

Highlighting Women's Issues

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Mansfield University's Women's Studies Newsletter

Fall 2003

Women, War and Peace

by Denise Seigart

I just returned from a wonderful Women's Studies conference at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) on Women, War and Peace. Today I can sit down to write the introduction to this newsletter with new enthusiasm. Spending the weekend with highly energetic, motivated peace activists and Women's Studies faculty, I feel renewed and hopeful in a time of great turmoil. Since I am working on another paper for a different conference (on the correlations between women's peace activities and feminist evaluation), I decided to attend this conference so that I might interview and listen to several peace activists. I was lucky to have this opportunity, and took away much more than I gave. I interviewed two elderly peace activists, one of whom was an 80 year old grandmother who was arrested in March for protesting the then impending war in Iraq (she shared that this was not her first time being arrested!). I interviewed young peace activists, who have only begun to learn the history of peace activism and the strategies they will use in the future. I was inspired by intelligent, thoughtful, energetic women who have been so much more involved than I. I explored the connections between feminism and peace activism, and made connections with women's studies faculty and peace activists that I am sure will benefit me and Mansfield for many years to come.

I believe that the Women's Studies program at Mansfield promotes on a day-to-day basis what I experienced at this conference in such an intense way. We broaden the exposure of students and faculty to new ideas. We ask different questions, and find different answers. We turn traditional courses and old-world ideas inside out, and expose the inequalities, prejudices and injustices therein. If I had my way, we would offer many more women's studies courses at Mansfield, and we would have faculty assigned permanently to this role. Unfortunately, in an era of budget cuts and glorified militarism, funding for education, health care, and many other necessary programs are being cut. This is true not only here in our country, but worldwide. In Columbia, where 3 million people are displaced by 40 years of war and living in abject poverty, the U.S. sends 100 million in aid for social programs and 600 million in weapons. The need for more women's studies courses, peace education, and a greater understanding of the causes of war can not be stressed enough. How does women's studies change the way we understand our world? I believe Diana Relke (1994) addresses this question well;

It is one of the objectives of women's studies to integrate the new knowledge about gender into the mainstream curriculum, thereby affecting the education of all men and women. . . .

We use the word "integrate" advisedly, rather than the word "add," since one cannot as a rule simply add new perspectives without changing traditional ways of thinking. . . . One cannot simply add the idea that the world is round to the assumption that it is flat. One must revise the whole conceptual framework. In that sense, women's studies scholars speak of new paradigms and of "transforming" the curriculum.

In other words, in its interdisciplinarity and its multidisciplinary, women's studies is a megadiscipline that seeks to influence and even transform all other disciplines and interdisciplinary programs

(<http://www.usask.ca/wgst/journals/conf3.htm>)

My participation in the Women, War and Peace conference at SCSU convinces me the net of Women's Studies programs grows ever wider. The effect our women's studies program and the wider study of women, feminism, and peace activities will have on our university and the world remains to be seen. But I am hopeful.

Dreams of Danger

By Shawn Holderby

The Women's Studies Department commemorated the 400th anniversary of the death of Queen Elizabeth with a public lecture by Dr. Carole Levin. Dr. Levin, the Willa Cather professor of history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and who is currently serving as the Senior Historical Consultant for the Newberry Library's exhibit, Elizabeth I, Ruler and Legend, visited Mansfield on September 5, 2003. Dr. Levin, who has written two books on Elizabeth I, *Heart and Stomach of a King* and *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, spoke to the history department's class, British Royal Biography, on the challenges of writing biographies. Later that afternoon, Dr. Levin addressed a large group of faculty and students in the multipurpose room. Her talk, Elizabeth I, Dreams of Danger, examined the use of dreams as propaganda to both confirm and denounce the legitimacy of Elizabeth I's reign as queen of England.

