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Origyns: Reclaiming our feminist voices

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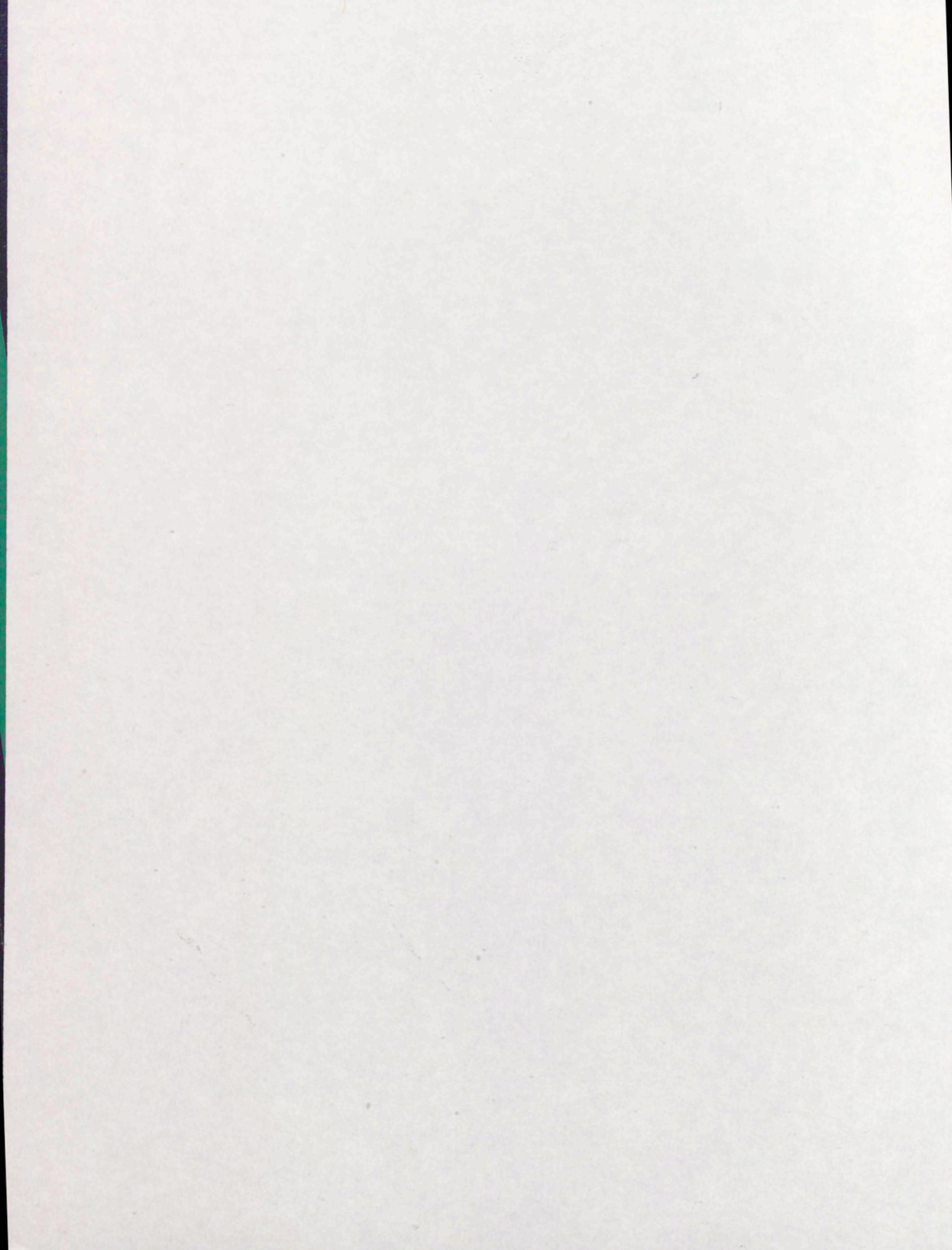
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Reclaiming Our Feminist Voices



o r i g y n s

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origyns is a publication for the voices of feminists — undergraduates, graduate students, alumnae, faculty, staff, and professors emeriti. Originally published in commemoration of Thirty Years of Women at Lehigh University (1971-2001), **origyns** now appears annually.

origyns is a collection of essays, poetry, articles and short stories. Some were specifically written for this publication; others were written for class or for personal expression. In addition to written works, **origyns** publishes original artwork. Many thanks to all the contributors.

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the opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of Lehigh University or the Women's Center, but do closely reflect the views of the authors.

all submissions may be directed to the Lehigh University Women's Center.

note from the editors: *biographical notes were written by the authors.*

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reclaiming our feminist voices

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Midday Conversation

*Her perfectly tanned and manicured hand
Wraps the glass of Barossa Shiraz,
Her painted nails,
Blood drips,
Matching the rich liquid. She looks
Over her tortoise-shell horn-rims,
Tell me, she starts, how does one truly juggle
Being a proper feminist and a devoted
Wife? I laugh, but see she is serious.
I'm too self-absorbed to answer
Such a question and say so. I'm a failure
Of a wife; continually forget to respect
The opinions of the someone I promised
To cherish. It's not feminism
But instead a self-
Preservationist. She ogles me
Like I'd grown she-devil horns.
I ponder and shudder.*

No, I'm Not Oppressed, But...

STOP.

STOP. Stop making excuses. Stop pretending that there is no invisible barrier between the men and the women on Lehigh University's campus. Stop underestimating the impact one little comment or glance can have on a person. Stop assuming that women want to be treated a certain way. Stop idolizing women who accomplish something that a man can. Stop making excuses for behaviors that are inexcusable.

I must begin by saying that it is hard for me to write about this topic objectively and in collected manner when on a daily, if not hourly, basis I am faced with decisions that question my beliefs and values as a feminist and a human being on Lehigh's campus. Any activist on Lehigh's campus and in the world is regularly faced with a decision: do you spark a discussion with someone about the ignorant comment they just made, or do you walk away? Most of us must choose to walk away if we intend on being sane for the majority of our lives, especially on Lehigh's campus. This, in essence, is silencing the few voices that have the courage to speak up at all.

Oppression—it's a scary word. Many people do not want to admit they are "oppressed"; that there may be this ominous, overpowering force upon the individual. When we think of oppression, the media has taught us to think of women wearing Hijabs in the Middle East or those in the sex slave industry. Oppression, we have been taught, could never occur close to home. Oppression could not occur on our own campus. Indeed, however, it does.

One should note that oppression is not limited to Lehigh's campus. Oppression of women is a problem that exists worldwide. Unfortunately, on Lehigh's campus the problem seems to be further exacerbated than many areas of the nation and for the progressive institution that Lehigh claims to be, this is unacceptable.

Based on the informal surveying of Lehigh students, both men and women from all classes, I shall explore the idea of oppression on Lehigh's campus and the forms in which it manifests itself. Please note that unless otherwise noted, the views expressed are my own but they were most likely provoked by my discussions with my peers.

Partying (aka Pimps and Hoes...)

Let's face reality: Lehigh has been dubbed the third biggest party school in the nation. This given, it seems more than fit that I would start off discussing partying and the party culture on Lehigh's campus. Campus is divided into essentially two types of parties: those off-campus and those on "the hill." Parties off-campus are sub-divided into honors frats parties, athletic team parties, frat parties, and miscellaneous house parties. Parties on

the hill are frat parties. Partying culture could, quite definitely, merit its own essay. However, for the sake of efficiency and brevity, I shall explore only the parties on the hill in this section.

All sororities must be dry based on their national chapters' regulations. Fraternities, on the other hand, do not have to be. This sets up a situation in which all of the partying that occurs on the hill is at the fraternity houses. At first glance, this seems to be a great deal for the women—not only do they not have to buy the alcohol, they also don't have to worry about cleaning up the mess the next morning. However, when looked at in more depth, this does not seem like the deal of the century. The women on campus then must rely on the men for parties and alcohol which creates a power dynamic that might not have existed previously. When your fun is centered around whether or not a certain fraternity is throwing a party this weekend then the fraternity has power (be it social or influential) over you.

"Pimps and Hoes" and other such themes are not uncommon on Lehigh's campus where the women are dressed in very little and ten women tend to escort one man (who is quite fully clothed, I feel inclined to add). These parties created situations in which, once again, women are subservient to the men. The women are even labeled (yes, a label which they willingly embrace—but that's another story) as "hoes".

Partying cannot be discussed without a discussion of sexual assault. Alcohol is the number one drug used to facilitate a sexual assault. Partying and alcohol come hand in hand and are of major concern to the Lehigh population. Partying increases the likelihood of a sexual assault occurring. In addition, parties are held in fraternity houses where the women do not have control of the space. They are in a fraternity house where the brothers have the greater influence and control. Hence, if a woman is intoxicated, a brother does not have a very difficult time trying to find somewhere to go to take advantage of her. Also, since the brothers regulate the amount of alcohol in drinks (women usually get served mixed drinks while men get beer), they can be certain that a woman is intoxicated.

By no means do I specifically attack the Greek system as this can and does occur in many places, however this is one of the obvious examples to point out on our campus.

Female Presence on Campus

Below is a table of the distribution of women and men in each of the colleges taken from the registrar's site. It is apparent that women still only make up forty percent of the campus while men make up sixty percent. In addition, there is an overwhelmingly high concentration of men in the engineering school relative to the women.

