

2001

Origyns: Reclaiming our feminist voices

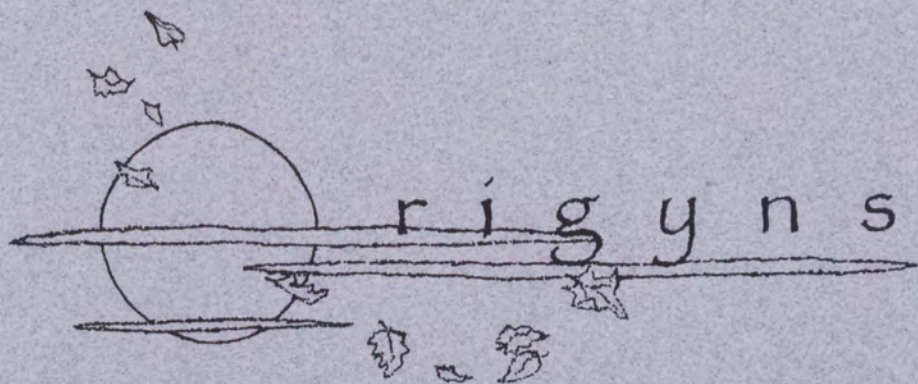
Annette Marie Gavigan
Lehigh University

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reclaiming our feminist voices

o r i g y n s

Founder
Managing Editor
Designer

Annette Marie Gavigan

origyns is a publication for the voices of feminists- undergraduates, graduate students, alumnae, faculty, and professors emeriti- commemorating Thirty Years of wOmen at Lehigh University (1971-2001).

it is a collection of essays and poetry. some of which were written specifically for this publication; others were written for class or some time long, long ago (but not before wOmen were at Lehigh).

origyns is funded by the Women's Center and the Humanities Center. many thanks to Kristen Handler and Gordon Bearn.

the opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect (unfortunately) the views of Lehigh University but do closely reflect the views of the editor.

special thanks to Alex Levine for the title origyns. i wish i could have thought of it. thanks to the contributors for their suggestions too.

all submissions may be directed to the next individual who after reading this publication decides to be the editor since I am finally graduating!

note from the editor: all statements in italics that describe the author are written by the author.

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dedication from the editor

for
those who have
endured
physical
mental
or
emotional
abuse

o r i g y n s

reclaiming our feminist voices

Volume 1

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JOSH HONN

This poem was written because of my experience growing up relating with victims. America has all sorts of victims. Victims of racism, classism and sexism. Victims of nationalism, consumerism and capitalism. Women have been victims of patriarchy for too long. And, as much as feminism needs to change attitudes it also, more importantly, needs to work towards demolishing the tired systems of oppression present in American society. The daily pressures placed on women in America are deeper than the differences assumed in the traditional and so-called "natural" gender roles. These pressures stem from the very foundations of capitalist ideology and hegemony and are one of the many appendages used to hold down any group which does not conform to American capitalism's standards of profit, competition and subservience to spectacle. "So Lonely She Swam" points the finger back at a patriarchal order (made up of men and women) who continue to make the female form a spectacle to be shaped and commodified through the eyes of greed and fetishism. This order needs to be made the new victim starting with a thorough and relentless criticism of all of our places within it and the ways in which we interact with the ubiquitous spectacle. My only intention with this poem is that in some way it can help contribute to the beginnings of such a grand revolutionary movement, even if it is one reader at a time.

So Lonely She Swam

She was so lonely she swam

And, we couldn't see distance like horizon lies

She was so lonely she swam

And, now all her history is laid out in lines

She was so lonely she swam

Until the angels lifted her course

We are so lonely we swim

And we remark with frowns

Why it was she drowned

She was only so lonely she swam

And, found light under darkest water-below

We are so lonely we swim

Only with arms outstretched, relying on current to flow

If she was so lonely she swam

Why must we judge with hands so dry?

For, if we are so lonely we swim

Is it better to stay above, than ask ourselves why?

Josh Honn is an American Studies graduate student originally from Homewood, Illinois.

HARRIET L. PARMET

Feminism

When I arrived at Lehigh in August of 1976, women students were already an established fact, though a Women's Studies program was not. Before I discuss my course implementation in this area, I must say that my personal feminist awakening goes back to 1973 and was part of mammoth changes taking place within the Jewish Religious Conservative Movement. Traditionally women were not counted as a part of the quorum of ten necessary for communal prayer to take place. After much agitation and Judaic legalistic research women were finally admitted to study for the rabbinate at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and thus women generally assumed their place in the synagogue in an egalitarian manner.

Having said this, my courses beyond the teaching of Hebrew language included Hebrew Literature in Translation where I attempted to sensitize my students to not only Israeli women writers but also the way in which women characters were portrayed by male authors.

We considered the images of women handed down to us in selected biblical passages as a background for understanding modern Israeli literature. Old tales when examined from a critical feminist perspective provided an excellent vehicle for fruitful discussion of women in Jewish culture.

We considered the exclusionary nature of the Hebrew language as an example both for the study of women and their literary expression over time. The banning of women from the public domain and their confinement to the home, is also reflected in the male dominated language and writing. We traced the history of Hebrew language in terms of male learning, ritual observance, rites of passage and subsequent authorship of texts, letters and novels. We gained a perspective on women in modern Israeli literature at the hands of prominent male authors.