Third Wave Feminism-or, Where do the mermaids stand?

by Emilee Danielson

Feminism in the United States has been a phenomenon that has spanned generations. It has existed on some level since the first humans moved onto the land that would one day be a part of this nation. Historians tend to split U.S. feminism into three distinct waves. Although these three waves may not best represent the experiences of all women, for our purposes today they represent the base of third wave feminists.

In 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, a group of women and men got together to hear and sign Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Declaration of Sentiments that stated "all men and women were created equal." This brave group of people constituted what was known as the first wave of feminism in the United States and this wave lasted until women were granted suffrage in the United States in 1920. This wave, however successful it may have been, consisted of mainly middle and upper class white women. Other races and classes were practically ignored in the rush for the equality of white women.

The second wave of feminism began in the 1960's as women struggled to be seen as the equal to men, even though they could not yet control their own reproduction. This wave was slightly more inclusive as it began to recognize the issues of lower class women and women of color. The second wave continued through the 1970's as more women began to work outside the home to support growing families. The anti-feminist backlash of the 1980's saw a diminishing feminist presence that quickly signified the end of the second wave of feminism.

However, that backlash gave way to the beginning of the third wave of feminism in the 1990's. The third wave of feminism is unlike its two predecessors. It lacks definition and organization towards a single goal, yet it is more inclusive in its application of feminism than either the first or second wave. Third wave feminists represent all women in all forms regardless of race, class, height, weight, religion, etc. However, what do third wave feminists do with this diversity?

In 1990 Barbara Bush addressed the graduating class of Wellesley College, much to the disapproval of the graduating class themselves. However, regardless of the controversy, she asked the highly feminist group of young women a very important question that day. In her speech Bush attempted to broaden their view of feminism by asking these young women, "Where do the mermaids stand?" In her speech Bush was attempting to show these young women that even though in the past there had been singular definitions of womanhood and feminism, in the world they were about to enter the possibilities were nearly endless. By using a mermaid as a symbol of metamorphosis it becomes easier to realize the confusion that many young women face today as they attempt to find their way as a feminist in the twenty-first century.

It seems unfair to women of the third wave of feminism that while we are told it is the world that waits for us, it is the society that we live in that we must contend with. In the United States of America equality is something that does not exist for women, minorities, or homosexuals, yet we are engaged in a war to award freedom to others. It often seems as if we live in a great hypocrisy where young women are told that they can truly be anything they want to be. Yet, on college campuses across the country, including our own, we must not walk alone for fear of being attacked. So it seems that the thing that third wave feminists crave the most is exactly what we are denied; respect, freedom, and equality.

If we refer back to Bush's speech in 1990, who are the mermaids and where do they stand? In her speech, Bush meant to use the mermaid as an example to the women she spoke to that young women could be anything they wanted to be and still be a woman and a feminist. Bush wished to impart to them that a stay at home mother was no less of a feminist than an astrophysicist working for NASA. However accurate Bush's message was, we need to move beyond that. We do not live in a time where it is acceptable to simply be told that we can "be" whatever we want to be, it is now time to go out and become that person. This is where third wave feminists have stalled.

So what is left for us to do? What is our role not only in the world we currently live in, but in the broad spectrum that is third wave feminism? Well, frustratingly enough there does not seem to be an answer yet. However, each one of us must move through our lives with the knowledge that no matter what we do we are opening doors for women yet to come. As women have struggled for equality over the years, one thing has become strikingly obvious, the changes that we need to see happening will not take place overnight. I initially began to write this piece to provide an answer, but I find instead that I am ill-equipped to give one. So I challenge each of you out there, each of you feminists who identifies with the vast cultural collage of this new form of feminism, to go out and take hold of every opportunity you can. Create yourself, finally, in an image that is all your own.

