

# WOMEN'S STUDIES NEWSLETTER

March 2008

Edited By Chloe Thompson



## Director's Column: February/March '08 By Karen Stein, WMS Director

Have you seen or heard the news and human interest items that circulate around Valentine's Day about what makes men and women attractive to each other?

The bit I heard on a TV morning program was that men like women who have small feet and the proper hip-to-waist ratio, and who wiggle their hips when they walk.

Women, on the other hand, like men who have square jaws and average feet, and who swagger or wiggle their shoulders when they walk.

Furthermore, we often hear that men place greater emphasis on a mate's looks than women do.

Some scholars of the subject variously known as Darwinian psychology, sociobiology, or human behavior and evolution, argue that these preferences derive from our evolutionary history and are adaptive survival strategies.

According to these theories, such predilections insure that men choose the most fertile women as mates, and that women choose the best providers.

These ideas have gained a wide acceptance in popular culture, along with related ideas about human behavior such as the belief that men have an innate proclivity toward aggression, especially sexual aggression. The claims are made that these behaviors are a function of our human evolutionary history, and have survival value.

## How do we answer these arguments?

The book I am reading now, *The Caveman Mystique* by Martha McCaughey, addresses the debates about human behavior and evolution.

Her response to the arguments about heterosexual attraction is to pose the questions: "how do we know what women would desire if they could afford to desire beauty over resources, or if men had to rely on women to get by culture in shaping men financially?"

What about the effects of consumer desires for sex with women who look a certain way?

Sometimes I find a book that I would like to share with everyone I know. *The Caveman Mystique* published by Routledge in 2008 is just such a book. Anyone interested in a WMS book club meeting occasionally to discuss books such as this? Please contact me. [wmsdir@etal.uri.edu](mailto:wmsdir@etal.uri.edu)

And another wonderful book is Jody Lisberger's *Remember Love*.



Karen

[www.litterascripta.com](http://www.litterascripta.com)

## Get into the spirit, women!

### By Kara Lafferty

International Women's Day is coming to URI! This is the second time that the University of Rhode Island is celebrating this holiday.

Although this is new for URI, International Women's Day has been observed since the early 1900s. The International Women's day Web site [internationalwomensday.com](http://internationalwomensday.com) gives us a glimpse of how this day was formed:

Back in 1908, women became more active in challenging their oppressors.

Fifteen thousand women took to the streets of New York City to demand shorter hours, better pay and voting rights. In 1909 the Socialists Party of America declared the first National Women's day (NWD) Feb. 28.

An international socialist meeting held in 1910, proposed an International Women's Day of no fixed date, to honor the women's movement.

International Women's Day has grown to become a global day of recognition and celebration across the world.

For many years the United Nations has held an annual International Women's Day conference to coordinate international efforts for women's rights and participation in social, political and economic processes.

Women's organizations and governments have observed IWD annually on March 8 by holding large-scale events that honor women's advancement.

International Women's Day is an official holiday in the following countries: United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Armenia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

**There are many examples of how IWD is celebrated globally:**

- Ireland will be holding a Grassroots Women's Celebration Night
- Kenya is hosting a spirit of Africa Women Awards.
- There will be a night of enticing food, wine and entertainment that will raise funds to support the projects of International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) held in Australia.

In the United States, there are several Universities holding special functions such as the International Women's Day Parade and Festival at the University of Nevada.

Many Universities are also holding amazing events on their campuses:

- Fordham University is holding a Human Trafficking talk, (URI Professor Donna Hughes's specialty)
- The University of Vermont is having a Celebration with Music, Readings and an International breakfast. The University of Vermont is also hosting a Women's culture, activism and cultural fair.
- Last Year, Bethlehem University of Palestine celebrated International Women's Day, under the theme "Palestinian Women between Suffering and Hope." Women's organizations from the Bethlehem area participated, as part of the University's effort to reach out to the local community.

Now the University of Rhode Island joins the many organizations and Universities in celebrating the holiday. Check out the program on the next page!

Anyone interested in the field of Women's Studies would benefit from attending some of these events because topics such as globalization are so important and relevant in today's society.

You owe it to yourself and to the historical cause of feminism. There are many opportunities available to learn something new and to observe a holiday.

These presentations could also inspire a future paper or research project.

In addition to attending these events, there are a number of things that you can do in honor of International Women's Day such as looking at an online newspaper from another country, cut out TV from your daily schedule, reach out to someone, refrain from consumerism or makeup, and last but not least, read articles on [feministing.com](http://feministing.com).

There are options for everyone, so do what feels right. Keep in mind that International Women's Day came forth as a result of a collective network of women from all over the world.