In the absence of a Women's Studies course devoted to Israeli women writers, we in a limited way-braided consciousness, thereby providing a fertile base for future readings and contextualization of other Israeli female writers. Feminist critical approaches were applied to and incorporated into an overall examination of Hebrew Literature in Translation. Students valued and appreciated the possibilities of their role in projecting and evaluating Israeli women writers as well as male in this heretofore exclusionary canon.

Harriet L. Parmet is Professor Emerita Modern Languages and Literature.

EUDORA WEAVER

What Do You Call It?

At a party the other week that consisted of some very close friends, a conversation was started between myself and two men. I have known both of these men for a number of years and they are roughly the same age as myself, early twenties. We often have more abstract conversations and this time was no different. It dealt with what women call their genitalia.

The conversation originated with me telling them the details of the "dancing vulva" seen in my Feminist Utopias class two days before. They, being the perverse men that they are, were intrigued by my explanations of the film and the class. They were also very interested in the fact that I referred to "it" as a vulva, "it" referring to the female genitalia.

The younger of the two men looked at me quite seriously and asked "So what do you call "it," in everyday conversation?" He included the hand waving motion toward his privates to indicate where he meant, a gesture often used by many people to indicate the female genitalia.

I, despite many encounters with feminist thought and a comfortable sense of my body, realized that I rarely referred to my own genitalia in anything more than "that area." I was also a perpetuator of the hand motion.

"What do you call it?!" I looked at both, feeling that it was only right to ask the question back. The pair looked at each other and shrugged, "Pussy," they said with a rather blank expression on their faces. "what else would we call it. All men call it that."

I was shocked. Of course I had heard the slang used of that word before, along with other charming alternatives such as cootch, cunt, snatch, boxe, or twat. I used none of these words and found many to be offensive. I was surprised though that they chose only to use the word pussy.

Being the curious people that we are and in a room filled with close friends in which sexual issues could easily be discussed, we spread the question further. All of the men in the room agreed. When asked what they called "that area" (hand motion included) on a woman, they replied "pussy."

The women, however, gave a much more varied response. No one actually called it female genitalia. In fact, that term never even came up until I started to think about the issue later in my head. No one said vulva, vagina, or clitoris because these words did not include everything down there. They were felt to be separate items. Some women gave evasive answers like "you know or down there," while others had never referred to it at all. They just looked at us and said "I don't know, I've never talked about it. I don't call it anything."

The three of us were stumped. How is it in this day and age that a woman can have no word to include the entire female genitalia? Most of the women found pussy and the other words brought up to be offensive and claimed they would never use them. I agreed. Although I also admit that I am secretly proud of women who can use words like cunt so openly. They have learned to celebrate the word. This is my cunt-try as Alix Olson would say.

So I started to wonder, why can't we just use vulva? When we flipped the question and asked everyone what they called the male genitalia all of the women replied "penis" while the men again used slang and called it a "dick." Why then can women not refer to their genitalia by a name like vulva? It does not include the whole package of the genitalia, but neither does penis. Vulva seems suitable enough for the purpose.

I looked up the meaning, just to make sure I was on

EUDORA WEAVER

the right page. The younger of the two men actually asked me exactly what the vulva was. I wanted to make sure I had given him the right information.

Vulva: the external female genitals, esp. the external opening of the vagina.

In all honesty, I had never really heard of the word vulva until high school (I was always so confused by that Seinfeld episode), but penis, although not used in everyday language, had been part of my vocabulary for years. However, even in high school, the vulva was a mysterious word and although I knew my own body, the word's true meaning wasn't revealed to me until college and Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*.

Furthermore, it was not until I saw a woman dressed in a large foam-rubber vulva suit, like the fruit-of-a-loom guys, that I truly came to terms with the word. There was nothing grotesque about the word vulva. It was almost comforting. It wasn't offending like the weak pussy or harsh like the cunt or so degrading like the twat. No, the vulva was soft and warm, yet resilient, like the rubber suit. It could stand up against the penis and be just as worthy a word for women to include in their vocabulary.

Maybe all women should be forced to watch the dancing vulva video or sit through *The Vagina Monologues*. Perhaps if we all got use to the fact that we have one and not be ashamed of it we would also be able to refer to it. We could make vulva a word that would be part of everyday conversation. So the next time someone asks me "what do you call it?" I can reply, "I call it my vulva, and it's no big deal."

Eudora Weaver is an English graduate student. She wrote "What Do You Call It?" for English 443: Feminist Utopias. As an undergraduate she was an English and Music major with a Women Studies minor and won the Patti T. Ota award last year.

LISA SCHULTER

"You're A What?"

What comes to mind when one hears the word, "feminist?" Usually, the stereotypical shaved head, hairy legged, pierced-face, angry lesbian – subhuman beings that have men for dinner, in the literal sense. This blind belief of the ignorant is exactly why some are still tuning us out when we try to voice our ideas and opinions.

Feminists, like women, come in all different shapes and sizes with different extremes. (Yes, there are actually some of us out there who do wear mascara!) Instead of turning against one another, deciding who is a "true feminist," we should remember that we're all on the same team, fighting for equality for all women, not just those who inhabit America.

I believe there are more people out there today who are feminists (men included) and don't even realize it. Perhaps it's the term itself that makes people uncomfortable. The word "feminism" gives off the feeling that it's a "girls only club." I encourage those who aren't buying my little piece here to look it up in Websters. Feminism: "the theory of the political, economic, and social equality between the sexes." I don't see "male-loathing, penis-chopping crazed-lesbian movement to rid the earth of all that is male." Perhaps "egalitarianism" would be a better choice. However...why should we feel obligated to change the name of this movement we're so passionate about to appease those who aren't willing to educate themselves and break this cycle of fear?

