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# Gender and Women's Studies Newsletter for April 2008

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# WOMEN'S STUDIES NEWSLETTER

April 2008

Edited By Chloe Thompson



## Director's Column

By Karen Stein, WMS Director

This will be my last Director's column, as I end my term as Director at the end of the semester. I will be on sabbatical next year, writing a book about Toni Morrison.

We recently met with Dean Brownell to discuss the future of the WMS Program. We were delighted to hear that hiring a second tenure track faculty member for the Program is at the top of her priority list. Given the budget situation, we remain cautiously optimistic.

I have been proud and happy to serve as Director of the Women's Studies Program, to watch the program grow, to celebrate our faculty, alumnae, and students' achievements. I'd like to look back and review my term as Director. I have room here for a few highlights; please visit the WMS Web site for a complete list.

Student enrollments in WMS courses have increased. From the 2003-2004 academic year to this year, 2007-2008, we have doubled the enrollments in WMS courses. We have added two sections of the WMS 150 Introduction course to the Talent Development Program in summers. We have begun to offer on-line courses, and the number of on-line courses is burgeoning. The number of our majors has doubled from 2003-2008.

We have dramatically increased the number and variety of courses we offer. We now offer several graduate courses. We started a graduate certificate program in WMS this semester and already there are 7 students in the certificate program, and one PhD student in Psychology will be awarded the certificate this semester.

The WMS program has a bright and vibrant tradition. I wish it well in the future.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

- The WMS Program has the largest endowment in the College of Arts and Sciences, over two million dollars. We are proud that Professor Dorothy F. Donnelly endowed a new scholarship for WMS majors or minors, which will be awarded for the second time this spring.
- Our WMS Honor Society, the Alpha Lambda chapter of Iota Iota Iota, started in 2006. We have inducted 45 members to date and inducted a new group of students last weekend.
- Our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner in April 2005 brought together new friends and old friends, alumnae, students, faculty, emeriti for a wonderful evening, and raised \$10,000.
- We have co-sponsored a variety of speakers with the Honors Colloquium, including three women folk-singers: Ronnie Gilman, Peggy Seeger and Rosalie Sorels in the "Music of Social Change" colloquium; a Chinese film maker in the "China Rising" Colloquium.
- Our Dana Shugar Colloquium invited URI faculty speakers on a wide range of topics: Professor Hughes (Sex Trafficking), Professor Suter (Homeric Hymn to Demeter) Professor Torrens (Indigo Girls), Professor Owens (birthing myths), Professor de Bruin (Mme de Stael), Professor Lisberger (pharmaceutical marketing choices).
- This year our International Women's Day celebration brought music, speakers and representatives of local women's businesses and organizations to campus.

## The Double Standard

### By Kara Lafferty

We have all heard accusatory remarks from both sexes that resemble, “That is such a double standard!” The end of the argument could end with some compromise, a slap in the face, or somewhere in between. Regardless, this idea of a double standard keeps resurfacing in our society and is worth closer examination.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, double standards are defined a set of principles that applies differently and usually more rigorously to one group of people or circumstances than to another; especially: a code of morals that applies more severe standards of sexual behavior to women than to men.

For instance, askmen.com lists the “Top 10 Double Dating Standards,” by Nick Fielding. The list includes “Men ask and pay, women accept and smile,” “Men interrogate, women are concerned,” “Men are whipped, women are clingy,” “Men are glorified for sleeping around, women are ostracized.”

But along with the shallower contexts of relationships and sex, we’re even seeing the double standard in one of the most important electoral campaigns in history.

During the 2008 Presidential Elections double standards are appearing almost daily. In fact, *The Boston Globe* published an article March 3 titled “Double Standard,” by Carl Rivers. Rivers opens up his article with the unforgettable Saturday Night Live skit that showed reporters fawning over Barack Obama and tossing him puffball questions, while grilling Hillary Clinton like a felony suspect. This skit seems to be right on the money of this election. Why is Clinton getting the tougher questions; being put on the spot more? Chances are, it’s because she’s a woman.

Rivers points out, “the media loved Hillary when she put her hand on Obama’s and said it was a privilege to be on the same podium; they hated her when she slammed him for giving out what she called misleading information on her healthcare plan.” The soft, demure side wins over society, but when she remains strong and controversial, all support goes out the window.