		F		M		Total	
Degree Seeking	Arts & Sciences	1081	23.74%	748	16.79%	1829	40.54%
	Arts Engineering	28	0.60%	45	0.95%	73	1.55%
	Business & Economics	426	9.00%	766	16.53%	1192	25.52%
	Intercollegiate Programs	9	0.25%	65	1.77%	74	2.02%
	P.C.Rossin Engrg & Applied Sci	258	5.49%	1092	24.22%	1350	29.71%
	Total	1802	39.08%	2716	60.26%	4518	99.34%
Non-Degree	General College Division	13	0.35%	11	0.31%	24	0.66%
	Total	13	0.35%	11	0.31%	24	0.66%
Grand Total		1815	39.43%	2727	60.57%	4542	100.00%

One might argue that this is merely the number of students and doesn't play a role in the oppression of women on campus. But, as a woman on campus and a former engineer I can certainly say that being in a classroom with entirely men was, at times, quite difficult. It got particularly annoying when I'd be out at a party on a Friday night and three or four men (whom I'd never seen before in my life) would approach me and say "Hey! You're the chick in my computer science class!" and was usually followed by some sort of comment about my appearance. While many people would find this flattering, I felt like I was receiving a great deal of unwanted attention. Not only did I not want these men to point me out, I did not want them to feel comfortable making comments about my physical appearance. Getting offered free tutoring sessions by random men in my class was also quite unwanted and irritating. Not only did it imply that the men thought I was not as good as them, but also that I was in class to pick up men. Some might say I'm overreacting, yet this experience occurred time and time again to the point where I transferred out of engineering. (Although this was not the sole reason, it played a huge role). Yes, I got it all. From "I speak four languages" followed by a list of computer languages to the awkward "Um, do you need help with the homework?" Finally, I couldn't take it anymore.

Other students speak of similar experience. What's interesting is that this is a double-sided phenomenon. While the majority of students will treat you as I described above, others assume that because you're female and in the engineering school you *must* be absolutely brilliant. So, instead of offering to help with homework or look over problems together, these people make it their sole job in life to compete with the female computer scientist. If, as a female engineer, you fall through, then you are looked down upon and expectations seem to not have been met. You really can't win—either nothing is expected of you besides sitting and batting your eyelids or everything is expected of you including a 4.0 grade point average.

What does this have to do with oppression of women? Simply put, when women are viewed as less than worthy competition or are put on a pedestal, they are not being treated as equals. Equality eliminates the oppression of women and until no more pressure or antagonism is put on female engineers, they will not fully be able to thrive in the field and equality cannot be established.

Just as a side note it should also be mentioned that although I looked for data on the numbers of female faculty in the colleges, I could not locate any. Having professors that are the same gender as you play a huge role in your development, I think. Had I been lucky enough to have a female professor as a computer science major, I feel that it would truly have helped to see myself as an engineer. However, being surrounded by men did not provide me with the inspiring role model I wish I had. This, obviously, oppresses women and keeps them from advancing in society.

What Was She Thinking?

It is a fact: women on Lehigh's campus are constantly competing with one another for attention from the men on this campus. One would assume that on a campus with a ratio of 3:2 men to women, respectively, there would be no need for this competition. Yet it still ensues. There are many arenas in which women compete but rather than in academics as most men at Lehigh do, they compete in appearance, primarily. Women want to be the most fashionable, picture perfect person.

When we, as women, constantly judge one another based on physical appearance, we are in essence hurting one another. We need to start treating others with more respect and join together to command the respect that we deserve on this campus. There have been countless times that I have seen a group of women pass another group and stare at them from head to toe several times without smiling or even saying hi. This is absolutely absurd.

Instead of questioning the decisions each of us makes, we should begin to embrace the positive changes that each of us has made on our community. Let's stop critiquing one another and start complimenting one another. And, let's get past the superficialities of judging based on appearance. Rather, we should get to know one another and work together to create a safe and supportive environment. If we are to compete, we can raise our grades and level of education by competing academically. Next time when you are asked "What was she thinking?" try replying "I don't know, let's find out. While we're at it, how about we talk a little bit about foreign policy and politics in general."

R-E-S-P-E-C-T?

This is a difficult section to write on. Although the previous sections are biased, this one is absolutely, without-a-doubt subjective. Personally, I think that when a woman walks into a room on Lehigh's campus, she commands less respect than when a man does.

NO, I'M NOT OPPRESSED, BUT...

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Women need to work very hard to earn respect on this campus. And, should they decide to be a little strict or to raise their voice a little bit, they become bitchy and overbearing. We are expected to fulfill the caring, nurturing role and if we don't, we are ostracized. While men as leaders on campus may be firm and instantly command respect, women must be dainty and charming in order to be listened to.

Again, this is entirely subjective. My one example, however, is that Steve McAllister, the former Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator of the Women's Center on campus had the ability to get a room to instantly quite down at the beginning of a program. All the other male sexual violence peer educators had no problem either. Nevertheless, when the women start a program, they always need to spend a few minutes chatting with the audience and convincing them to quiet down. This is consistent regardless of which men and which women are presenting. This indicates to me that men are treated with and command more respect than women on Lehigh's campus.

Angry?

You might be wondering why I took the time to write an eight page paper on the oppression of women on Lehigh's campus. You might be wondering based on my writing whether I'm angry about this or not. My answer is not a simple one (but then this is not a simple issue): yes I am angry. I am frustrated. I am tired of screaming into nothingness. I am tired of being silenced. I am tired of not being listened to. I am hurt by the lack of a community on Lehigh's campus. I am angry about all of these things too. I am angry that \$45,000 a year is being paid for me to attend Lehigh University and I have to constantly face discrimination.

The issues that I mentioned are only a few of the examples of oppression on Lehigh's campus. The list is quite endless. Should one add the issues of sexual orientation and race into the equation, the level of oppression increases tenfold. This is absolutely inexcusable and I believe I have every right to be angry. Didn't someone once say "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention"? I am outraged damn it and I am demanding that the Lehigh community pay attention.

Let's forget talk of oppression and gender equality if it scares you. Let's talk about basic respect both for you and the people you care about. When we talk about oppression we are fundamentally talking about disrespecting another person or group of people. I can't be with the people that I care about every single day but I am trusting that if I take care of the people that you care about, someone will take care of my family and close friends with as much care. Let's respect one another and work towards an environment and community in which the word oppression does not even exist to loom over us.

Reflection

*She closed her eyes
 As he undressed
 Her, as his eyes probed
 Her stiffened body
 In her cotton casket.
 She thought he was her friend.
 Shallow breathes and goose bumps
 Couldn't stop
 The clink of buckle,
 The zip as he undid his pants
 And pushed them down
 Just far enough.*

*Each thrust an icy stab
 That penetrated
 Every part of her
 Body, frozen
 Against him
 As his flexing
 Muscles labored to keep her
 Flat on her back.*

*The door clicked shut
 Behind him
 When he finally
 Climbed off her,
 Left the room.
 She slunk
 Into the shower,
 Prayed
 That no one else would still be up.
 She let the water scald
 Her back until her skin burned
 Red, it turned raw
 Beneath the washcloth,
 She scrubbed
 Between her legs
 So hard it felt like fire—
 She scrubbed harder.
 It felt like he was still inside her,
 His hot breath daggers
 On her skin.*

*Her vomit filled the drain,
Eyes watered
As she dry-heaved
Till her body sank,
back pressed
Into the grimy wall,
Head tucked
between her knees,
Tears mixed with water
That beat down
On her head.
She clutched her wrist
Where five round bruises stained
Her arm, the blackish purple skin
Looked dead.*

*The mirror framed her
Naked body,
Her skin, glass ruptured
By a bullet,
Cracked in spider web
Spirals that shattered
The once-smooth-surface.
Long steaks like bursting
Veins where he had forced her
Jeans down
Off her hips until soft white
Cotton; her only protection,
Lay exposed.
Her pants were crumpled
On the floor
Where he had thrown them,
Lifeless curves of denim
That seemed more alive
Than the pin pricked skin
In her reflection.*

A Woman's Worth in the Hindu Religion:
Propaganda Vs. Reality

Propaganda has one core motive: to conceal the truth concerning sensitive subjects. In the Hindu culture, it is used to accomplish just that. Brahmin male propaganda advocates the notion that the customs of sati, dowry, female infanticide and all other social suppression of women in India is the result of "social degeneration," corruption, or foreign Christian or Muslim influences. These are all part of one fabricated lie designed to fool women. The reasons are far more deep-rooted, and are fully the result of Brahmin male conspiracies. The real reason for the sad state of Indian women is the continuation of the Vedic and Vaishnava religions, collectively referred to as Brahmanism or astika Hinduism. These religions clearly and unambiguously justify and prescribe the crushing of women to the status of sub-human. Rather than being due to some kind of corruption, the ghastly practices of sati, female infanticide, dowry and related acts are actually enforced by Vedic and Hindu scriptures. Although this may sound like Christian or Muslim propaganda, it is not. Quotations from Vedic and Vaishnava scriptures have shown that these religions, and nothing else, are the main culprits behind the most anti-woman system the world has ever seen. Brahmanism is, in fact, the very fountain of the evils of sati, female infanticide, and dowry.