We shouldn't have to compromise our beliefs – or their title – to attract those who show some interest.

What upsets me the most is seeing other women reject feminism, when it is truly an ideology designed for their benefit. It's that stereotypical visualization that's turning even females off. Feminism isn't about rejecting the feminine – it's about being proud of the feminine and not apologizing for it. Women are women – and we should not have to be ashamed of (or attempt to change) our biological/chemical makeup just to be considered equal citizens.

Unfortunately, I don't have all the answers to this problem that's ingrained in the minds of the majority. However, I do have a simple suggestion. We need those "closet feminists" to declare themselves a part of the movement. I believe we all learn by example: when one sees that feminism can be in the body of a grade school teacher, a CEO of a Fortune 500 company, a college student, a resident of a small farming community, a scientist, a librarian, a punk rocker, a homemaker, a supermarket cashier, a janitor, a fast-food server, an economist, a mother or a father – when we finally see people from all walks of life not afraid to demand equality, only then will feminism be widely accepted and not ignorantly feared or hated.

Lisa Schuler is a sophomore journalism major considering minors in women's studies and economics.

RUTH KNAFO SETTON

Dog Woman

In the mountains God sings.

Listen, said Takame.

I heard a howl.

Dog Woman, he said, singing
to her children. But her song cracked
my bones, sizzled flesh. Yellow flower,
sour, flaming,

We knelt at the spot

where she became woman. He burned
her dog-skin here, said Takame.

She came to him on four feet.

When he gathered food, she swept
and baked tortillas. He saw her shed
the skin. Naked and gleaming, she rose
high as the roof, taller: a star sparking
walls with her nipples, fingers.

He stole her dogcoat,

set it on fire. She roared

in pain, shook the earth, screamed
while he fed her skin, piece by piece,
to hungry flames. Until nothing
was left.

Mama! I called.

The howl took a lifetime to emerge:

blast through bones and flesh, explode
in the yellow sky.

Takame recoiled.

I howled again

and leaped.

RUTH KNAFO SETTON

When God Yelled at Me

When God yelled at me
 shaking his fist from the bima
 up to the women's gallery,
 where I leaned forward,
 I laughed – half-falling
 over the railing
 that marked sacred
 from profane, man from woman,
 Chagall's floating city
 from our earthbound
 snotty kids, screaming babies,
 Nana Mazal weeping, girls giggling,
 ladies gossiping –
 when God glared at me,
 my laughter coiled
 like a snake,
 hurtled through the air
 and bit him

on the tongue.

The women gasped,
 pulled me back. I tore away:
 had to see. His tongue was swelling,
 like a bee sting – vast, filling
 the shul. The men bobbed
 and swayed, muttered prayers –
 didn't see his tongue
 mushrooming –
 bread dough left too long,
 rising and foaming.

The women watched
 the men sink and drown
 in a sea of dough.
 God's tongue billowed
 towards us, but Nana Mazal took
 her sewing scissors
 and cut. We watched it sag,
 deflate, disappear
 with a burp.

The men rose,
 still praying and mumbling.
 They didn't look back at us.
 And with a jerk
 of his shoulders,
 God left the room –
 without a word.
 His mother should have
 taught him better.

Ruth Knafo Setton is the Writer-in-Residence at the Berman Center for Jewish Studies and teaches in the English department. Her novel, The Road to Fez was published in 2001.

S.L. BAVARO

The Book of Alma

or

The Song of Solomina

(a never ending MISSive)

sit and wait for my date to come – why am I calling coffee with a friend, date – and listen to National Public Radio. talk of A.I.D.S. and its horrors. “race for a cure (.dotdotdot.),” “which drug is best (.dotdotdot.).” just behind a diatribe says the economy is boom boom booming, baby. irony? i don't know maybe and perhaps. into this new millennium; society gone to hell but, gosh darn it, we got the green in our jeans; smiles, applause for the worldly leaps and bounds of our paternals, run for miles. i watch the good (or was it God?) OLD patriarch trip fall just to rise to fuck you higher. brush off that Suit. frowns abound for this face.

what was it you said at the last, through the steam; be? here? now? bite my nails. furiously. coffee date?

toes frolic with the flowers, tries to change the world with Her prance, Her stance, Her shouldbehavingcoffee with me dance.

noise. radio statically waves. all the better to swallow your brain with, my pretty.

Move the needle with the dial.

Move the needle with the dial.

stop, needle. ah; classical sounds. write here. over this. Play through me, symphony, through me.

yes. (i watch from my place). Her frolics in the flowers, changing the world with every step – Her thinks, ‘wasn't there something i needed to do today, fuck. (yes, coffee with me, yes?). no matter, not much, I tell you, more important than squishing my toesies in the grassies being that i am here now’ – sun burns memory out of Her memory, singeing past decisions, divisions. sweet autumnal breeze spirals through her ears with ease...

... yes, i know where you are, my date. no thoughts of coffee there for you; simple mother nature and swish squish wish. (what to do on the Friday afternoon you swim in free? Decided to go for a drive you did you did. watching). the beautifully short girl sitting shotgun; she can always sing along because it's only Her to hear here. There is nothing else. (Watch sharp turn); not watched; Short on her lap, giggle, lazy. Her see Short skirt tussled bye and bye, ridding ever slightly up up up, thigh. eyes wander from the (keep your eyes on the road). pavement, sudden look to curvy path skin running, beckoning; travel up if you dare. (more grass?). – ‘yes, yes. how's about more grassy

S.L. BAVARO

grass? fuck this polluting machine. nature on my flesh.'