Many also believe Clinton’s popularity is only due to her husband’s shadier past with Monica Lewinsky. Such scrutiny is outraging feminists including Gloria Steinem. Steinem noted in her New York Times op-ed piece, “what if Obama had been a woman, with the same resume? A female candidate with his resume would have been laughed at if she said she wanted to run for president.”

Feministing.com did an interesting review of an article in *The New York Times*, “Students of Virginity,” by Randall Patterson, March 30. This article examines the abstinence movement in Ivy Colleges and focuses mostly on a Harvard Student named Janie Fredell. Janie Fredell explains why she believes she is going against the double standard by practicing abstinence. Feministing.com critiques the whole argument of the article while focusing on a section where Fredell explains she feels women are pressured to have sex and blames it on a cultural double standard:

“I care deeply for women’s rights,” [Fredell] said ... She had awakened to the wage gap, to forced sterilization and female genital mutilation — to the different ways that men have, she said, of controlling women. One of these was sexual. Fredell had seen it often in her own life — men pushing for sex, she said, just to “have something to say in the locker room,” women feeling pressured to have sex in order to maintain a relationship ... Fredell came to realize that women suffer from having premarital sex, “due to a cultural double standard,” she said, “which devalues women for their sexual pasts and glorifies men for theirs.”

A contributor to feministing.com believes that the problem is the double standard NOT the sex. Jessica believes “if we don’t like how women ‘suffer’ from sexual double standards, how is not having sex fighting back? Seems more like giving up to me.”

Is Jessica right? Or is Fredell Right? Perhaps they are both trying to figure how to break double standards and the answer might be different for all of us.

Img: <http://evatt.labor.net.au>



## A Few Facts on Sex Trafficking By Melanie Shapiro

Sex trafficking, the trafficking of persons for the purpose of committing commercial sex acts, “deprives people of their human rights and freedoms, it is a global health risk, and it fuels the growth of organized crime” and is a form of modern-day slavery. In varying levels, the victims of trafficking are trafficked against their will. Oftentimes, their traffickers, many times a family member, a boyfriend, a pimp, or brothel owner tricks the victims into prostitution, usually by some form of force, fraud, or coercion.

According to a 2005 US State Department report, about 800,000 to 900,000 victims are trafficked across national borders each year, 17,500 to 18,500 of whom are trafficked into the US . This figure does not include the millions more that are trafficked within their own borders. Each year over one million children are exploited through sex trafficking. I would like to emphasize, that trafficking within the U.S. is not just of foreign women trafficked to the country. Increasingly, U.S. citizens are being used within their own country.

Like any other economic institution, whether it is legal or not, there is an ebb and flow of supply and demand. People become a commodity that can be bought and sold as the vessels of commercial sex acts, the product, to be dispensed and exploited to the consumer. Sex trafficking is a highly profitable industry. It is ranked second only to the arms trade industry, of black market industries. I have seen varying figures, but it seems that the annual revenue of the sex industry in the US is approximately \$9 billion. Throughout the world, there are sending countries that supply victims (many Eastern and third world countries) and receiving countries that demand the victims (many Western countries or places that Westerners frequent like Thailand).

But why is there demand for the exploitation of women and girls in the first place? Many countries afflicted by poverty are often sending countries.

In desperation to provide money for their families, women and girls are often tricked into prostitution by men promising them that they will be able to send money back home. Or in other cases, the parents actually sell the child

for a lump sum of money. Many people in these

poverty-stricken countries, too, are illiterate, and because of a lack of education, world experience, and language barriers with traffickers, these women are completely unaware of what they are getting themselves into until it is too late.

In many of the supply countries, such as in Cambodia, the girls feel a sense of duty to provide for the mother, based on their culture. Also, different religious traditions are influences. Again, in Cambodia, an overwhelmingly Buddhist country, the girls blame themselves for being trafficked, believing that they must have done something bad in another life, so karma warrants their current situation.

Also, it is important to keep in mind that traffickers are seeking out easy prey; they look for areas where it will be easy to procure victims. Conflict or post-conflict countries are the perfect environments. With a disestablishment of regulation or governmental control, it is an opportune time to take advantage of the population. Also, war-torn or not, many of these countries are not protected by the military and police officers, because they are engaging in this market as well, whether they are accepting bribes from brothel owners, pimps, or traffickers, or they are “johns” themselves.

Culturally, we make commercial sex acts permissible, or even glamorized, fueling the insatiable demand. I think this is most apparent in music videos, in which “pimps” and “hoes” are portrayed to be acceptable or even emulated.