The horrible custom of female infanticide was widely practiced by the barbaric Vedic Aryan tribes who invaded India. It is these Vedic nomads who introduced this depravity into India. The Vedas prescribe an intense hatred for women, and female children were considered highly undesirable in the nomadic Aryan patriarchal view. Indeed, so deep-rooted was the desire for male children that the Vedas prescribed numerous prayers for male offspring, such as "Let a female child be born somewhere else; here, let a male child be born." These verses were recited whenever an Aryan couple wished to have a child, and they display considerable discrimination against women, even in the Vedic age. The maltreatment of women in the Vedic religion does not end here. The Vedas ex-

explicitly authorize the practice of female infanticide. The following verse, from the sacred Vedas of Hinduism, allows the practice, and even takes it for granted as a normal practice in Vedic religion: "Hence they [Aryans] reject a female child when born, and take up a male." There are several reasons for the practice of female infanticide during the Vedic Dark Age (1500 BC - 500 BC) and the Brahmanic Dark Ages (1500 BC - 1000 AD), all of which can be traced back to Vedic barbarism. First, the large dowries prescribed by the Vedas implied that female children were solely seen as an economic burden. This caused such madness that marriage, even today, can ruin an ordinary middle-class family. Obliterating female children was thus a convenient way of alleviating financial ruin in the Vedic period. Second, women were of little use to the Aryan war-tribes. As a result, their numbers were reduced in order to maintain the high effectiveness of the Aryan war-machine. The inhumane Hindu female infanticide is not due to any "corruption," but is fully sanctioned by the core of Hindu religious scriptures, the Vedas.

To truly understand the extent of female infanticide, it is imperative to look closely at numbers. In 1921, there were more than 97 women for every 100 men in India. Seventy years later, the number had dropped to 92.7. Given that the birth rate in India is 32.0 per 1,000, and the total population of India is 835.8 million, this implies an annual total of 26.7 million births, out of which 13.4 million would be girls. Given that the present sex ratio is 92/100, which implies that 8/100 girls are killed, this leads to $0.08 \times 13.4 \text{ million} = 1.072 \text{ million deaths}$. That means that 1.1 million girls are killed each year due to the Brahmin-enforced customs of Vedic female infanticide. A recent United Nations report stated that 50 million girls and women were missing from India's population, the result of systematic sex discrimination extending to the abortion of female fetuses. These are quite chilling statistics.

Female infanticide is only one of the many horrid acts committed against women in India. In addition to female babies being killed, women are at risk of being burned and killed when they are ready to marry. When a bride's family cannot pay the amount demanded by the in-laws, the bride is often burned alive. Often, the in-laws make demands in excess of

those made at the time of marriage. When the specified deadline runs out, the bride is burned in the most gruesome fashion. Often, the bride is severely mutilated by having her genitals cut off in the most brutal manner; sometimes the bride is boiled alive and at other times large objects are thrust into the girl's private parts in order to induce internal bleeding. The extent to which such barbaric Vedic and Brahmanic customs have survived is astonishing. At least 5,000 women die each year for not bringing in enough dowry. At least a dozen women die each day in 'kitchen fires,' which are often passed off as accidents, because their in-laws are not satisfied with their dowries. Only a few of the murderers are brought to justice. This custom of dowry has divine sanction, since the Ramayana explicitly mentions that Sita brought a huge dowry for Rama in the scriptures. Continuing through a woman's life, once she is married, she is at risk of being burned and killed at any time for the most trifling circumstances. The ideal role model for this custom was Sita, Ram's wife. She was required by her spouse, the "ideal husband," to pass through the fire ordeal after her return from Sri Lanka, simply because her husband suspected her of infidelity. From the time a woman is born, it is evident that she is living her life day to day, hoping to survive each waking moment.

Lastly, the Aryans, upon their invasion of India in 1500 B.C., introduced the horrific custom of sati. Sati is the burning of a woman after the death of her husband. It is sanctioned by their most sacred texts, and has been practiced from the fall of the Semito-Dravidian Indus Valley civilization, to the modern age. Many of the scriptures support the idea of sati. For example, in the Brahma Purana, it is stated, "It is the highest duty of the woman to immolate herself after her husband," and "It is proper for a woman, after her husband's death, to burn herself in the fire with his corpse; every woman who thus burns herself shall remain in paradise with her husband 35,000,000 years by destiny." Sati was not only practiced by the wife of the deceased. Even slave girls, mothers, and sister-in-laws were forcefully burned alive when a man died. This shows that the brute custom of sati was merely designed to destroy womanhood as a whole. Sati still continues to this day; in 1990, more than fifty widows were burned alive. This, once again, is the Brahmin conspiracy at work.

It is evident that the appalling acts committed against Hindu women in today's society have deeply rooted causes and support from the religion's scriptures and founders. Blame should not be placed on other present day religions, corruption, or simply the notion that women are inferior to men in today's society. The Hindu followers must realize that what is being done to their women is ingrained in their culture; the way the women are treated is what their religion and culture is grounded upon.

Barren Landscape

Is what they call
Land that is naked
And raw.
Large expanse
Of nothingness
Scattered with trees
That loom
Like withered hands
Reaching toward
The pale sky
For answers.

Mother-nature
At Thirty
And not really
A mother at all.
Single and without
Prospect. Hair
No longer golden
But thinning
And lifeless.
Body scarred
Parched ground
Dying and drying
Uterus

***Left Hand of Darkness* attempts a genderless society,
But fails as readers perceive overriding masculinity**

LeGuin's *Left Hand of Darkness* prods at our definitions of gender and how it affects our society as a whole. Her novel's intent, as indicated in her essay "Is Gender Necessary", was to show a society in which "men and women were completely and genuinely equal in their social roles, equal legally and economically, equal in freedom, in responsibility, and in self esteem," (169). I admire her efforts in this regard because women today are continually exploited, while men struggle for dominance and divisions between sexes are insisted upon. This book shakes those notions of men versus women, and attempts to portray them as one. We see the narrator, who is human, struggle to gender the Gethenians, a group of non-humans. However, LeGuin uses a male pronoun and masculine diction and attributes dominantly masculine characteristics to the Gethenians. There are few feminine descriptions in the text but they are completely overshadowed. Also LeGuin's main narrator often describes female characteristics negatively or stereotypically. He is presented as a dominant man who rejects femininity and never really addresses or changes this mentality. Ultimately LeGuin has failed as readers are not persuaded that Gethenian society is genderless, but imagine it as a dominantly masculine society.

The most obvious and consistent problem in the novel is LeGuin's choice of pronoun. She uses a "he" as the general descriptor for a Gethenian. In her essay she says, "I call Gethenians 'he,' because I utterly refuse to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for 'he/she.' 'He' is the generic pronoun, damn it, in English...But I do not consider this really very important," (168). The problem is that the pronoun is important because we assume these creatures are not aliens but men. Readers automatically attribute male characteristics to these beings. Also there are not a lot of strong female characteristics throughout the novel so masculinity subconsciously builds inside our heads, and it becomes harder to detach those characteristics as readers. 'He' may be the generic pronoun of the English language, but doesn't that show how men are superior to women in our culture? Shouldn't LeGuin go against the assumption that men are the generic, dominant sex? If she wanted to create a genderless society, she should not have included a pronoun which supports male superiority. Her mistake only reinforces the fact that our language and society is dominated by men. It is so engrained in us that even LeGuin fails to see something that completely uproots her novel's intent.

Not only does LeGuin use 'he' as the general pronoun, but she literally describes Gethenians as men, sons and lords. Although they were supposed to be alien creatures, she indirectly tells the reader they are humans and men. For example, when describing Estraven's tale as a traitor the novel says, "Rich land is scarce in Kerm...and the lords of Kerm Land are proud men and umbrageous men," (124). Later on in this story of Estraven, a **son** is born. If this is a genderless society, how can a Gethenian birth a son? Does that

mean a daughter can be born as well? If it does, there is no evidence of any daughters being born. Also, when Genly Ai travels to Orgoreyn, he is imprisoned, drugged and thrown onto a bus. During his travels, he describes the harsh conditions he must endure, "One of the truckload died that night...No one did anything for him; there was nothing to be done... The man happened to be next to me on the right, and I took his head on my knees to give him relief in breathing: so he died," (168). Here Genly is describing these beings again like humans, and the one who died as a man. If Gethenians are dominantly described as men throughout, then readers are to assume this is a dominantly masculine society.

Furthermore, Genly Ai is in fact a man but is described to look very similar to Gethenians. We can assume that if Ai can pass as a native then Gethenians physically look similar to human men. They only have the *capability* of adapting female characteristics while in kemmer. Even when in kemmer there is a fifty-fifty chance they will become female. Feminine physical characteristics are rarely described which further supports LeGuin's masculine society. For example, when Ai seeks out the Foretellers he discusses his ability to 'pass' as a Karhider, "...I had never had any trouble passing as a native, if I wanted to...my sexual anomalies were hidden by the heavy clothing. I lacked the fine thick hair-thatch... and was blacker and taller than most, but not beyond the range of normal variation," (56). If, aside from his sexual organs which are hidden by clothes, he can pass for a Gethenian, we can assume that the typical Gethenian's body structure looks more masculine than feminine. We also can infer that Gethenians tend to lack female curves or physical distinctions and only gain them during kemmer (if a Gethenian becomes female), "...the breasts enlarge somewhat, and the pelvic girdle widens," (91). The Gethenian body changes to look more like a woman. This masculine physicality is also supported through Estraven's perspective. Even he recognizes how much Genly looks like a Gethenian, "It is a pity he [Genly] looks so much like us...They see him no doubt much as I first saw him: an unusually tall, husky and dark youth just entering kemmer," (154). Throughout the novel and onto Estraven and Ai's escape, Ai passes as a Gethenian and because he is a man, we can infer that LeGuin's Gethenians look dominantly masculine.