## PROGRAM FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

### TALKS

#### **In Atrium I**

**9:30 a.m.** "Sex Trafficking" URI's Dr. Donna Hughes.

**11 a.m.** "Rethinking Globalization: Gender and the Politics of Possibilities" UConn Professor Manisha Desai.

**1:30 p.m.** "Multilingual Poetry Reading" Students in the English Language Studies Program. Professor Luz Rodriguez

**2 p.m.** Fiction Readings. ENG 260.

**3 p.m.** "Women of Honduras: Sharing the Lives of Five Women" Deborah Drew.

**4 p.m.** "Doris Lessing: 2007 Nobel Prize Winner" URI Professor Karen Stein.

**4:30 p.m.** "Poetry Reading: Lisa Starr, Rhode Island Poet Laureate" English Department and WMS Program

#### **In Atrium II**

**7 p.m.** "That Ain't No Way To Treat A Lady" Nancy Hulse PINK Women

#### **Ballroom**

**5:30 p.m.** Keynote speakers Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards: "Can I Be a Feminist and ... shave my legs, have a boyfriend, be a man?"

### MUSIC

**12 p.m.** Israeli Folk Dancing. BALLROOM. URI Hillel

**12 p.m.** "Women in Music" URI Professor Carolyn Livingston. Atrium 1

**1 p.m.** Cognitive Dissidents: Songs of Women around the World. BALLROOM. URI Professors.

**2 p.m.** **Mujer de Cabo Verde: Women of Cape Verde**. BALLROOM. Cape Verdean Student Association.

**5 p.m.** "Songs of Social Justice" BALLROOM. Raging Grannies of Greater Westerly

**8 p.m.** **Learn How to Salsa Dance!** Room 318. Latin American Students Association.

### FILMS AND EXHIBITS

#### **ONGOING in the Ballroom:**

**Place and Dress:** Women's Clothing from Three Cultures URI Historic Textile and Costume Collection, Department of Textiles and Fashion Merchandising and Design

**Spotlight on women** (PAGE)

**Women's Expo** – Informational tables: resources for women and vendors representing women (PCOSW)

#### **ONGOING in the Gallery**

**"What is Beauty?"**

Body Image Acceptance Committee

#### **ONGOING in Atrium II**

**2 p.m.** "Killing Us Softly" ads about women and men--- WMS Program

**3 p.m.** "Daring to Resist" Documentary about three European Jewish women who survived the Holocaust. Hillel.

**4 p.m.** "Rape Is"-Documentary with a brief discussion afterwards URI Peer Advocates/Violence Prevention Program

#### **GLBT Center 111 Adams Hall**

**7:30 p.m.** "Keep Not Silent" Documentary chronicling the struggles of Orthodox Jewish lesbians in Jerusalem. Hillel and GLBT Center

## The Beauty Myth: A Review

By Dominique Sirois

Naomi Wolf's, *The Beauty Myth* explores the ways in which beauty and society's views of beauty are forced upon women. Women are expected to fit an ever-changing mold. Trends devastate culture by forcing women to abandon individuality and conform to a particular society's idea of what is "beautiful."

Wolf explores the many challenges women face and asks the question of whether or not women can escape such pressures. Her ultimate decision is that *The Beauty Myth* is not something that has always been; rather, it came about after the second wave of feminism in the 1980's.

She explains that during this stage in feminism, women become more involved in the workforce and less tied down to the duties of a housewife.

So, what else is there to do for a woman with new freedoms than to create a standard for other women to live by? Her argument is a very opinionated one but I found it possible to ignore this and respect the book for its smaller ideas.

But I can't help but realize how porous her argument is.

I personally believe that beauty has always existed and has largely been encouraged and affected by men. A woman feels a sense of fulfillment when she is admired; every woman wants to be desired by men and admired by women.

Historically, women have altered their appearances for hundreds of years.

Modern day methods include extreme diets, eating disorders and plastic surgery that have evolved from the whale-bone corsets that

women used to create an unnatural hourglass shape to please men.

Even in the early part of the 20th century, breast reductions became popular to fit into the boyish styles of the time, only for styles to change in the 1930's when big breasts came back in style.

Simply put, I just don't find Wolf's argument very convincing.

*The Beauty Myth* is worth reading even if only for the chapter titled "Hunger." Wolf recasts eating disorder, a predominantly female disease, into a predominantly male disease which has spread like an epidemic across the world.

