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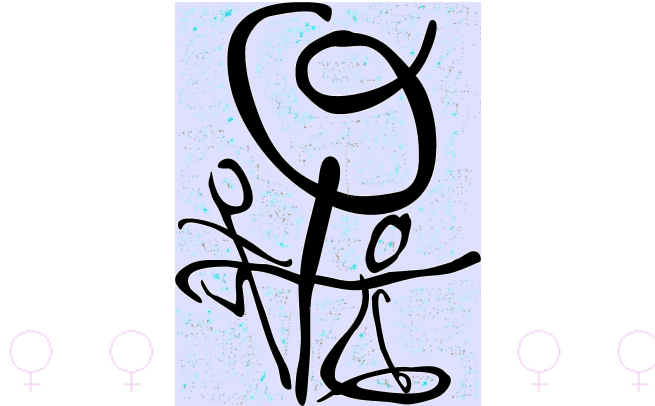
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WOMEN'S STUDIES NEWSLETTER APRIL 2007



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Director's Column

Here's a dialogue we can start. Here are some reasons to major or minor in WMS. If you have ideas to add, please e-mail me at wmsdir@etal.uri.edu

Why should you major or minor in Women's Studies?

- 50% or more of the world's people are women
- Most of the people over 70 worldwide are women
- WMS combines well with any other major or minor field of study
- WMS is an interdisciplinary program that analyzes social structures and information from multiple perspectives to achieve

a more complete understanding

- WMS examines the socio-political world. It studies social structures, organizations, institutions such as the military, government, schools, workplaces and families.
- WMS studies the personal. It examines inter-personal relationships, body image, sexuality, family and marriage, and women's experiences in various settings.
- The WMS Program accepts courses in many related departments, such as English, history, nursing, political science, psychology, sociology, and Textiles, Fashion Merchandising, and Design.

- WMS is global. It examines the lives and experiences of women in different countries.
- WMS is about your life if you are a man or a woman.
- The WMS Program offers practical courses that can help you learn about careers, professional development and leadership. The WMS Field Experience course is an internship that leads to work experience, resume-building, and job offers.
- WMS seeks social justice and basic human rights for all people.
- The WMS program sponsors many events, including speakers on a wide range of topics.
- The WMS Program at URI is a small department. You will get to know your professors and other students. "Friendships are sure to develop."
- The WMS Program offers several scholarships to provide financial aid to our majors and minors.
- Classes are grounded in feminist pedagogy. Students say: "The teacher is your friend. . . . Your opinions matter. . . . The class helps you keep an open mind."
- WMS grads succeed in careers ranging from airline pilot to zoologist
- Class projects go beyond typical research papers. Students say: "we get the chance to make a difference with action projects, choosing what we would like to change about the world."
- Other student comments:
----You learn so much about yourself

and who you want to be.
 ----The class avoids stereotypes. Almost everyone can relate to the topics discussed, whether you're a male, female, black, white, Asian, Hispanic, gay/straight/bisexual, etc.
 ----The class is fun!
 ----Films and talks with special guests that are closely related to the class enhance the discussions and debates in class.
 ----Other classes teach about subjects. Women 's Studies teaches about life. --
 -----You want to go to class!

Congratulations to our 12 graduating seniors, and to three award winners:
--Bijitha Varghese, President's Excellence Award
--Samantha De Muro and Katherine Tanner, Carlson Award

We are reviewing scholarship applications and will announce the winners at the end of April, and publish their names on our web page and in the first newsletter in Fall 2007. Shannon Stad will edit the newsletter again next year. If you have interesting experiences or information to share with her, please e-mail her at shmariest@hotmail.com

Best wishes for the end of the semester and the summer ahead!