There are a few references to female physicality in the novel, but Genly Ai consistently describes them negatively. For example, earlier in the novel when Genly Ai describes the superintendent of his island he says, "I thought of him as my landlady, for he had fat buttocks that wagged as he walked, and a soft fat face, and a prying, spying, ignoble, kindly nature," (48). This offensive description synonymously named 'landlady' completely goes against everything LeGuin claims she was trying to do. Here exploitation is clearly present and there is no equality of sexes. The 'landlady' is not only physically criticized and objectified, but also implies she is a nosy, sneaky person with low character. Although female characteristics are occasionally described, we still are convinced that most Gethenian's look masculine. This particular Gethenian stuck out to Ai and because he did not like that it looked feminine, he ridiculed the landlady. By rejecting female physical characteris-

tics, it's as if Genly Ai would prefer to see these beings as masculine and because of that, readers imagine those qualities as well.

Much like in the case of the landlady, when LeGuin includes feminine or female characteristics in the novel, they are described in stereotypically negative terms. Going back to Ai's travels on the truck, he encounters a Gethenian in kemmer who has become feminine. He says, "I saw a girl, a filthy, pretty, stupid, weary girl looking up into my face as she talked, smiling timidly, looking for solace," (171). This 'girl' is described by her physical appearance, which objectifies her. Why is she described as stupid and how would one know her intellectual capacity just by looking at her? Apparently it is a fair assumption that a submissive girl seeking a man's safety, comfort and protection ('looking for solace') is stupid. This passage just feeds into stereotypical gender roles. If in fact one argued that this is simply Ai's struggle with gendering Gethenians, then why doesn't he recognize his negativity towards femininity? Why doesn't he change over the course of the novel or reflect on his harsh, stereotypical judgments? He does not and because LeGuin includes this negativity without recognizing or refuting it, she has failed at intending to show equality of sexes and lack of domination.

As mentioned before, we read the story through a human perspective and because Ai is struggling with gendering the Gethenians, LeGuin could be criticizing how Ai judges and interprets gender as a dominant male (which could be applied to how we categorize gender in our own society). I think it is valid to say that Ai does struggle with defining Gethenians sexuality and gender. For example, when Genly Ai first meets Estraven he does not like him, trust him or believe he has any real loyalties (20). This is because Ai is struggling with the fact that Estraven possesses some femininity. He recognizes this struggle to gender Estraven and reflects to himself, "...Estraven's performance had been womanly, all charm and tack and lack of substance, specious and adroit. Was it in fact perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him? For it was impossible to think of him as a woman...and yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness, of imposture..." (12). As much as this goes to LeGuin's main point of a genderless species and shows us how we must categorize people, this is the one reflective moment that Ai has about this. The rest of the novel is filled with Ai rejecting femininity and continually describing these beings as masculine. Also, do we ever really question or criticize Ai in the novel? LeGuin never really forces readers to step back and judge him in this way. That, on top of LeGuin's diction and pronoun usage, and negativity towards femininity, builds the image of Gethen as masculine society.

LeGuin's attempt at a genderless society is a failure. Her main narrator not only describes these beings as dominantly masculine but she describes them as similar to Genly Ai. There is so much masculinity described on planet Winter that we as readers are convinced to imagine a society of men. The rarity of feminine characteristics or descriptions in the novel supports this as well. Not only is there an absence of femininity, but there is also

a strong rejection of women. When women are described in the novel, they are attributed negative and stereotypical characteristics. Also, there is no recognition or valid criticism of Ai's rejection of women and no attempt to change his notions of male superiority. LeGuin does stretch our thoughts of gender but her genderless attempt breaks down as she includes too much masculinity along with a dominating male protagonist. Instead, readers imagine just the kind of society LeGuin intended to break away from.

Orange Beyond Orange

*My first memory of you revolves
Around an orange so bright,
God must have cringed at it.
Big round, brown plastic glasses
And your ink black banshee hair.
Our legendary warfare ...with rare
Glimpses of white-flagged peace.
It was awkward sharing that carrotty
Small square place with you, my sister,
The poor middle-child - it wasn't very fair.
Your moody moments, weak asserted
False authority and your tacky clothing
Forever on the shag-carpeted floor.
Clutter haunts me in nightmares
Of my days with you and I'm happy
That it stays in the sleeping world
And in your own grown-up home.*

Details

It's raining as I leave your apartment, and I'm thinking about everything you don't know. Already, I'm regretting last night. Too much, too quickly. No, I should say, too little, too quickly. I'm hungry, but I can't eat yet. I can never eat before eight. You didn't know that, did you? You don't know anything except my name and my shape. Between the hellos and the "Do you want to come upstairs?" there was no time at all for details. So many details—the likes, the dislikes, the haves, the have nots—all withheld for the sake of staying casual. But now I'm walking away, soaking wet, wishing we'd been formal.

My high heels echo at six in the morning—more clickety than at two in the afternoon. Let me think. You don't know my phone number. Click. You don't know my birthday. Click. You don't know my middle name. Click. It's Elizabeth. Click. I pull the shoes off and keep on walking. Better. I suppose if I had the chance, I would start with what I hate, because it's easier to reel off aversions than it is to confess delights. I hate orange juice, so I drink iced tea with breakfast. I hate drinking coffee; yet, it is my favorite flavor if ice cream. I only eat mushrooms cooked, and I only eat carrots raw. I gag on peas, cauliflower, and frozen squash. All other vegetables are tolerable. Oh, except beets; I hate beets. I will never put my tongue near a wooden popsicle stick because it freaks me out. And I can't stand to hear people scrape their forks against their teeth. I wonder if you do that. Let's see, what else?

I like cats, but not dogs. I like vodka, but I can't keep rum down. Lilac is my favorite scent, while daffodils are my favorite flowers. When I was young, I wanted to be a florist. My least favorite part of me is my legs, and my most favorite part is my lips. My ears aren't pierced. I have thirty-eight beauty marks on my body. The only make-up I wear is mascara, though sometimes I wish I wore more. I shave my legs using only soap and water. I have never dyed my hair, never broken a bone, never seen a shooting star, never had a one-night stand. Wait. Scratch that. Change to: I never want to have a one-night stand again.

I should really call a cab. Either that, or buy an umbrella. Because I get crabby when my clothes are wet. And my back hurts when I'm cold. And I don't like stepping in puddles. And if you knew all that, I'm sure you wouldn't have sent me out into the rain without an umbrella. But you did, because you don't, because there simply wasn't time for those kind of details.

Compliments	Insults
You look gorgeous.	You look like a cow.
You're so sweet.	You're overbearing.
You're so cute.	You're such a man.
You always are so stylish.	Do you own a brush?

Try it. Write out a list of compliments that you remember receiving over the course of your life. Notice how almost all of mine refer to my physical appearance. Others, which I was given recently, minimize me to a child ("you're so cute"). Women are constantly bombarded with messages about how they must look and act to be accepted as women in our society. All of us have, at some point, felt inadequate in our society—some of us feel this way on a regular basis. I hope to share some of my memories of being raised in two sexist cultures, Lebanon and California, and how this pervasive sexism has affected my body image and my self-concept.

The second I was born, my gender was enacted upon me. I was given a feminine name and was adorned with gold jewelry and pink clothing. Along with that came the expectations of how I would behave. "You're such a pretty baby" or "Look at how gentle she is" my parents' friends would coo. My brother, on the other hand, was told he looked "strong" and "smart." Besides my mother finding me at age eight months in her room putting her lipstick all over my face, I didn't really seem to pay attention to cultural messages about how girls should or shouldn't act when I was very young. Growing up in California in the eighties, large baggy t-shirts (some of which I still have and still fit into) and spandex were the styles that left little room for glamour. Once I got into kindergarten however, a lot changed.

In kindergarten I made an incredible discovery: I loved learning. I would spend recess following my teacher around, observing everything she did so that I wouldn't miss out on a single lesson. As I soaked up every piece of information I could possibly get a hold of, I also learned that I was supposed to be interested in boys, and that stick-on earrings

were cool. This is also when I learned about how I was supposed to dress: in a dress with neatly brushed hair. I have always had a very strong personality, and was not easily swayed by my peers at a young age, so my memories of early childhood don't have many instances in which I realized I was female, not male.

Television was not allowed in our house until I was about six, and even then my parents were very selective about what we were allowed to watch. "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles", for instance, was off-limits because my parents thought we got too violent after watching it. A study of the Old Order Amish, who don't own televisions, mentioned in Crawford and Unger's essay, finds that women and men in that culture show little difference in body dissatisfaction. When we moved to Lebanon, television wasn't as closely monitored and I began to mischievously watch The Bold and The Beautiful after school every day while playing with my Barbies. I remember wishing that I was one of the women in that soap opera: blond, blue-eyed, thin, and big busted. Then, looking down at Barbie, the ideal of beauty was reinforced. In Lebanon, the American blond and blue-eyed woman was "exotic" and considered more beautiful than the typical Middle Eastern woman. I felt that I was at least a little closer to achieving the ideal because I spoke English and had lived in America. Later, in my teen years, my friends would start buying colored contact lenses and dying their hair—something I vowed I would never do. Crawford and Unger discuss this in Images of Women and Men saying that "Although 'whiteness' is unattainable to women of color, its possibility is being sold all over the world through the global marketing of glamour."

Physically, I never felt good enough. In the United States, at a young age, I was teased because I looked different, and in Lebanon I was teased because I looked too plain. As I became a teenager, my two best friends were gorgeous models. I could never understand how I ended up with such beautiful friends looking as plain as I did. Laura, one of my best friends who spent a good deal of her life in England, was obsessed with music videos and would tell us how to dress, dance and act based on the videos. I struggled to keep up with them because my parents did not give me as much money as their parents did, so I couldn't buy the most fash-

ionable clothes every week, or the best make-up. Being the stubborn person that I was, I often refused to change my appearance to suit the bigger cultural ideal. Soon enough it rubbed off on me, though, and I would spend as much time and money as possible trying to look perfect.

