into practice a global anthropology of reproduction and reproductive health. In this volume, leading anthropologists offer new perspectives on how transnational migration and global flows of communications, commodities, and biotechnologies affect the reproductive lives of women and men in diverse societies throughout the world. Based on research in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Western Europe, their fascinating ethnographies provide insight into reproduction and reproductive health broadly conceived to encompass population control, HIV/AIDS, assisted reproductive technologies, paternity tests, sex work, and humanitarian assistance.

Browner's most recent work focuses on the



growing role of genetic testing in the field of neurology, building upon and expanding her longstanding research into the social impact of decoding the human genome and the meanings and uses of genetic information. Her monograph, *Neurogenetic Diagnoses, the Power of Hope, and the Limits of Today's Medicine*, coauthored with Mabel Preloran (Routledge, 2010), explores the diverse meanings and impacts of genetic diagnoses for patients enduring currently incurable,

ultimately fatal neurodegenerative diseases—and for their family caregivers and clinicians.

Calling the volume “superbly insightful,” Linda Furlini of McGill University notes in her review that “this book is a welcome addition to the literature in raising important ethical questions regarding the complexity of neurogenetic diagnoses and genetic testing.”

Hale echoes this comment at the event on April 26th, “Perhaps the title of the book gives us some clues about where she is in her ethics and outlook—with the words ‘power,’ ‘hope,’ and the critique of medicine included in the subtitle. Carole is always thinking of change, always thinking of serving the underserved, always alert to the system and its flaws, and always engaged. She frequently works collaboratively, making *real* an important principle not only of feminist research, but of revolutionary thinking in general.”

Browner and her team of neurogenetics experts and health services researchers have continued the work started in *Neurogenetic Diagnoses* by engaging in an investigation of when and why community-based neurologists order genetic testing and refer patients for neurogenetic specialty consultations.

Throughout her career, Browner’s stellar work has been recognized and funded by the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Agency for Health

Care Policy Research, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, private donors, and private foundations.

Her professional service has included membership on the Scientific Advisory Committee for the State of California’s Birth Defects Monitoring Program and on the Executive and Advisory Boards of several University of California institutes including UC-MEXUS, the Institute for American Cultures, the Institute for Development Studies, the International Institute, and the Latin American Institute.

Nationally, she has been elected to the Executive Boards of the American Anthropological Association, the Society for Applied Anthropology, the Society for Latin American Anthropology, and the Society for Medical Anthropology; she was President of the latter from 1995 to 1997. She has also served on several journal editorial boards.

In her closing remarks at “Bodies, Politics, Subjectivities,” Hale pointed out that we must not let Browner’s voluminous professional accomplishments overshadow her personal ones: “Amidst all of the serious thinking, we should not forget the sharp wit that permeates so much of what she does,” says Hale. “Nor the warmth of the many friendships she has forged here and throughout the world.”