.(symphonic caresses my ears – affect your grassy endeavors. i, there).

angular turn into parking lot; machine almost to a stop; Short opening door, not yet cessation of motion; premature thinking of warm, damp grassy grass .(I know I know). Thigh higher. 'maybe do away with cloth, grassy grass. is Short thinking of me after all? point was flesh on grassy grass, was it not, in my head?'

door open, car moving unsure footing facet to the ground, laughter and sobs. unruly skirt laughter skirt sob skirt.

.(oh, I can taste the coffee on my lips. booming cellos. drool. we hurry before it is to late for; the sun is leaving and I am thirsty besides).

her registers these thoughts; i think i know, if Her big brown eyes tell me so: 'i want the' Her helps Short up among tear filled giggles 'point to be flesh on flesh, moist grassy grassy? togetheratsundowneveningdewflesh? Short, this?' walk.

the moon is full, i notice; the breeze ... she is there, too, in the field they find; blows cool air on the napes of necks, down the ledge of a little hill.

"What, now, that we are here; now that we found here?"

"We roll."

slight distance, up right there, a hill ledge. role. .(me rolling here from a far and since tired of waiting, imagination enveloping, I'll make my own brew for the one coming, i do know what is coming, do so they?).

in my head, .(in your hearts?). we roll, roll down little hill, dizzy more with every flip. bottom comes quick, Short landing farther and first, and then Her at small distance from. .(scheming; what is Short going to do? anticipation, now, burning my bones and coffee, too). Short dizzy crawls dizzy over to her dizzy. so fucking dizzy and there is Short's giggles. Short flops on top of Her; there is that giggle.

.(spark).

of excitement

of recognition

of excited both recognition

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Short blue eyes look down meet me I capture her browns. ours pass in pose .(or is it seconds? ourseconds). motion
cessation. stop.

until valiant courageous palm.

Her palm reaches up, ever so slowly; cautious, deliberate, a warm autumn breeze. slowly motions. Short's hand, Her
cheek, pushing hair, tussled grassied.

'is what we do, is way we come, here, seems?

.(in steeped coffeemusic, laybackwatch; tear leaking wiped with shaking penstained hand).

Short Her arms flowing, slowly breezy, flowing, down to grassy grass belly .(ah, tearwipe, belly). palms walking every-
whichway, eyes and lips - lips - drawing close

.(cantaste feel bee each others breath now)...

SHARPBLACK.

the phone; what, me, fuck, beauty interrupt from me writing place; scared me. glorious cello still.

Her. on phone.

will be late for coffee date; going for a drive.

with phone, receive Her, resumed.
ink tainted hands crumple mystically stained paper.
beginning again.

s. l. bavaro is a graduate student who likes to put words in funny places.

JILLIAN MARIE MARQUIART

Female Genital Mutilation Cultural Ties vs. Modern Times

Once upon a time, there was a young girl who fell victim to her African culture's rituals. Shortly after turning 12, she was considered to be beginning her path to womanhood. To commemorate this journey, she was excised. Brought into a hut by her two favorite aunts, P.K. was turned over to the hands of the excisor. Immobilized by the hands of other women of her Mali tribe, P.K.'s legs were forced open and she underwent the ablation of the labia minora and the clitoris. *My heart seemed to miss a beat. I would have given anything at that moment to be a thousand miles away; then a shooting pain brought me back to reality from my thoughts of flight.* When it was believed that the operation had been performed to "perfection" P.K.'s mutilated body was set free. She was forced to stand up without assistance and join the celebration outside where she would dance with the other girls who had also just been circumcised. *I was in the throes of endless agony, torn apart both physically and psychologically.* Completely exhausted and drained P.K. hopped about trying to please her tribe, but her body soon gave in to the pain she was enduring and she fainted. *It was a month before I was completely healed, as I continually had to scratch where the genital wound itched. When I was better, everyone mocked me, as I hadn't been brave they said.*¹

The fight against female genital mutilation is a multi-dimensional and complex one. It encompasses feminist, humanist, cultural and traditional issues. It is a problem that cannot be fixed through aggressive means to ensure human rights or feminist organizational tactics. The solution is instead in the hands of the women and men involved. They alone can construct their own support system, which will have to tackle the

cultural and traditional rituals that they have grown up with and understand, before any organization can. These campaigns must make use of persuasive techniques incorporated into educational messages proposing an alternative message to female genital mutilation. In time, by breaking cultural taboos that are involved with this topic, horrific stories such as P.K.'s will be used as a learning experience instead of a cry for help.

Unfortunately, P.K.'s story does not end happily ever after. While she remains a victim of such violence towards women and a victim of her culture's beliefs, she is a hero to others. Unlike the women who held her down and the woman who performed the circumcision, P.K. realized with the first cut into her body and self, that this religious and cultural act was wrong and unnecessary. With this realization, she can in a small way regain that which has been taken from her. By taking on the role of a sister, friend, possible mother and above all a woman who does not agree with the female exciser, P.K. can heal herself by helping others.