Laura and Becky were obsessed with their weight. Becky would eat one or two salads a day and Laura was constantly on a diet. When we went out to eat, we would all eat at the salad bar—our crazy friend Maria, who had a great metabolism, would be the only one eating pasta or other “fat” food. I soon started to be very self-conscious about my weight, being the heaviest out of all my friends. This is when I first began yo-yo dieting, something that I still do to this day. My friends would also reward me when I lost weight by telling me that I looked really sexy or that they were really proud of me. Our conversations were soon monopolized by us talking about the amount of calories in everything we were eating, or how we were never skinny enough. Little did I know, two of us had developed eating disorders.

When I moved back to California my junior year of high school, I was both happy and confused. The lack of emphasis on appearance (compared to Lebanon) was very relaxing. I do remember, however, that for my first day of school in California I was so nervous that I woke up at 4am so get myself ready. It was ingrained in my mind that the better I looked, the more successful I would be in making friends and thus, in school. Because I was not surrounded by people so obsessed with their weight, I began to feel better about my looks. In fact, people thought I was gorgeous and exotic in California, which helped me make friends—until September 11th.

I had only been in the United States for two weeks after living in Lebanon for almost eight years when September 11th happened. All the friends that I had made now refused to talk to me. The media was bombarded with images of Arabs as terrorists. It seems a little odd that I am now talking about race in my discussion of sexism, but I think the two are so closely intertwined (as is heterosexism) that it would be impossible to discuss one without the other. I began to mask my accent in school, and didn't talk about where I had just come from. I started to pick American

women to look up to and mimic. For example, this was when I began to think that Jewel was incredible, versus my previous idol, Feyrooz, a traditional Lebanese singer.

I didn't realize until recently when I saw Paradise Now, in which there was a very natural looking Arab woman on the movie screen, that the lack of positive Lebanese women in my life and in the media has had a huge impact on me. I have consistently spent hundreds of dollars on products to thin my hair, and make it less voluminous and frizzy. Because I never saw a woman on TV with imperfect hair, I always thought it must just be me not knowing how to manage my hair, instead of realizing that not all hair is silky and straight. There are other small ways we are taught as women that we can look beautiful, besides the perfect hair. I have consistently been taught that acne, especially on women, is, as my ex-boyfriend said, "disgusting." So I spent money on make-up and cover-up and acne medication to try to get rid of it. And when I couldn't, I spent a year very depressed about it, and wasn't able to interact with people confidently. Having a large breast size also equates to beauty. Again, the same winner ex-boyfriend told me that my breasts were one of my best qualities. As comedian Ellen Booster said in A Century of Women, I often feel that men look at my breasts first before they talk to me.

As Bessie Smith the blues singer pointed out in A Century of Women, we need to stop emphasizing appearance and having women judge their self-worth based on the impossible beauty standard. I want both equality and progress with regards to the way that women are viewed in our society. I am now happily with a man who does not parade me around like I am an attractive prize, which has helped me become more comfortable in my skin. I am still working on surrounding myself with friends who place less of an importance on physical appearance. I am still struggling to survive in a world in which the qualities I most value—intelligence and compassion—are not valued in me. It is hard to detail the impact that society has had on my definition of being a woman in 3-4 pages. To truly map out all the dimensions of my life affected by sexism I would need to write a book. It would be entitled I Am Normal—We All Are.

“All Men Are Created Equal”

The United States has always seen itself as a beacon of progression and liberty. Throughout history, the American government has often meddled in foreign affairs or even gone to war over idealistic matters. During the Vietnam War, the United States preached the need to reform the backwards ways of Ho Chi Minh's Communist regime and establish a Democracy. According to the American government, the North Vietnamese promoted not only primitive economic and political policies, but backwards social ideals. Included in the list of antiquated societal practices was the treatment of women. Though the United States assumed that females in Vietnam were oppressed, the reality was more complex. While many Vietnamese women were indeed coerced into degrading situations, a large number also took an extremely active role in the war effort. Conversely, American women were expected to maintain their traditional and domestic social roles. Therefore, while the United States boasted of superior women's rights, in reality, American society presented females with fewer liberties than its Vietnamese counterpart.

The differences between Vietnamese and American cultures are evident in Vietnam War literature. American and Vietnamese authors alike give insight into their customs through their characters and stories. Writers Bao Ninh, author of The Sorrow of War, and Le Ly Hayslip, author of When Heaven and Earth Changed Places and the inspiration for “Heaven and Earth” (directed by Oliver Stone), portray the complex position of Vietnamese women in society. Bao Ninh's The Sorrow of War focuses on the degradation and plight of women in Vietnam. He conveys that the suffering of women was not a fundamental part of Vietnamese society, rather, a product of war. This mentality is evident in the relationship between the main character, Vietcong soldier Kien, and his first love Phuong. Kien and Phuong were neighbors and childhood sweethearts, and despite the fact they were extremely young, they loved each other very deeply. However, regardless of their seemingly unbreakable bonds, their relationship is ruined by the conflict in Vietnam. According to Kien's father, Phuong was destined for a life of sorrow. “She was sixteen and already very beautiful, when he said ‘You're really beautiful.’ Then, as a veiled warning he had added, ‘You will be unhappy. Most unhappy. These are perilous times for free spirits. Your beauty one day will cost you dearly.’” He is implying that the violence and events encompassing Vietnam would be responsible for the ruin of women, not Vietnamese society itself. This prophesy becomes reality as Ninh's story continues. As the fighting between the Americans and the Vietnamese is accelerating, Phuong is preparing to take college entrance exams. She is on a path to higher education and success, an opportunity unavailable to many American women during this period. Kien, on the contrary, enlists in the army.

When the couple reunites a decade later, Phuong sadly states, “I should have died that day ten years ago when our train was attacked. At least you'd have remembered me as

pure and beautiful." Phuong's life had deteriorated to such an extent that she wished herself dead. Her beauty and her "free spirit" made her easy sexual prey for savage soldiers. For example, Ninh describes a scene where Kien finds Phuong after a brutal raping,

He peered into a dark corner and found Phuong there, in a sort of twilight. She was leaning on some rice sacks, her legs folded, her arms covering her face as though asleep. Her long, tangled hair fell over her scratched soldiers. He called her name, hoping it was not she. He stepped closer, his knees trembled at the sight. He almost collapsed as she looked up at him with a curiously unfamiliar and vacant look. Her blouse was wide open, all the buttons ripped from it, and her neck was covered with scratches. 'Phuong, Phuong, it's me Kien,' he said gently. But she kept on staring, showing no sign of recognition.

Phuong's inability to recognize Kien is representative of the extent to which the war altered her character. Phuong also must utilize her sexuality in order to survive. She acquires a reputation as a prostitute and loses her respectability. Previously, she had planned to enroll in a university, acquire an education, and live her life to the fullest. However, the savage nature of war destroys her spirit, literally takes her innocence, and completely changes her outlook on life. Kien later reflects, "From being a pure, sweet and simple girl she was now a hardened experienced woman, indifferent to vulnerable emotions." Ninh is careful to point out that Phuong is not the only woman to suffer such a heartbreaking fate. At one point, Kien accidentally shoots two Southern Vietnamese women. A third girl, shocked, remained frozen against the wall. "She was cradling her face in her hands, her curled hair almost covering them. Between her hands they could see smeared lipstick and her lips twisted in pain. The whole building was in chaos and all around them were grenade explosions, gunshots, screams, and footsteps." Ironically, as Kien and his friend Oanh attempt to help the girl leave the building unharmed, she shoots and kills Oanh. Despite Ninh's extremely feminine description of the girl, in which he focuses on her hair and makeup, she commits an extremely masculine act. Just as the war and its violence hardened Phuong, other women throughout Vietnam were experiencing the same agonizing transformations.

The American media and government claimed that should the North Vietnamese regime be dismantled, infringements against civil liberties would cease. However, they failed to acknowledge that in the case of women, American soldiers and the Vietnam War itself were much to blame for the downfall of Vietnamese females. Americans also failed to recognize that many Vietnamese women held more responsibilities and privileges than the majority of American women. Le Ly Hayslip's When Heaven and Earth Changed Places and "Heaven and Earth," a film directed by Oliver Stone based upon Hayslip's writing, both depict the important roles females played in Vietnamese culture. In general, women were not disrespected in Vietnamese society. When Le Ly Hayslip describes her

mother, she states,

"She had two other special signs of beauty. One was her 'Buddhist ears,' which, with their long lobes, showed she would live a long and fruitful life. The second was her blackened teeth, made dark from the three-day process of *nhom rang*, and strong from chewing betel nuts. Because the nut juice perked you up and kept your mouth from going dry while working in the sun, only active, strong minded women enjoyed the habit. This showed our neighbors that she was an independent, healthy person fully capable of tending to her family."

Thus, according to this passage, self-sufficient, resolute women were valued in Vietnamese culture. Women were not forced into domestic, subservient roles; rather, they needed to be strong to do work for their families and their state. Hayslip also uses her mother to portray the ample freedom a Vietnamese woman held. Le Ly asks her mother how she and her father met. Her mother replies, "Uncle Khan had just moved out and I finally had some time to myself. I even thought of traveling. But I saw your father working in the paddy next to mine and he saw me. I had no parents for his matchmaker to approach, so I just let word get around that I was available." Hayslip's mother is able to live alone and even contemplates traveling alone before settling down with a husband. Stereotypes of Asian cultures assert that women were cruelly forced into arranged marriages where they suffered under Confucian principles and strict rules. In actuality, while women were not necessarily the decision makers in a typical family unit, they did possess a substantial amount of autonomy.