The language of much of today’s music, especially rap/hip-hop advocates the degradation of women and visually, music videos put women in hardly any clothing and portray them as objects of sex and nothing more. The spread of child pornography and the belief that having sex with a virgin will be less likely a point of contraction for HIV leads to the increasing demand for virgins or young children for commercial sex acts.

Hardcore pornography that portrays painful, unrealistic, sadomasochistic sexual fantasies drives men to seek out these activities and subjects women to these dangerous and degrading expectations. Oftentimes, the demand for the fulfillment of hardcore pornographic activity pushes men to seek out prostitutes to

fulfill this demand.

Lastly, sex trafficking is greatly aided by several legal issues.

Legalization of prostitution in certain

**Sex trafficking: Con.**

countries or territories permits the exploitation of women, and in regulated areas where there is enforced compulsory examination, it has been shown that such enforcement only drives the practice underground, and actually increases disease. In other cases decriminalization of some aspects of prostitution law, such as in RI, create a loophole that essentially permits trafficking in designated measures.

Another issue is the failure to enforce existing legislation, which I suspect is due to the revenue that the government receives in police kick-backs and officials having stake in the brothels, which creates an unofficially government-sponsored sex trafficking industry.

Trafficking is a deplorable form of modern-day slavery in which women are procured to fulfill insatiable demand that is often sponsored by governments implicitly or

explicitly. In order for this to be addressed, the

legal framework must be revised and strictly enforced, corruption must be suppressed, and a complete cultural overhaul is needed to address the overt advocating of glamorizing “pimp” and “hoe” culture.

I would also recommend that education and increased employment opportunities would need to be provided in war-torn, third world, and poverty stricken countries that are more vulnerable to become supply countries. Aggressive education of laypeople, government officials, military, and police officers on trafficking practices and consequences is a necessity.

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at

*Melanie\_shapiro@mail.uri.edu.*



In creator of “The Vagina Monologues,” Eve Ensler’s monologue, *I Was There in The Room*, she talks about birth and conveys the importance of staying connected to the vagina:

*The heart is capable of sacrifice  
So is the vagina.  
The heart is able to forgive and repair  
It can change its shape to let us in.  
It can expand to let us out.  
So can the vagina.  
It can ache for us and stretch for us,  
die for us and bleed and bleed us into this  
Difficult, wondrous world.  
So can the vagina*

*The Vagina Monologues are in collaboration with V-Day, a global movement dedicated to ceasing violence against women. This year marks its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The monologues have been translated in more than 45 different languages all over the world. The “V” in V-day stands for Victory, Valentine, and Vagina. This year, there were more than 3,700 events to raise money for anti-violence groups within communities. Some of the issues the monologues address are rape, battery, incest, female genital mutilation and sexual slavery.*

*The statistics speak for themselves:*

*64 percent of women reported being raped, physically assaulted, and/or stalked since age 18 by someone they knew.  
Only about half of domestic violence incidences are reported to the police  
FBI estimates only 37 percent of all rapes are reported*

*Between 1 in 4 and 1 in 5 college women experience completed or attempted rape during their college years.*

Info taken from [www.vday.com](http://www.vday.com) and [feminist.com/antiviolence/facts.html](http://feminist.com/antiviolence/facts.html)

## **A Look into the Vagina Monologues By Melissa Cranston-Bates**

*Go Vaginas V-A-G-I-N-A-S, And Go Vaginas V-A-G-I-N-A-S, AND GO V-A-G-I-N-A-S!!!!!!*

Instead of the cheer go Banana's, B-A-N-A-N-A-S! Our warm-up song as URI's 2008 cast of the Vagina monologues this year was "Go Vaginas!" We would start in a whisper, which gradually escalated into voices that got louder and louder and finally concluded with an enthusiastic, full throated, simultaneous, and earth shattering yell. This yell was loud enough to stop any passerby dead in their tracks. Leaving them to ask themselves...are they really screaming, singing, and chanting the word "Vagina?"

The answer is Yes. In fact, anyone who attended this year's production of the show saw our cast yell it, "cry it, laugh it, scream it, and moan it"(derived from a V-day T-shirt) So what does it take to be a member of this performance?