P.K.'s story is similar to many. It is estimated that more than 130 million girls worldwide have suffered from the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). There are two forms of female genital mutilation that are practiced in African and Middle Eastern nations.² The mildest form of female genital mutilation involves the removal of the clitoral hood, while the most severe form involves removing the clitoris, the inner lips, the outer lips and then sewing everything together, leaving only a very small opening, this is known as infibulation.³ It is a complicated practice with many consequences and much historical background.

The concept of female circumcision involves a set of beliefs revolving around the woman's identity.

JILLIAN MARIE MARQUART

Ironically the deprivation of a female's genitals increases her symbolic stature as a woman. Once a woman is circumcised, she moves up in the culture. While many claim that there are religious motivations behind the procedure, it is more often explained as a cultural way to preserve virginity for marriage, enhance male pleasure and control a woman's sex drive. Removing a woman's sexual identity via her body parts allows her to be respected and held in high prestige by the rest of her tribe. This ideal woman is one void of experiencing sexual pleasure whose purpose is to please her husband alone and to procreate.⁴

While many have tried to compare the practice of female genital mutilation to that of male circumcision, the act is far from similar. Even in its least brutal form, female circumcision is equivalent to removing the entire penis.⁵ As a result, the practice of female genital mutilation has become an international factor in the fight against violence towards women.

The consequences that come along with this cultural practice include extreme pain and shock, major complications and pain during sex and childbirth, and the potential transmission of HIV due to the unhygienic conditions in which the practice is generally performed.⁶ The extreme consequences of female genital mutilation cause it to be viewed as a form of torture rather than a religious or cultural symbol of prestige.

The major and realistic solution to the issue of female genital mutilation is education. Dr Maurice Assaad carried out a case study in Egypt to assess this concept.⁷ In 1978 with the help of the Coptic Church the program "Family Life and Family Planning," was enacted to address the issues surrounding female genital mutilation. In order to be more effective The Care of Girls Committee, which was aiding the

program, broadened their points to include the unfair treatment of women in any traditional ritual. For example, in some cultures young women's genitals are inspected prior to marriage. A bloodstained towel signifies not only a broken hymen but also a pure, virgin female. Hedy Banoub, head of The Care of Girls Committee, pointed out that in many instances the father kills his daughter if there is no blood shown on the towel.⁷

Besides the health issues involved, a major factor to consider is the psychological trauma involved for women who are circumcised. Amina, a 25-year-old Somalian was infibulated at the age of nine. In four years, she has had four operations to open up the infibulation so that she may engage in sexual relations with her husband. She said, "Each time my husband comes near me the place closes up. I have been through a lot of pain even to the point that I wanted to commit suicide."⁸ Therefore, no matter what age a woman is circumcised, whether she remembers the event or not, she will still be negatively effected. Dorkenno states that Amina's problem is not uncommon and is a result of "post-traumatic stress, which evoke severe vaginismus at intercourse. This is the result of the memories of pain she had suffered from female genital mutilation."⁸ This problem that affect's Amina and many other circumcised women is viewed as a weakness and therefore they often are outcasts among their community and do not receive the help that they need.⁸

Female genital mutilation denies women the ability to enjoy their sexuality and in turn makes them sexually deficient. A survey performed in 1985 stated that 7.7 times as many uncut women were able to experience stimulation of the clitoral area than those who have been excised. Also, 50 percent of uncircumcised women were able to reach orgasm while only 25 percent

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of those mutilated could.⁹ This lack of sexual fulfillment is not only experienced by these women. Many husbands have complained about the emotional hurt they feel while engaging in sexual intercourse with their wives. A Sudanese man said, "I felt horribly guilty. The whole thing was so abnormal. The thought that I was hurting someone I loved so dearly troubled me greatly. I felt like an animal. It was bad for both of us."¹⁰ This is just another complexity in the multi-dimensional issue of female genital mutilation.

Female genital mutilation as a social movement must consider all of these hidden aspects. It is essential that anti-FGM groups consider multiple factors and anyone concerned does not become paralyzed by inaction. By remembering not to denounce a society's cultural traditions, beliefs and values, anti-FGM groups may gain more credibility even though their message may not be agreed with. Campaigns must support the traditional importance that African and Middle Eastern societies hold in addition to offering an alternative ritual which is less violating. The prominent task at hand is that both sides of the female genital mutilation issue must compromise by learning from the past and ending the battle between modern thought versus cultural ties.

Notes

¹ Parmar, Pratibha and Alice Walker, *Warrior Marks* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 105-108.

² *Ibid.*, 108.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Eve Ensler, *Marie Claire Women of the World* (2000).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Efua Dorkenoo, *Cutting The Rose* (United Kingdom: Minority Rights Publications, 1994), 96.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

Jillian Marie Marquart is a junior journalism major with minors in communications and English.

AUDREY GIBBS

The poem "Forgotten" was written about a year ago. I was sitting in a movie theatre watching the previews of thin, socially beautiful women. I found myself wishing to be like them in some way because their images are everywhere. After a few moments of self-torture I snapped out of my thoughts and said to myself "I have forgotten I am beautiful." I kept saying the phrase until a poem began to form. After the movie I returned home and what flowed out is what you are about to read.

Later, during a creative writing class I revised the poem to have a second part because the woman speaking in the poem went through a transition. The part of the poem where the woman begins to say (designated by solid type and not italics) "I have forgotten. I am beautiful." Her transition from forgetting her beauty to realizing true worth is a journey I think every woman in this society should make. For some, this journey is very painful and sadly, never reached. There is beauty in every person. Unfortunately, the physical beauty we are expected to obtain, as women in a male dominated world is as falsified as the surgeries and plastic we place upon or in our bodies to meet some criteria.