The Vietnamese peasant woman's emphasis on strength and independence was exceptionally useful and important to the North Vietnamese army. Many women were involved in the defense of their villages, which often implied physical combat. This was well portrayed in Oliver Stone's "Heaven and Earth." For example, when the South Vietnamese come to Le Ly's village, she and another girl set off a landmine, killing several soldiers. During the same brawl, two additional women choose to kill themselves rather than face capture. While the North Vietnamese certainly brainwashed the peasants into resenting capitalism and defending communism, women in North Vietnam knew the risks of military participation and opted to aid their country nonetheless. The fact that the communist regime respected women as active citizens and defenders of their country proves that Vietnamese women did have a significant degree of liberty in society.

Throughout history, Americans have seen themselves as culturally superior to foreign states. Politicians continue to preach the importance of bringing civilization and justice to countries where people are suffering under corrupt regimes. During the Vietnam War, Lyndon B. Johnson, his predecessors, and his successors alike emphasized the importance of establishing a democracy to end the plight of the Vietnamese people. However, while the American people were convinced into believing the Vietnamese lived in slave-like subservience, women in the United States had significantly less power than many Vietnam-

ese females. *A Saigon Party* and *In Country*, by Diana J. Dell and Bobbie Ann Mason, respectively, portray the traditional and menial roles American women were expected to fill. Diana J. Dell's *A Saigon Party* is the true story of an American woman's journey to Vietnam. After Dell's brother, Kenny, is killed in action, she decides to go to Vietnam to better understand the conflict. She joins the USO, a Catholic charity which employed women to go to abroad and assist the troops. Before her departure, Dell believed she would be heading into the war-zone, diving head first into the conflict that sent Kenny to an early grave. However, once she arrived at her "training" in Portsmouth, Virginia, she realized that the United States government had a different role for her in mind.

During the stay at Portsmouth, I saw loads of movies, read every Pulitzer prize-winning book (fiction, nonfiction, and plays), partied each night, and slept till noon and beyond. I dated a reporter for the local newspaper, who had a student deferment then high blood pressure that mysteriously went away when he turned 26, and a teacher, who left education when he turned 26 and started a career with IBM. There were lunch dates, dinner dates, movie dates, and barhopping. The training was exhausting. I could not wait to go to Vietnam, where I could get some rest.

Dell is sarcastically implying that she never acquired any skills during her training; rather, she tanned in the sun all day, partied all night, and was forced to sustain the relentless flirtations of her boss. Albeit the USO's training seemed like a non-stop party, Dell was still afraid of Vietnam. Despite the fact that the USO was solely concerned with their volunteers' looks and clothes, Dell could not help but think of the dangers that lie ahead. She divulges, "I had visions of being killed in a foxhole in some rice paddy during a rocket attack while wearing one of my cocktail dresses." Once Dell arrived in Vietnam, it was obvious that women were not active contributors to the war effort. American women in Vietnam were often expected to fill vacant, superficial roles. In fact, Dell creates a man-worshipping Barbie character who embodies the prototypical American female. In Barbie's diary she writes, "God, I love him! I love when he casually comments about our being together long enough to have grandchildren, I thought as I slid lower down the bed, put my ear against his stomach, and began caressing him." Barbie exudes the air of a brainless damsel. She clearly worships Ken, mentally and physically. Whereas Vietnamese women took on responsibilities which literally helped the war effort, American women were merely expected to dress fashionably, look beautiful, and worship their men.

Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* also conveys the menial and superficial roles women held in American society. Although the novel is set in the aftermath of Vietnam, the subordination of females in the United States is evident. Mason's female characters are either submissive, yet accepted by society, or shunned for their independence. This is manifest in the comparison between Sam Hughes and her best friend Dawn Goodwin. Dawn is an extremely incapable young woman. After graduation, Dawn has a job at the local fast

food joint and no feasible plans for the future. Dawn and Sam dream of seeing new places, and starting over far from Hopewell, Kentucky. However, Dawn soon becomes pregnant and must grasp reality. To American females, especially those in the South, pregnancy meant sacrificing the future. Dawn, who is already forced to cook and clean for her deadbeat father, agonizes, "I've always played mommy, I'm sick of playing mommy. I want to play daddy. No, I want to play Las Vegas." Dawn realizes that she is trapped in Hopewell. Nevertheless, to her peers, Dawn's pregnancy is ordinary and positive. American women were expected to do the housework and bear the children. For example, after Sam informs her boyfriend Lonnie of Dawn's condition, Lonnie exclaims, "Hey! I knew she'd marry Ken somehow. She's crazy about him." According to Lonnie, pregnancy implies marriage, and marriage entails security. Thus, Dawn should embrace the pregnancy. American society assumes that a woman's ambition is to find a man and settle down. Education, independence, and ambition are meaningless.

While determined and diligent Vietnamese women were embraced, ambitious American women were seen as abnormal. Mason portrays Sam Hughes as an exemplary "irregular" female. Throughout the novel, Sam's peers and neighbors question her behavior. Sam is an opinionated and stubborn tomboy. She feels no need to settle down with a man and play the part of a housewife. Sam states, "If she married Lonnie, would anybody give her a spice rack? What would she do with a spice rack? She couldn't even name five spices." Her disgust with the spice rack is representative of her loathing towards domesticity. Sam would leave Hopewell if she was not worried about her war-torn uncle, Emmet. Sam's boyfriend, Lonnie, is particularly exasperated by her defiant personality. For example, Sam expresses her disapproval of Dawn's pregnancy to Lonnie. Sam replies, "I think it's cruddy, she'll be like my mother, stuck in this town, raising a kid. That's not what I want to do with my life." Kenny simply retorts, "You're weird." Dawn's decision to keep her baby is seen as more acceptable than Sam's disapproval, even though Dawn has no way to support a child. Sam eventually leaves Hopewell to attend the University in Lexington, where she had an opportunity to acquire a higher education and utilize her talent for running. However, again, her behavior is seen as abnormal by Hopewell residents. Neighbors constantly ask why she runs. For example, Lonnie mockingly inquires, "Do you want me to take you home or are you still training for the Olympics?" Later on, Sam explains the motive behind her running. "She couldn't remember why she had been such a determined runner. Only when they started traveling did she begin running again. It was because they were in new places, and she remembered that she wanted to see the world." American women were not supposed to have such desires. However, Le Ly Hayslip does not mention anyone questioning her mother's hunger for adventure. In Vietnam, Sam's independence and talents would have been valued.

The American Declaration of Independence states that "All men are created equal." All men are to share the same rights. All men are allowed to pursue happiness. However, women have long been expected to remain subservient and supportive of their fathers,

brothers, and husbands. Ironically, in Vietnam, a country described as backwards and primitive, a strong, determined woman is valued and revered. Similarly paradoxical is the fact that Ho Chi Minh's Declaration of Independence states that "All people are created equal." American society today has improved its attitude towards women since the sixties and seventies. Nevertheless, there are still several ways in which women do not have equality. A woman's right to an abortion is still under attack. Women are not paid as highly as men in the workforce. In 2004, out of a total 290,788,976, approximately 95,000 violent rape cases were reported. The overwhelming majority of these victims were women. Today, the American government is calling for the establishment of democracy in the inherently primitive state of Iraq. While the Iraqi government does not have an exemplary reputation for respecting human rights, the United States has, yet again, been quick to use moral arguments to justify the invasion. The American government, a beacon of independence and opportunity, should attempt to repair some of its own despicable tendencies before attacking others.

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She's One of Those

Psst! Have you heard? There's a new girl in town,
spreading her crazy ideas all around.

Gather your children, cover their ears,
whatever you do, make sure they don't hear
her novel, fanatical, radical concepts
that encourage us all to respect and accept,
to coexist on a level plane
where women and men are treated the same.

Don't let her fool you, she's one of *those* girls—
the ones who are out to destroy this world
we've worked so hard to mold and perfect
as a place where a person is judged by her sex,
and the fact that she bleeds every month with the moon,
and can carry the human race in her womb.

A girl like her, she'll try to trick us
with logic and reason, but her real business
is to annihilate and devour our men,
and turn our daughters into lesbians
with talk of sisterhood and empowerment,
blaming our patriarchal government
for upholding age old laws and faiths
that keep boys on top and girls underneath.

So they're a little bit lower, a little repressed,
sure we measure their worth and success
by the way they look, what they do in bed,
and the kind of wife they'll make when they wed...
but they got the vote. They got the pay.
What more can they want, or have to say?

I'll tell you what this new girl wants:
to bring that word to the forefront.
That wicked, foul, dirty word,
that musn't be spoken, musn't be heard.
The word that labels extremist bitches,
that's got everyone up in all sorts of twitches.
She uses that word, yes, she insists,
she says she's <gasp!> a feminist.

"Sup to my sh-bles in your
you, bitches!"

We're sexually free now. Chris Bradshaw held the line in the
pression. God, I really felt oppressed before. "I have not held in
..."

A woman who anxiously deals with men is not a feminist. She
can do whatever she wants. I feel so much better about my
Don't you see I need sleep.

I said she was just a girl. She was a feminist. Like Lindsay Lohan
and the Olsen twins. Once they hit 18, it was like boom! They're so not now, right? And
you're legal, so they can do what they want. Props to them. Wearing revealing clothes is
empowering.

Eighteen was, like, such a great year. All you freshmen, live it up. When you turn 18, it's
like you have all these new rights! Like you can drink water now and your parents can't
stop you. You can stay out later and see whomever you want. So thanks to Christine

Listening to her read "The Disquieting Muses"

*Her ghostly voice
With strong supremacy
Reaches beyond her grave*

"Day Now, Night Now".