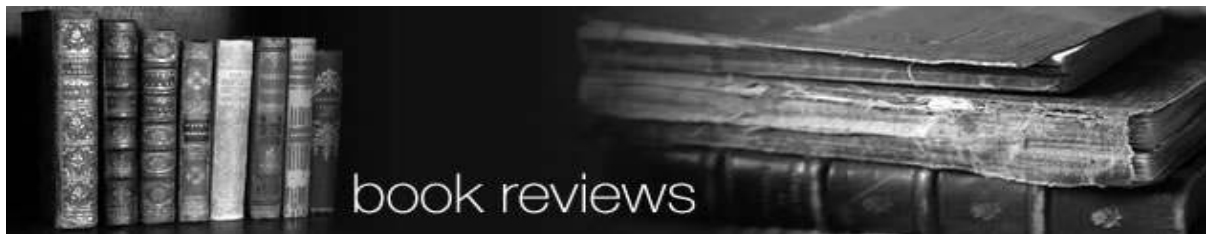
She hypothesizes that the captain of the Princeton football team and half of the Dartmouth rugby team have been "infected" with an eating disorder.

This seemingly ridiculous idea is Wolf's attempt to show the absurdity of the obsession of being thin in a woman's world today.

These Dartmouth rugby players represent the bulimic runway models and the anorexic Hollywood superstars whom young girls emulate. This is a problem that continues to be ignored. Until women respect and honor their bodies, the beauty myth will continue.

Wolf very accurately describes the weight-loss phenomenon as a "cult," so, in order for the phenomenon to come to the end, the cult must be destroyed. But as long as women need to feel admired and desired, this so-called cult will continue to influence culture.

*The Beauty Myth* is a must read for all women.



## Profile: Deb Erickson-Owens

By Chloe Thompson

Editor

Though she's been around the world, Deb Erickson-Owens is returning to her roots to speak at the University of Rhode Island about the importance of birth control.

Her lecture, titled, "Navigating the Birth Control Maze," is part of the Fredrika Schweers Memorial Lecture on Women and Health, and will be held March 12 at 7 p.m. in the Independence Hall Auditorium.

The talk will explore the different methods of birth control, and educate listeners about the medical risks associated with different types of contraceptives

"It's basically the good, the bad and the ugly, so people have a sense of what's out there and what's coming in the future," Owens said during a phone interview.

"I think people don't know about everything that's available, but they're also not aware of the issues surrounding it."

She listed some of these issues to include the participation of the partner, who is in control of obtaining birth control, the cost and whether or not the use is to prevent pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections.

Owens said half of pregnancies that occur in the United States are unintended, and said this is a primary reason why she feels her lecture is of utmost importance to URI women.

"Unintended pregnancy, as welcome as babies may be, it really does affect a woman's life," she said. "This is a way for women to control their destiny."

Owens said she would also speak about emergency contraception, which became approved for over-the-counter usage two years ago.

She plans to cover a bit of the history of birth control, as well as take questions from the audience.

"I think what's going to end up happening is I'm going to run out of time," she said laughing.

Even though she might have to cut her speech short, for what it's worth, 55-year-old Owens is accustomed to using her time well. Currently a doctoral student at URI, she acted as the former director of the university nurse-midwifery program, and joined the

military out of college to run the Air Force Midwifery Program.

Her first assignment as a midwife was in the United Kingdom, where she lived for three years, and finally retired in 1998. She achieved her master's degree while in the military, and had studied prior to this at Boston University and the University of Utah.

"It was a nice career, and it's been a nice life," Owens said.

She said her talk would be much like the all-day birth control talk she does at the university for the nurse practitioners. Though she is adamant about educating the college population about birth control, her true passion lies within her midwifery career.

"I really do believe in birth," she said. "I believe it's powerful; I believe that women innately know what to do, and I think the less we interfere the better it goes."

Owens later added, "It's not just my job that I show up to, it's this lifelong path ... It's what's in my core, and it fuels and drives me forward."

Along with studying at URI and working in Providence, Owens exercises her therapeutic bone at women's prisons in Rhode Island every other week. She said she loves caring for people, and enjoys talking to the pregnant women in the prisons.

"I'm at the point in my life where one of the important things to me is to give back to the community," she said. "I think as you get older, it becomes more important to you, you realize you've been given so much you have to give back."

Currently, Owens is working on a research project focusing on cutting the cord at the time of birth, versus waiting just a few minutes. She said that waiting would give the infant more blood cells from the placenta, and let the baby possibly "fare better in the long run."

Owens added this might prevent a baby from getting anemia in the future.

She's presenting her theories in Boston in May and June.

"I'm getting kind of the best of everything," she said. "I'm getting to teach, I'm getting to practice and I'm getting to do research."

## The Legal Corner: Rhode Island Prostitution Loophole

Melanie Shapiro

Sex trafficking is a serious global issue that is growing each year.

This is modern-day slavery. The women are forced to live in squalid conditions, are often held captive, physically and sexually abused, forced to “service” upwards to twenty, thirty men a day, become malnourished, and are vulnerable to HIV and other diseases, among other abuses.