Forgotten

Girl. Watching. Me.

She stares from behind paper cut culture curious with curtailing expression
With sex on her flesh and clothes on her heart,
lips parted to suck in my reality
Reeling my beats to pound pumping red seeds that grow imaginary ideas.

I have forgotten I am beautiful.

In her black leather skirt and rings shining gold
Sun light and promise glitter in the diamond shimmering eyes that behold her
gorgeous gluttony.
Behind wishes of moons and black stars falling in promises and promiscuous places
she looks at me ...and I...

Am lost in the airbrushed paper-thin hope of beauty
As falsified eyes of an American Ideal seduces my sin and sucks out my security
To leave my mind monetary and washed over in red lips and white pearl necklaces
choking my....self.

I have forgotten I am beautiful

Me

Of flesh and flab
Of dimples and legs to short too straddle that page of glamour.

Me

Of brown glare
Not blue or exotic glaring green,
But of flowering dullness and daily wear of dark circles lowering beneath my windows to
The world.

I have forgotten I am beautiful

Because she looks beyond the page with paper thin legs
And walks along the balumptious bridges that bind my body and mind

AUDREY GIBBS

She is watching me and my faulting curves that deny me a profile peace.
 Her tone of body screams the definition of
 Unobtainable
 And fine lines uncrossable by those like me...
 Those like everyone but
 Her.

I have forgotten / am beautiful

Because the men dream of her while I lie next to them.
 Because when dreams fill the screaming sensual nights
 her glossy paper persons captures his raging reality and contorts my face
 With her empty paper soul
 Plastered perfectly on billboards in Times Square
 To heighten the sale of postulating ideals.

I have forgotten / am beautiful.

She demands to desecrate my own dreams of beauty
 as I desperately define her,
 Curtly criticizing and purposefully plaguing her perfection's against the prisoned definition of
 Beauty
 But only because...

I have forgotten. / am beautiful.

And in the darkness cultured created knight's expectations exploit a body of bones and feeble flesh,
 A fashionable disease
 Presenting her mind as exempt evidence to a mask- you -lined world
 Whispering contempt to the child and woman
 whose sentences are too long for their bodies to complete.

AUDREY GIBBS

I have forgotten. I am beautiful

Because I know while the witless men of the executive elite
 Play boy games with live
 Barb i.e. doll,
 I am compelled to comparisons-
 Reduced to a rancid rubber model with an un-proportioned mold ...and...

I have forgotten. I am beautiful

While her picture is priced a thousand wrong words
 Spilling from the over-empowered and constipated collection of
 Male America,
 Where Kant is replaced by C & K that won't kill the obese Obsession smell
 Obligating representations of beauty full dreams
 As she is lost in the longevity of lapsing time...

I have forgotten.
 I am beautiful.

I am
 Girl
 Watching.
 Me

Audrey Gibbs is a recent graduate with a degree in English and minor in Psychology. She is currently living in San Diego, California doing odd jobs until graduate school where she will pursue Photography, the second love of her life.

JANE MADELEINE

Everyday we try to be different, or seen, or blend in, or hide. And some days, we just try to be real. Sometimes we can't be all we want to be, and sometimes showing them everything is showing too much. And sometimes, just sometimes, on days where the noise overwhelms you and even the tears feel forced, vulnerability is the closest thing to real... This is how I came into "feminist stories". As a woman, this is the only story I really know how to tell...

9/6/01

And you don't understand...
I thought you would...
And, what's new... I'm wrong.

I talk because I want to tell you...
I want to tell you that my heart's beating too fast...
Inside my chest and throat
The big bad world is fuckin scaring me...
AND I'M BIG and Strong...
And fuckin' terrified.

And, whats new, you don't find that attractive...

And when will I be happy?

Why aren't I now?

I guess / don't understand...

All the variables tested. No solutions.

So what's new.

AAAAAAAAAAH

I want to make the loudest noise and breathe the heaviest...

I want to catch the corner of your eyes,

Dancing wildly, like a caged animal, a tigress, or a bird...

And the sand is sifting through my fingers... And I'm clenching my fist... missing.

I want to claw my fingers down your back

Make you feel ...something ...sweet.

Maybe then I'll be girly enough for you...

But the lingerie doesn't fit... and my eyes are too red...

And the salt water of my tears are bleaching my skin... a perfect mask of
someone too sensitive of not sensitive enough...

I'm afraid it's both...

Jane Madeleine is a sophomore majoring in English and Theater.

ANTHONY C. BLEACH

Feminist Adventures Close to Home

Because this article is appearing in a publication commemorating 30 years of women at Lehigh University, and because I've been a member of the Lehigh community since 1998, I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about who I am. I teach English 1 and 2 to frosh. I come from a middle class background. I'm white. I'm heterosexual. I'm male. I'm completely (albeit discriminatorily) obsessed with popular culture. I'm a feminist.

There's been a lot written by feminist critics on feminism's relationship to popular culture. Probably most famously, Susan Faludi's 1991 book *Backlash* argues that feminists were constructed through the 1980s media as angry witches or power-hungry ice queens. Strangely, growing up in a home that devoured popular culture, I was largely ignorant about who these "feminists" were or what "they" did. Even though this was the case, it was through my consumption of popular culture that I first realized that I was a feminist.