Personally, it took courage and inspiration. "You have to be able to say the word!" Director Allyson Lenz commanded. During the first rehearsals many of us struggled to say the word let alone an entire monologue. It was hard for us to say it without giggling, stuttering, or feeling a rush of heat in our cheeks. Why was it so hard? It was a question I often asked myself.

The answer lies within the sexist society that we live in. A society which stifles, silences, and represses a woman's voice. The vagina is a central part of womanhood. Therefore, mention, appreciation, and even recognition of the vagina has been left un-explored. If the Vagina has been explored it has been violated in ways that degrade, demean, and objectify women. It took a little bit of time for our cast to feel comfortable enough to yell across the quad to a cast member,

Assistant director Tina Bowes repetitively pointed out, "Hey you! How are you and your vagina doing today?" This is not just a regular play; it is a movement." A movement to do many things, the most important being the fight against domestic violence.

So how do you move an audience? How do you inspire grandparents, professors, basketball teams, sororities, and a multi-faceted student body to have an appreciation for the vagina?

It is about becoming inspired yourself (as an actress). Personally, I gained inspiration through building a bond with my character. Performing the monologue, *The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could*, I had to become a poverty stricken African American woman from the South, looking back on childhood memories while exploring both rape and sexuality.

She was more than a character to me. My monologue (as were all the other monologues) derived from a real woman's story. Therefore, I felt responsible for representing my character accurately and honestly. I began to appreciate my character as she humored me. I began to love how my character saw the world. I felt a great sense of empathy for the troubling life my character endured as a child. I shared her pain as well as her desire to be disconnected from her vagina after being raped. Once I understood her I was able to become her.

I must say I miss my character, but her story lives on inside me. I hope all the monologues performed during V-week live inside those audience members who joined our movement. I hope all the audience members left having an appreciation for the Vagina.

## Honor and the Culture of Jihad

By Melanie Shapiro

“Submission” is the direct translation of Islam and total obedience its rule (Ali 94). The literal interpretative following of Islam is the greatest global threat to women’s and human rights. It is incredibly dangerous on many levels and is a growing militant force. The core of this Islam is honor, and to be dishonorable is to bring shame on oneself and one’s family. This culture of honor is Quran-mandated, as are the punishments for dishonorable acts: “It gives a legitimate basis for abuse, so that the perpetrators feel no shame and are not hounded by their conscience or their community” (Ali 310). Argumentatively, the culture of honor mandated by the Quran has influenced Islamic Fundamentalism’s human rights abuses in several ways.

One way of this abuse is by its lack of respect to women. The Quran mandates that “the testimony of two women is equal to that of one man” and explicitly encourages the subordination and suppression of women (Ali 131). Women, as responsible for bearing children, pass down the “rigid, dogmatic, obedience to Allah’s dictates” in the name of honor (Ali 313).

Women are expected to be baari: “a pious slave who honors her husband’s family and feeds them without question or complaint... never whines or makes demands of any kind... is strong in service, but her head is bowed. If her husband is cruel, if he rapes her and then taunts her about it, if he decides to take another wife, or beats her, she lowers her gaze and hides her tears” as not to stain the family’s honor (Ali 12).

Women are also expected to cover ranging from simple headscarves to the burqa in order for Allah to accept her prayers (SunnanAbuDawud 2:641). Mal-veiling can be severely consequential. In Spring of 2002 in Mecca, girls were pushed back into a burning building for not being properly covered (Hymowitz 1). Women have no autonomy at all, and are reliant on men’s decisions about their lives.

Prior to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, women society was more egalitarian and women

were not obliged to veil. The intertwining of church and state is recipe for corruption. When a

government rules as a theocratic dictatorship, fundamentalist views are forced into homes, schools, mosques, and the price for apostate are fatal. This and the pervading anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist, anti-West propaganda is the quintessential breeding ground for suppression and terrorism.

Globalization and Sharia law have been tremendous proponents of the spread of Fundamentalism and terrorism globally. While terrorism had been an issue long before the 9/11 attacks, it was a catalyst to other Jihadist fronts.

Osama Bin Laden was transformed into a universal leader of Fundamentalism. Universal human rights are currently endangered by Jihad, which had traditionally meant self-struggle. It has now been indoctrinated into Fundamentalist Islamic society that to die for Allah is honorable. Fundamentalist organizations preach that the deeper your devotion to Allah the better your life in the Hereafter (Ali 130).

The fascist, misogynistic political movement, Islamic Fundamentalism has profoundly abused human rights domestically, governmentally, globally, and developmentally.