Areas in which prostitution is legal do not help to regulate, but rather contribute to the issue of sex trafficking.

Did you know that prostitution is legal in Rhode Island? This may sound surprising, but while street walking, just one of infinite forms of prostitution is illegal, all commercial sex acts occurring indoors are completely legal.

Why?

There simply is nothing in Rhode Island’s legislation that is mentioned about prostitution, aside from anything outdoors, such as street walking.

Therefore, due to the loophole, prostitution can occur indoors completely legal for brothel owners, pimps, and traffickers. Even though there have been several police raids that rate the conditions of the brothels as “slave-like,” there is nothing that they can do until this legal loophole is closed.

The section under the 195 overpass on Allens Avenue in Providence is the most highly condensed area of prostitution operation in New England.

Many of these women are trafficked, as part of circuit prostitution. They are not permitted to leave the brothels, and when they do, it is only in a taxi to be transported to the next circuit, or with the pimp or trafficker to buy clothes and make up for their “services.”

The women who are trafficked make little or no money, and have to pay back unreasonable and fictitious debt to their debtors. They truly are held captive.

These brothels operate from many fronts. These include, but are not limited to, massage

parlors, spas, strip clubs, sex video stores, residential homes and gentlemen’s clubs.

Traffickers also make use of technology, mostly through the Internet, to advertise these brothels, attracting a variety of customers.

There were major prostitution busts throughout the New England area last year, but no legal action in Rhode Island could be taken due to this loophole.

However, according to the ACLU, there are three felony statutes, “dealing with pandering, harboring prostitution, and deriving support or maintenance from prostitution” that could have been used to prosecute the pimps, traffickers, brothel owners, and “johns.”

It seems that only the women are the ones that are subject to the law, when applied, even though they are clearly the ones that are victimized.

There are others who have been speaking out about this loophole, such as Representative Joanne Giannini, who in 2007 had a press release that advocated closing the legal loophole. Also, “[the legislation that she is proposing] adds sections of law that would provide equal punishment for “johns” who engage or attempt to engage in services of a prostitute, as well as for anyone who knowingly permits prostitution on their property [i.e. brothel owners].”

While this is a start in the right direction, the mindset of equal punishment is not in itself, equal.

The women in these situations are victims, and that needs to be recalled legislatively.

In order to abolish prostitution in its entirety, we cannot further degrade the women.

For there to be progress, women must be rightly rescued and rehabilitated, and the brothel owners, traffickers, and pimps should receive the criminal treatment for their gross violation of human rights; which is clearly the criminal behavior.

**.THE LEGAL CORNER.**

**Student Groups on Campus: P.A.G.E.**  
**By Christen Makram**  
**PAGE President**

Promoting Awareness for Gender Equality is a student organization that began approximately 5 to 6 years ago and has been recognized by Senate for the past 3 to 4 years.

Currently the organization consists of women, but men are welcome and encouraged to join and/or support.

Our mission is to “strive to promote awareness and importance of understanding and unity of all people. P.A.G. E. emphasizes the understanding of all individuals regardless of age, sexuality, ethnicity and religion.

Focusing on gender inequalities, we shall educate our student body and provide support against any and all misconceptions.”

We meet every Wednesday from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Memorial Union in Room 314. P.A.G.E. makes every effort to educate the student body and the surrounding community on issues concerning disadvantages in our society based on one’s gender, race, sexuality, etc.

Help us to make significant changes with the support and confidence of this organization. We as college students have an obligation to contribute to our society’s present conditions for our future and generations to come.

Upcoming Events Spring 2008

**March 4** – Body Awareness Day in the Memorial Union, P.A.G.E. will be

presenting “Dream Worlds 3,” a documentary that analyzes the way women are portrayed in music videos (focusing on the Hip Hop culture). The documentary will begin at 5 p.m. followed by a brief discussion.

**March 6-** P.A.G.E. is participating in the International Women’s Day event in the Memorial Union. We are showing a PowerPoint presentation of women from different regions around the world. This will be shown from 9 to 12 p.m. and then 4 to 5 p.m.

**April-** Art Exhibit. In collaboration with the NAACP, we are holding this event which will allow students and participants of the community to contribute their individual work.

Note: We are still looking for more participants, please spread the word or contact us if you’re interested. The Deadline to contribute to the exhibit is March 31; we will need detailed information about each and every individual piece.

For more information, please contact [Christen@mail.uri.edu](mailto:Christen@mail.uri.edu), or our secretary Jessica Wesiah: [jwesiah@mail.uri.edu](mailto:jwesiah@mail.uri.edu)  
Thank you for all your support  
Christen Makram  
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