We were a music-listening home first and foremost. My mother's stereo system (a turntable and a reel-to-reel tape machine with these enormous wooden and gold-metal speaker cabinets) took over a whole quarter of our living room. I was always in awe of her vibrant LP collection that lived under this monstrosity, which spanned Mahalia Jackson to the Beatles (my Dad's records were mostly dustily classical). And this stereo was almost always on when any type of chore needed to get done, so I probably heard a lot more music than I can easily remember. When a VCR entered our house (more on this phenomenon later), the stereo was moved first into the basement, and was then later transferred to the rickety shed outside. It was demolished when a freak

hurricane-strength storm slammed our small Connecticut town, but this didn't stop me from catching my parents' musical disease.

One birthday, my grandparents gave me a combination radio/turntable; I used to spend hours squatting in front of it with my Dad's tape recorder (complete with detachable microphone), spinning the dial and recording whatever spewed forth on the top 40 stations that dominated my area at that time. I scrawled in my painful penmanship on lined loose-leaf the song titles and artists:

"Beat It" - Michael Jackson

"Cum on Feel the Noize" - Quiet Riot

"Lucky Star" - Madonna

"Yah Mo B There" - Michael McDonald & James Ingram

When word got out to my English relatives about my obsession for popular music, Mum-Mum and Uncle Jan began sending me English pop music magazines like *No. 1* and *Smash Hits* for birthdays and holidays. It was there (along with the clandestine late-night glimpses of TV's *Night Flight*, broadcast on one of the local channels) that I began seeing the faces behind the more obscure artists that I heard on the radio. I mean, sure, who didn't know who Michael Jackson and Madonna were, but what about Howard Jones (the icon of the only fan club I've ever joined) or Dale Bozzio (lead chanteuse of Missing Persons)?

It was the female singers that fascinated me the most. Who were that pair of polka-dot-lace-and-mascara women, looking and sounding like they just didn't give a flying fuck even for the perimeters of fashion then being widened by Madonna? (*Strawberry Switchblade*.) Who was that German woman fronting the tuff-looking boy band with that incredible authority

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behind her voice? (Nena.) I had a poster of Nena in my room, and remember wanting to hang out with her in the video for "99 Red Balloons" and walk through the bomb-blasted remains of that unidentified European town.

But this was only half of my pop culture immersion. Our house also consumed movies. One of my earliest memories is a newspaper clipping hanging on the refrigerator of Dustin Hoffman walking his son, from the movie *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1977). My folks put this photo there because they went out to the movies and I wanted to know what they saw. And although we didn't get cable until I was in high school (something to do with our deeply suburban neighborhood, far from the town center), we were fortunate enough to have loads of local channels (this is even before the Fox Network started buying up affiliates) that programmed movies every afternoon when I came home from school. Each week would be a theme week: the *Planet of the Apes* series, every day at 4 PM, or Godzilla (or Gamera, the flying turtle) movies Monday through Friday. The local public-access station even showed cheapo horror movies on Monday nights. My friend Matt and I loved *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*; we used to drive our parents and bus drivers bonkers singing the theme song while marching around our living rooms or bouncing around in the seats way in the back of the bus. Saturdays and Sundays were the motherlode, though: 1950s cold war/ nuclear horror monsters crushing New York and Los Angeles and Hammer witches and vampires terrorizing English villagers.

Birthday parties ended up being movie-themed, too: Dad would borrow a VCR from the community college where he taught, and my friends and I would thrill to the movies we could now watch *whenever we*

wanted! When our largely middle class families started buying VCRs in the late 1980s, I started going over Matt's house after school to watch the movies we were too sheepish to watch with our parents (because movie nights were family events, after all): horror, slasher, and teen movies.

My fascination with female pop stars carried over to the young girls in these movies. I always wanted to know more about Molly Ringwald's characters in *Pretty in Pink*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *Sixteen Candles*, and felt that the conclusions to these films were too easy somehow, that they corralled in with a romance someone who I saw as a really interesting character, someone for who the "solution" of a romantic partner (and lest we forget, Ms. Ringwald ends up with a boy at the end of each of them) really wasn't a solution at all. The Jone Skye character in *River's Edge* was another one of these teenage girls that blew me away; while her friends descended into drug abuse, hysteria, or apathy following the death of their friend, she remained cool and intelligent in an oversized dirty sweater.

These female pop stars and teenage girl characters in movies were, in very personal ways, role models for me. Their strong attitudes, iconoclastic world views, and idiosyncratic, vaguely punky styles were the ones I was intensely conscious of trying to emulate when I entered high school, a private, upper-class hellhole where I felt no more welcome in my middle-classness than they seemed to feel in *their* fictional high schools. I don't want to complain here about the raging conformity and materialism there; that's a familiar story that's been told and retold more times than I want to remember. But I think much of what I do now, who I am now, was shaped by my reaction *against* what I saw and experienced in high school: the sense that ownership

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and connections were the key to social advancement; that money is what makes the world go around; that being beautifully WASPy (in both the literal and figurative senses) is the be-all and end-all of human existence.

I'd consider myself pretty fortunate, though, because I had something to act favorably *toward*: the ideology (reinforced, of course, by my parents, who reminded me that there were *always* alternatives to the way that everybody else did things) that I read in these incredibly strong young women in pop music and movies. I identified with and attached myself to this way of looking at the world in which difference is accepted, even cool; where identity is connected more with personal qualities instead of material goods; and where personal resistance helps you survive socially in the world.