Karen Stein wmsdir@etal.uri.edu

WMS EVENTS IN APRIL:

Tues, April 10 Naomi Caldwell, "Native American Women" 5:15 Women's Center

**Sunday, April 15 Reception for
graduating seniors, Iota, Iota, Iota
Initiation, 3:00 Women's Center**

**Sunday, April 22 Theatre Party "Pride
and Prejudice" 3:00 URI Fine Arts
Center**

Editor's Column

Shannon Stad

(shmariest@hotmail.com)

Knowledge



Is

Power

I have often wondered why more people do not choose to take action, seeing as there are so many injustices in the world; so little tolerance. Deep down, everyone has some sort of "liberal" belief (i.e. freedom, power to the people)—but why does it seem that the country is leaning on its conservative republican foot despite there also being so many democrats, or at the very least so many people agreeing that prejudice against others based on race, race and sex should cease? Why, then, are the poor still so *very* poor and lacking power, why is it worse for minorities, and why can't women seem to break through the glass ceiling- or at the very least, claim to own their bodies without a dirty look?

P.A.G.E (Promoting Awareness for Gender Equality) recently held an "Affirmative Week of Action." One speaker was the president of Rhode Island's chapter of NOW, Carolyn Marks, speaking to the small group of

people who showed up. She reminded me of how important it is to keep up with politics, no matter how boring or angering they can be. Without knowing what your up against (say, the less than 15% of politicians in RI being pro-choice), how can anyone bother to take action? I have also come to realize that sometimes it just isn't the people's fault they are uninformed; I consider myself at least semi-attentive to the stance on women's rights and where our government leaders stand on important issues, yet still the percentage of RI leaders who wouldn't support my right to choose absolutely floored me. There are also smaller (I use this term loosely) fights which never get known by the majority of the public, such as completely sexist t-shirts, advocating violence against women in children's sizes.

Because of this, I would like to advise our readers to at least subscribe to news feeds and newsletters through e-mail with organizations such as Planned Parenthood (<http://www.ppaction.org/ppaction/home.html>) and Amnesty (<http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/index.do>) which will send you news, along with how one may take action if they wish. I would also like to recommend Women's E-News (<http://www.womensenews.org/index.cfm>).

All of these sources are less apt to be biased, like the "news" one may get on the television or radio. Once more people get educated (and rightfully outraged) about the truth of what is happening in the world, it is likely that more people will take action—at the very least to pass on this information, to keep people out of the dark and to work toward better lives for all.



Gillian Ramos
(stupidrabbitsuit@yahoo.com)
March 2007



“Proud to be Childfree”

The question arose during a casual conversation with a pregnant acquaintance. She openly shared her excitement and anxieties about her impending motherhood, while I mostly smiled and nodded. Sensing I was not enthralled by the discussion, she looked at me, puzzled, and asked, “But as a woman, don’t you think it’s your higher calling to have babies?”

The short answer to this question is, “No – don’t want ‘em now, don’t want ‘em later.” But that answer comes with follow-up questions – don’t I think I’m being selfish? What’s wrong with me that I hate children?

Not all Childfree people hate children or the people who have them. Many people, myself included, choose to be Childfree if they feel they lack parental instincts. Other reasons for choosing to be Childfree include the freedom to pursue a lifelong career, or passion/hobby; health concerns associated with pregnancy, birth, or fertility in general; or the desire not to contribute to overpopulation. Some people choose to be CF out of disdain towards gender roles, and the social obligations to conform to them.

Sometimes I feel as though I was born to be Childfree. My family’s medical history is riddled with child-related issues, from miscarriage to stillbirth, as well as an issue that currently impacts me – endometriosis, a medical condition in which a woman’s uterine lining does not properly exit the body during menstruation; this condition often impacts a woman’s fertility, rendering her sub-fertile, or altogether infertile. I inherited this condition from my mother, as she did from her mother, and so forth.

While I appreciate my mother’s struggle to have a child, I constantly ask myself, “Would I be emotionally strong enough to live with the frustration and disappointment of not being able to have children if I wanted them?” I have never felt comfortable around children. I have no parental instinct towards them; I babysat once when I was younger, but the experience was more comparable to an anxiety attack than legitimate employment. My mother likes to joke that I ought to be given a HazMat suit before entering a room with a baby in it. I’m lucky if I remember to feed my fish every day, or get my cats to behave – what would possibly I do with a child?