It has promoted terrorism and disregard for all articles of the UDHR, governmentally and religiously. In order to save the endangered human rights, we must, as a Western culture of denial open our eyes and take action. Ali says, “There are times when silence becomes an accomplice to injustice” (Ali xi). Women need a voice. The only way to effectively change a society is legislatively, through power-sharing. To attain that, we must take the globalization that has spread the seed and reclaim it. We must reclaim the Western principles that have bred and nurtured terrorism and fundamentalism and use our free speech to lobby, document, and fight for the rights of those who are forced to veil themselves, look down, and remain quiet in the mental (and physical) cage of Islam (Ali 286).

*Originally submitted for WMS class, edited for length.*

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#### **A Note From The Editor:**

Recently, a young woman adamantly declared in front of my journalism class that she was "absolutely not a feminist." I cocked my head to the side, and listened to the rest of her explanation. It included the usual, "I like wearing skirts too much," but what made me nearly launch into a tirade was the end of her declaration. "Well, the book was OK, I never knew that feminism was actually about equal rights."

Instead of discreetly tattooing "the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes AND organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests" (courtesy of the *dictionary*) on her forehead, I merely waited my turn and spoke up, as a very proud feminist, about gender equality, the works of Andrea Dworkin, and some of the classes I'd taken. I'd like to think she walked out of the room with a slight clue. Maybe, maybe not.

But, as I've discovered in my short time within this program, a little has gone a long way. From the women who took the reins in the workhouse after World War II to Norma McCorvey a few decades later whose landmark case (*Roe v. Wade*) has defined a woman's right to choose, and 15 years later when Eve Ensler sat down and wrote an explicit, brave tale of *Vaginas*, to the women who sit beside me in my women's studies classes today, I thank you for empowering me, and those around you, with your knowledge, your courage and your commitment to change. It's okay to question what has always been taught to you, and to embrace a new viewpoint in life.

During my time as a women's studies minor (and new women's studies major), I've been introduced to the horrible injustices that women have faced, and been even more disgusted by the discrimination still present, but one thing has been clear all along: One voice *does* make a difference. I truly admire the women in this movement, and learning about each and every one of the fights and struggles they've encountered, and more importantly, how they've overcome.



## **CONGRATULATIONS!**

On April 12, 2008, 32 students were inducted into the Lambda Alpha Chapter of Iota Iota Iota, the National Women's Studies Honor Society. They are all a testament to academic success within their feminist classes.

Kade Langston Aris  
Kristen Baxter  
Kelly Beatty  
Sandra Berard  
Lindsey Beun  
Benita Brown  
Melissa Callahan  
Claire Creighton  
Jennifer Daley  
Elizabeth Darling  
Kristin D'Auria

Jenna Dickerman  
Renee Ethier  
Jillian Foley  
Lea Goto  
Jessica Kirby  
Kara Lafferty  
Lindsey LaScalia  
Emily Macaux  
Melissa Maia  
Christen Makram  
Amy McDermott

Lauren McGovern  
Lisa McLeod  
Kristin Orcutt  
Jamie Rubin  
Daniela Scaldaferrri  
Melanie Shapiro  
Dominique Sirois  
Stefanie Taylor  
Chloe Thompson  
Jillian Tomaino

**CONGRATULATIONS** also go out to this year's scholarship and prize winners!

**President's Award for Academic Excellence:** Kristen Moody

**Eleanor M. Carlson Award:** Colleen Hayes-Costello and Christen Makram

**Dorothy F. Donnelly Scholarship:** Lisa Ariosto and Chloe Thompson

**Carlson Trust Scholarship:** Kade Langston Aris, Kara Lafferty, and Kristina Moyet

**Mother Jones Scholarship:** Melanie Shapiro

**Patricia Farnes Essay Contest:** Jillian Tomaino

And once again to the program's graduating seniors! Do big things, women!  
**Graduating Women's Studies Majors**

Kelly Beatty  
Misfy Cranston-Bates  
Marlana Gallagher  
Colleen Hayes-Costello  
Christen Makram  
Noel Marandola  
Amy McDermott

Lauren McGovern  
Kristen Moody  
Shannon Stad  
Maggie Sullivan  
Alicia Sweeney  
Stefanie Taylor



CONGRATULATIONS STUDENTS

AND NEW ALUMNAE!