But how does this pop culture consumption connect with my being a feminist? We need to fast-forward a few years later, to two magazine articles that I read when I was in college. I eventually graduated from those English pop music magazines to their grown-up American counterparts: *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*. One article in *Spin* talked about the bi-coastal Riot Grrrl scene, about young women fed up with the way they were treated in the male-dominated punk, hardcore, and indie scenes. I was amazed that the frustration and anger expressed by the women being interviewed (at being forced to the back of venues, relegated to coat-carriers for their male partners, or worse, physically or sexually assaulted) actually amounted to practical solutions within these scenes. This was amazing that the seemingly apolitical realm of pop culture could translate into real-world action. While bands like Bikini Kill demanded that a safe space be cleared at the front of the venues they

played, near the stage, girls in that audience would write their anger through photocopied zines, or in the more radical move of Sharpie-scrawling "bitch" or "cunt" on exposed arms, bellies, and legs. I think this was my first exposure to the word "feminism," since the writer of this particular article made the point that there was a connection between these strategies and the actions of feminists in the 1960s and 70s.

The second article came, unfortunately, from *Esquire's* notorious "Do-Me Feminism" issue in 1994. I bought the issue because Drew Barrymore (one of my favorite teen film icons, who always seemed older and wiser than her youth in her trashy, post-cocaine-addiction movies) was on the cover. Inside, however, there was an article about a high-school age woman who reminded me both of the female musicians and young women in movies whose attitudes and styles inspired mine: I saw a kindred spirit in her. More importantly, though, were pop profiles of the so-called "new breed" of feminists, young women like Rebecca Walker, Naomi Wolf, and Susie Bright. While I hated one implicit assumption here that screamed from the cover—that these were feminists who actually *liked* heterosexual sex, so that they were good pickings for young men who might be looking for partners who were attractive *and* smart—I was excited that here were politically active people around my age working for social and political change.

I found out much later that 1970s feminists onward spoke of feeling a "click" when they came to feminist consciousness. Well, I felt a pretty heavy click after reading these articles. It was almost like the world started spinning differently. I saw an incredible continuum between bands like the Go-Go's profemale lyrics and videos and the Riot Grrrls transforming anger into action, between the

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nonconformist characters played by Ally Sheedy and Mary Stuart Masterson in teen movies and the young feminists highlighted in *Esquire*.

It was around now that I began identifying myself as a feminist. Although I didn't realize this at the time that I was a politically unaware and hugely disgruntled teenager, I know that my feminism began with me thinking outside of mainstream ideologies that I identified then as being complicitly capitalist and rigidly patriarchal, white, and heterosexual. Now, as a more politically aware (yet still disgruntled) graduate student, I still identify the mainstream as such, although my feminism has helped me to construct ways of acting outside of the mainstream and changing conditions for existing in our world. I would see marching on Washington with NOW, supporting female-fronted bands, reading feminist journals, helping to organize on-campus events with Women's Studies and the Women's Center, and teaching courses about popular culture as some manifestations of my feminism. (Weirdly, this last example is one way I feel like I've come full circle with popular culture. I'm asking my students to try and consider looking differently at something they might immediately take for granted, in the hopes that they, like me, will get something more from it than dumb entertainment.)

If you've made it this far in the article you're reading, you'll know that the preceding was one member of the Lehigh community talking about his feminist awakening. But this article had another, somewhat less obvious, purpose as well: it was a way for me to thank my parents for their shaping influence. I just wish it were as easy to thank Nena and Molly Ringwald.

STEPHANIE NELSON

A song: *peeling and sparking*

In solitude see my broken eyes
 Years pass by we still sit idly by
 Plan of salvation dilutes our will
 Cracking the silence we can't sit still
 Hey hey, heeey heeey yeah
 Hey hey, heeey heeey yeah

Peeling away the layers
 Peeling away the layers
 I'm peeling away the layers
 Of patriarchy

Embracing myself and breaking down the man
 Embracing myself still feeling while I can
 Embracing my soul I see my sister again
 Embracing my soul we'll start a revolution
 Hey hey, we'll start a revolution
 Hey hey, yeah a revolution

Peeling away the layers
 Peeling away the layers
 I'm peeling away the layers
 Of patriarchy

I can see my spirit and she
 She's withering
 I've gotta stop that little girl
 Gotta stop her from dying
 Hey hey, heeey heeey yeah
 Hey hey, heeey heeey yeah

Peeling away the layers
 Peeling away the layers
 We're peeling away the layers
 Of patriarchy

mentalPause

they say that feminism is the radical notion
 that women are... people.
 waiting for the backlash,
 the mindcrash,
 the venomous bite of the fearful;
 venomous in spite of the tearful
 eyes locked into
 eyes locked into
 eyes locked into deepening revelations.

Stephanie is a graduate student in the Political Science Masters program, focusing on Feminism/Women's Studies within the program. What she really wants to be, however, in her heart of hearts, is a rockstar. Keep your eyes open for her sure to come debut on Starsearch and/or Saturday Night Live.

a c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

many thanks to
the contributors

the women's center

the humanities center

printing services

& all those who read my endless 'feminist publication' emails

special thanks to

kristen handler

alicia ebbitt

for introducing me to the inspiration for this work- *Slut Language*, published by wOmen at byrn mawr
college

stephanie nelson

lauren cliggit

lauren ercole

tim mclaughlin

erika berg

flore chevallier

my co-workers at the green café

my parents

for listening to me talk about ...

o r i g i n s

...from birth to creation