I have tremendous respect for people who do choose to have children. The vast majority of people in my life would make great parents, whether they are good friends, good teachers, or generally good people. I trust that their children are going to turn out just fine, should they choose to have them.

And I trust that my cats and career are going to turn out just fine, as I have chosen not to have children. In response to the initial question of my higher calling as a woman, I believe that it is my duty to promote pro-choice behavior, including the choice *not* to reproduce.

Maggie Sullivan
(msully@mail.uri.edu)
The Vagina Monologues



I still remember the anxiety I felt on the night of my first performance in The Vagina Monologues. The controversial play by Eve Ensler had always interested me, and I could not turn down the chance to perform in it. The play's purpose is to give women a space to speak about the topics that affect us all and yet are rarely discussed; menstruation, birth, violence, rape, and many others. Still, many do not understand where the empowering aspect of the play comes from. This empowerment is something I am very familiar with. I was cast in what is said to be one of the most difficult monologues.

Reclaiming Cunt is a monologue based on a woman who changed her perception of the word "cunt." Rather than interpreting it as a deeply cruel insult (as many women do), she turned it into a compliment; a word meaning you were a sassy, gutsy woman worthy of praise. In my mother's generation, it was a word so malicious that she refused to say it when I told her about my monologue. I saw her face change when I explained what I would be doing. Clearly, my mother still saw "cunt" as a dirty, vicious insult; a loaded word with the power to hurt even a strong woman such as herself. At the end of the monologue, I had to attempt to get the audience to say it to me; yes, I had to get

them to scream "cunt!" in a crowded theatre in East Greenwich. Remember the anxiety I mentioned? That was about where it peaked. I was hoping the audience would truly grasp the purpose behind the monologue, which is that if you reclaim something; you make it yours, and you take away the power it has to hurt you. If you change your perceptions of what cunt means to you, then no one can ever use that word to hurt you, shut you up, or make you feel weak.

This is what The Vagina Monologues enables women to do. By breaking the silence, we take away some of the power these issues have over us, we reclaim this power and demand that our voices be heard. We recognize that violence against women happens every day and we will not sit silently any longer. I stood on that stage, dissecting the word, and finally coming to the point where I was asking the audience to say it back to me. I was terrified I would be met by silence, but I hoped they understood my message. Saying it helps us realize that it is just a word. Changing what that word means gives *us* the power, rather than a person who would try to use it against us. In the mingled voices of the Odeum Theatre, I distinctly heard my mother. She said it just once, but clearly. "Cunt." I have since heard her use the word in conversation with friends, and occasionally with me. She no longer becomes silent or stone-faced when I say it in front of her. No one will ever use this word to hurt her, ever again. How's that for empowering?



Suggested

Reading



Looking for some feminist books to sink your teeth into? Sick of all those classes that only focus on male authors or male issues? Want drama, truth, happiness and sadness according to women's lives? Here are some books you'd love:

-Cunt by. Inga Musico

-Bastard Out of Carolina by Dorothy Allison

-Zami: A New Spelling of My Name by Audre Lorde

-A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft

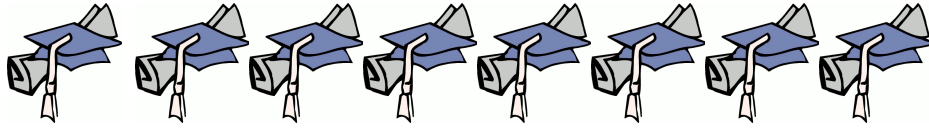
-So Far From God by Ana Castillo

-The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism edited by Vivian Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin

-The War on Choice: The Right-Wing Attack on Women's Rights and How to Fight Back by Gloria Feldt

-No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women by Estelle Freedman

CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES!



Amy F. Alexander

Elizabeth D. Ashley

Amethyst P. Brell

Samantha De Muro (December)

Megan N. Locke

Elizabeth V. Long

Stephanie C. Menard

Margaret Merlini (December)

Jeffery S. Reid

Caitlin S. Shelton

Catherine A. Tanner

Bethany G. Vacarro

Bijitha N. Varghese

Melissa Zuba