*My perpetual waking life,
I can understand those words far
Beyond their intended meaning.
Work Now, School Now,
Wife Now, Daughter Now,
Friend Now, Lover Now,
Writer Now,
Day Now,
Night Now -*

*Dreams,
The place where I'm revived, renewed.
In the misty realm I stand alongside my brother,
I hold in my arms the warm, snuggling babies
That will never be mine.
Lands I've long since departed
Revisit me and once again I walk
Their shores, mountains, and glades.
Friends come to visit that I have not beheld in decades...
Lovers welcome my weary body
And I succumb to their touch.
Don't you see- I need sleep,*

-so that I may dream the dreams of the just.

Who needs a Women's Center?

Tampons. Tampons, tampons. Contraception, condoms, tampons, feminism.

Ew, right?

Thanks, but no thanks, Women's Center. We're all stocked up on that kind of stuff now. Just close your doors. There's no need for you at this university anymore.

I can't believe I even said that word. Tampon. So gross.

And feminism? Don't even get me started on feminism. All women are now equal to men these days. There's no need for feminism anymore. What did it ever do for us, anyway?

Feminism is just another word for sitting cross-legged in a circle, burning bras and bitching about boys. Femi-Nazis just need to shut their loud mouths and get over their insecurities. Maybe men would treat you better if you looked nicer.

Women are so liberated already. Derogatory words don't even mean anything anymore. In fact, these words are just terms of endearment among all my girlfriends. Who's with me?

"Sup to my slut-faces in Campus Square! Aimee, Stef, you girls are my whorebags! Love you, bitches!"

We're sexually free now. Carrie Bradshaw held the key to unlock our cage of sexual oppression. God, I really felt oppressed before "Sex and the City" helped out us women.

A woman who emotionlessly sleeps with men is not promiscuous; she is sexually free. She can do whatever she wants. I feel so much better about my life now.

I also love that young women can finally express themselves sexually. Like Lindsay Lohan and the Olsen twins. Once they hit 18, it was like bam! They're so hot now, right? And they're legal, so they can do what they want. Props to them. Wearing revealing clothes is empowering.

Eighteen was, like, such a good year. All you freshmen, live it up. When you turn 18, it's like you have all these new rights! Like you can dress sexier now and your parents can't stop you. You can stay out later and see whomever you want. So thanks to Christina

WHO NEEDS A WOMEN'S CENTER?

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Aguilera and Carrie Bradshaw for giving women the right to be sexy.

Oh yeah, and the right to vote thing. Yeah, that's important, too. I'm just not super political. It's getting old. Like the other night I was trying to watch "Grey's Anatomy" but the President kept talking and talking and it's like "Yeah, OK, we get it already! Now bring back McDreamy."

So, back to my main point, what's the Women's Center even good for? I know, I know. You go there to talk about your feelings, watch "The Notebook" and paint your toenails.

Estrogen-fest 2006!

No, you go there to sit around and bash on men, vow to never again shave your legs or wear makeup. What a bunch of lesbians.

And double-ew to the Vagina Monologues. Who would ever pay to watch a play about vaginas? Now that's offensive. They make women look like sluts. Plus they talk about menstrual periods. Ew, did I really just say that?

Finally, why isn't there a Men's Center? Why doesn't the university sponsor the gathering of the male species? Definitely not fair. That's so sexist.

What's that you say? Students can start up a Men's Center if they want?

Cool, but who cares, right? Like anyone really has the time for that, anyway.

What I really have a problem with is the Rainbow Room ...

I read Marjan's article, "Who Needs a Women's Center?," and I have to say, way to go, you really said in public what a lot of us can only mutter in passing. What is the University doing wasting so much money on a women's center? There are free tampons in the restrooms—I think they've done enough.

I mean, I've read that 3 percent of U.S. women college students are sexually assaulted during an academic year, but that's only 2-3 women per week at a school of our size. Why just throw money at the Women's Center's Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator and Gender and Violence working group to try to prevent just a couple of girls a week from a heinous and life-altering experience? Also, only something like ninety percent of rape victims are female, and that's only reported rapes. If ninety five percent of them are unreported how do we know a lot of those aren't guys? Where is our Men's Center?

Oh, I also read somewhere that over half of date rapes involve drinking. At first I was sort of worried, because I guess we do drink a lot at Lehigh, but then I remembered: We don't date! Most students can barely remember their sexual encounters, so even if it was rape, what does it matter?

And don't even get me started on the Women's Center's Body Empowerment Alliance. Apparently something like twenty percent of college age women report having an eating disorder, and three out of four of those girls don't seek treatment. I mean, yeah, hospitalization and rehab suck, but do we really want some group on campus working to reduce those numbers? I heard somewhere Playboy rated us the thirteenth hottest girls. If our campus has found a way to prevent the dreaded freshman fifteen I say we stick with it no matter how much our schoolwork, relationships and general well-being suffer.

So what if the Women's Center is having their fifth anniversary? Why celebrate the accomplishments of women students and faculty at the University? Women have been here since 1971. Get over it.

Satire: Readers missed the point

I was initially very hesitant to respond to Marjan Maghbouleh's column, "Who needs a Women's Center?" (Oct. 24), but after pondering it for over an hour, I realized I should at least say something.

When it comes to serious topics such as those surrounding women, it's hard for me to take negative sarcastic remarks lightly because it hits too close to home.

I enjoyed the article's satirical anecdotes about the many female stereotypes we have on campus. Parts of the article even made me laugh out loud.

However, I knew Marjan was being sarcastic and that she was making light of how ridiculous these stereotypes are, while many of my friends unacquainted with Marjan weren't sure how to take it.

"She was joking, right?" many of my friends responded. Yes, but that does not necessarily excuse some of the things Marjan said. And instead of ending the article with a catchy line like "Now doesn't all this sound absolutely absurd?", Marjan instead ends with further satire, saying the very offensive statement, "And don't get me started on the Rainbow Room."

I understand the point Marjan was trying to make, that Lehigh students need to take a hard look in the mirror and realize how offensive and sexist their stereotypes toward women are on this campus.

My worries lie with the fact that too many people on this campus didn't get the point. I worry too many students laughed at her article, but not in the intended way.

I applaud Marjan for a well-written satirical column. My only wish is that next time the point is made more clear, because the Rainbow Room and Women's Center are two amazing centers of open-mindedness and deserve a lot more credit than what they are given. For many, including myself, the Women's Center was my salvation for being able to exist happily here on Lehigh's campus.

Instead of continuing the sarcasm and negativity revolving around it, let's rejoice with smiles, giggles, and bright eyes that we are lucky enough to have an amazing Women's Center to go to.

Face the F-word

My last column, "Who needs a Women's Center, anyway?" brought about some misunderstanding, anger and more than a dozen outraged e-mails.

I "bashed" on the Women's Center. I "bashed" on feminism. And the campus became livid.

But it was all sarcasm. Gasp. Yes, sarcasm.

To the disappointment of many, I chose not to end my piece with a tidy little, "Just kidding, guys!" because I thought the column would lose its edge, its power and true message. The column was a blatant exaggeration and satire of the responses I get when I tell people about the Women's Center.

Yes, I work at the Women's Center.

On one hand, I was pleasantly surprised to see so many people were outraged over the despicable statements.

But on the other hand, I thought the words were so exaggerated and unbelievable nobody could take me seriously.

Perhaps some feel I didn't execute true irony in my column, but that's a risk every writer eventually takes with satire.

I was sorely disappointed and upset to find that fellow students – even faculty – actually took my words at face-value.

So what does this mean?

If the outlandish statements still seemed "a little too real" to be satire, maybe we have to look at the mind-set of the campus to discover why my statements hit so close to home. Was the sarcasm misunderstood because we hear ignorant comments like that every day?

If so, why aren't we doing something about it?

If anything, the column woke up the majority of students, faculty and staff who hear ignorant comments about women or homosexuality and don't understand the underlying meaning and implications.

For example, some women “lovingly” call each other derogatory names like “slut” and “whore.”

What message does this send to society? If women deprecate themselves with smiles on their faces, doesn't this give everyone the idea that calling women “sluts” and “whores” is OK?

A large number of young women now consider feminism a bad word or an insult, but “slut” or “whore” as synonyms for “friend.”

This is something in everyday life that we can stop.

Why do young women today shy away from the word feminism? Why do they join anti-Feminist groups on Facebook.com?

In my opinion, modern society's idea of feminism is skewed. Fewer and fewer women want to be associated with the dreaded F-word because, somewhere down the road, feminism became tantamount to hating men, loving unshaved armpits and dressing in nothing but potato sacks.

Feminism, some believe, is arbitrary because women can vote, they can have careers and they're generally happy. But I ask you, are things truly equal now?

A self-proclaimed engineering school or not, Lehigh still has a much larger population of men.

Even if you, as a woman, have not felt blatant discrimination, you've most likely felt the pressure to look phenomenal at a party where the closest thing to classy is Frank Fraternity scooping you a drink from a large pot.

You may have to work harder to prove yourself in a science or math class because of an old-fashioned professor, and I'm hard-pressed to find a girl who hasn't felt a little threatened by a relentless guy in pursuit of physical attention.

So, if you ask me, there's still a long way to go.

The hidden roots of sexism are only growing stronger when we turn our back on the F-word.

Biographies

Rebecca Beardsall is an English graduate student. She is from Quakertown, Pennsylvania. She has lived in various places in the world, but her favorite is New Zealand.

Kathleen Gillen is an International Relations and History double major. She is from Niskayuna, NY. She is involved in World Affairs Club, Project Awareness, America Reads tutoring, and serves as Community Service Coordinator for the Phi Eta Sigma fraternity.

Marjan Maghbouleh is a junior Journalism major with minors in Communications and Anthropology. She is an editor for Lehigh's newspaper, The Brown and White, and hosts a radio show at WLVR 91.3 every week.

Alex Milspaw is a senior Sociology and Anthropology major, with a minor in Women's Studies. She is an avid skydiver and just completed her 100th jump! Alex is a co-producer of this year's production of the Vagina Monologues.

Stephanie Palmieri is a senior English major with minors in Writing and Women's Studies. She is a member of the women's center staff, an editor of Amaranth, a Student Athlete Mentor and a member of the varsity field hockey and softball teams. She is from Blue Bell Pennsylvania.

Nayla Raad is a Sociology Master's student. She hails from both Lebanon (the country) and Los Gatos, California. In addition to being a student, she works at the YWCA of Bethlehem and is completing a fellowship with the Lehigh Valley Hospital. She hopes to join the Peace Corps in September 2007!

Ashley Saunders is a Junior English major, while attaining a double minor in Business and Communications. She is from Rockland County, New York. Currently, Ashley is highly involved in her sorority chapter where she holds the position of President for this academic year. This summer, she hopes to begin her goal of pursuing a career in Public Relations in the book publishing industry through interning in New York City.

Christine Tucker is a junior English major with a Sociology minor. She is from Niskayuna, NY and is involved in University Productions-Arts & Excursions. She is Secretary of Phi Eta Sigma Honors Fraternity.

Katherine Wegert, '07, is an English major with minors in writing and communications. She hails from Winnetka, IL and is an editor of Amaranth, a Brown and White journalist, and a member of Alpha Omicron Pi sorority.

Hailey Witt has a major in political science and hopes to get a minor in both Environmental Studies and Economics. The past two summers she's worked with the Public Interest Research Groups on Environmental issues and next year she'll be working on a campus some yet-to-be-named place organizing college students around progressive issues for the same organization. Also, she'll hopefully go to law school, and at some point she would like to work on women's issues, but she's not quite sure how yet.

WOMEN'S CENTER

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Celebrating 5 Years: 2001-2006

The MISSION of our sponsor is to foster a safe, equitable and empowering environment for women at Lehigh by:

Empowering students to create a campus culture that values all women and their differences of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, ability, age and socioeconomic class

Providing a comprehensive University-wide sexual violence prevention program and coordination services for survivors of sexual violence

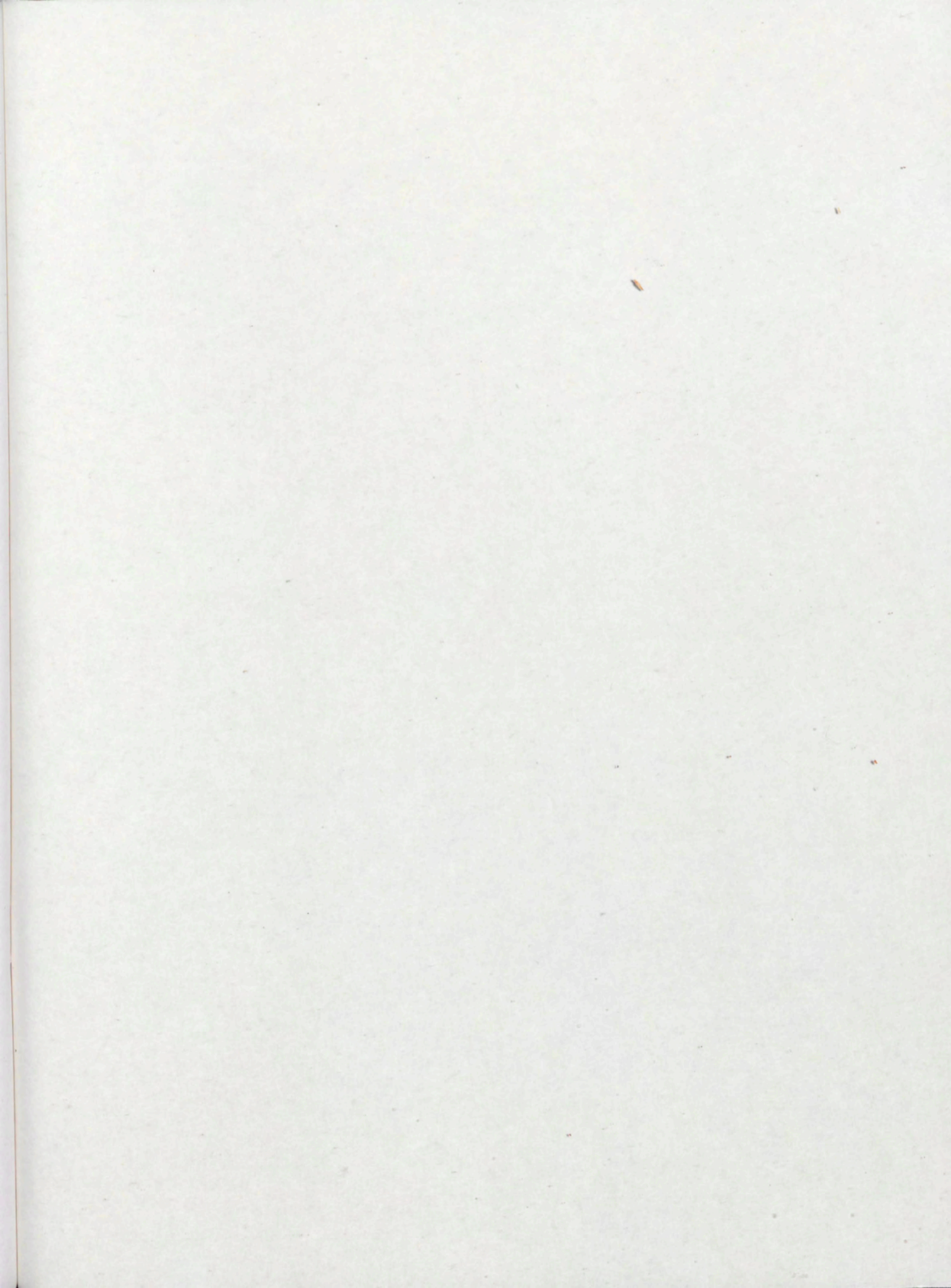
Assessing the climate for women at Lehigh and advocating for the diverse needs of women students

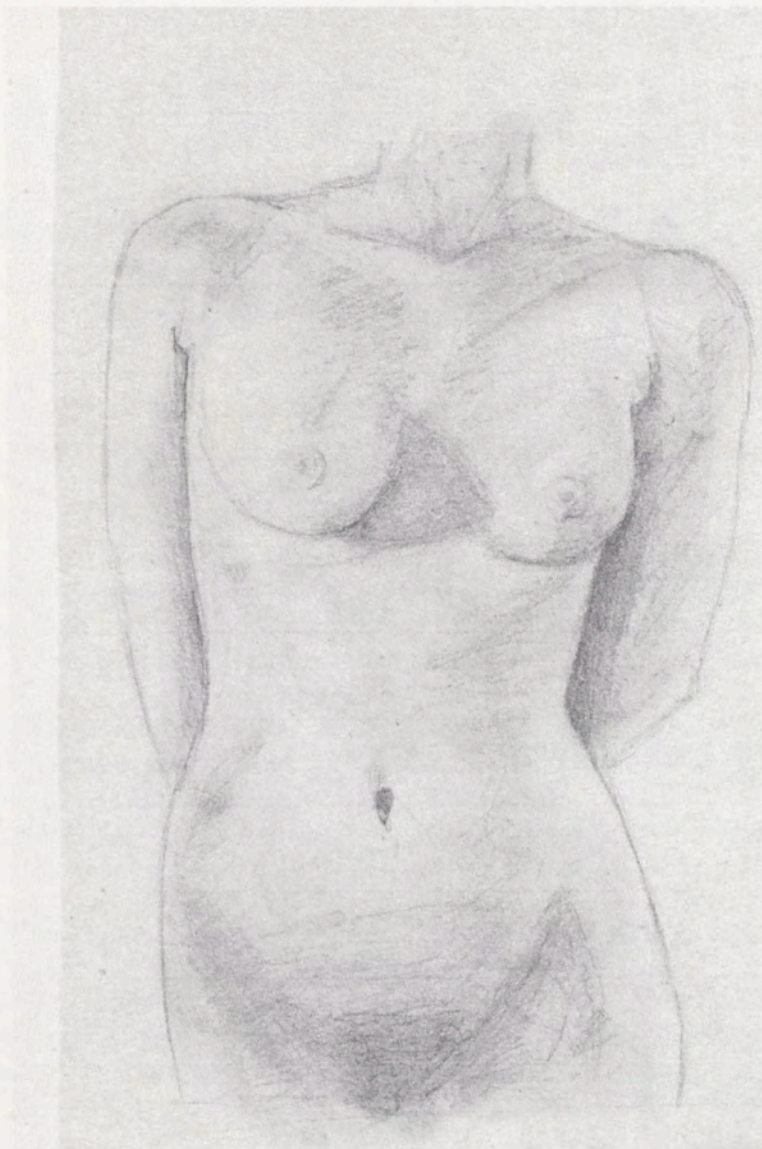
Maintaining a woman-friendly gathering place open to all members of the University community

Providing information, education and referrals about issues that disproportionately affect women, such as sexual harassment, relationship violence, rape, and disordered eating

Sponsoring speakers, performers, events, and activities that address gender issues

Creating opportunities for women's voices to be heard





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