Women's Groups Beat the Bushes

In a July announcement that thrilled women's sports advocates, the Department of Education announced that it will not alter or weaken Title IX. Faced with overwhelming support for Title IX, the Bush administration announced that there will be no changes to the landmark 1972 law that prohibits sex discrimination in federally funded education. The Feminist Majority, together with other leading women's rights organizations has been working to block any changes to the law. "One year, one stacked commission, and the outrage of women's groups all over the country, and finally the Bush administration recognizes the vast support for Title IX," said Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority.

Ref-<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org>

An American Feminist in Russia (Continued from Spring 2003 issue)

by Denise Seigart

This article is a continuation from the Spring 2003 issue regarding my experiences teaching a Women's Studies course in Russia. The previous excerpt can be accessed online at <http://www.mnsfld.edu/~womenstu/newsletter.htm>

"Should women be restricted from jobs that require heavy lifting?" I asked. "Yes!" my students agreed. "But what about the heavy lifting nurses, waitresses, and childcare workers do every day?" "It is dangerous for women to lift heavy loads, they are too fragile!" they answered. "Really?" I said, "and what about the babushka I saw carrying a large sack of potatoes down the road this morning? Is she a woman?"

And so our discussion drifted into gender, and how one defines, what is a woman? "Do they not have vaginas", I asked? "And breasts? Do they not give birth to children, which they must support any way they can?" "Yes, they agree grudgingly, but still, they are not women. Women should be beautiful, and stay home with their small children to raise them, or the mother's relationship will be damaged." "And what of fathers", I said, "they do not usually stay home with their children, and yet their relationships are not damaged?" One of my male students, who argues vehemently that women should stay at home while their children are young, admits his own mother is a doctor. "And did she stay at home with you" I asked? "Of course", he says. And

so we moved on to occupations, and I observed that Russia has more women physicians than the U.S., yet even in this field there seems to be discrimination. One woman doctor I met (a cardiologist) is discouraging her daughter from considering Obstetrics because this is “men's work”. “How odd”, I told them, “I work with several women obstetricians who seem to manage quite well.” We debate the roles that societies hold out for women (child care, housekeeper, cook, eldercare, etc.) and argue over who should do what. Many of my women students say “If we love our husbands, we will cook for them to show it, even if we work outside the home. This is what our mothers have taught us to do”. “And what will your husbands do to show their love for you?” I asked.

As we move into the domain of relationships, I approached the subject of violence against women, and discussed the domestic violence initiatives in our country. “Do you have shelters for battered women” I asked? “Not that we know of”, they replied. One of my favorite male students asks, “How can date rape be called rape. I mean, when a woman accepts an invitation to a man’s flat, a little wine, a little cake, she knows what is going to happen! Do you really think this is rape?” “If she says No, then yes, I do”, I answered, “No matter where she is. Your way of thinking is rather like saying if her skirt was too short, she was asking to be raped” Fortunately, I was wearing a short skirt that day. “Do you think this is true as well?” I asked? “No”, he counters, “but many Russian men are in jail for rapes they did not commit, because women changed their minds after the deed was done”. “Really”, I said, “in my country most women who have experienced date rape don’t even report it, for they fear no one will believe them. It is very difficult to get a conviction for rape in the U.S. Is this not true in Russia as well?”

From rape we drift to discussion of abortion and family planning. My Russian students could not understand why abortion is debated so vehemently in the U.S. They were surprised to hear that every day, since Bush became President, we have lost more rights to control our own bodies. Yet Russian women have problems of their own with abortion, too many, too young, too expensive, too little education regarding contraceptives, lack of availability of contraceptives, etc. One of my male students suggested that abortions be made harder to get in Russia, for Russian women are not having enough babies. And so I shared with them the results of pro-natalist policies in Romania, and the deaths of so many women and children. If you want Russian women to have more babies, I argued, you must create conditions that are favorable for children and families; better salaries, better jobs, better childcare, more help from partners, etc. This is a lesson we have yet to learn in the U.S. as well.

In addition to our class discussions, I frequently interacted with students outside the classroom, attending social events, Halloween parties, plays, musicals, and concerts. We shared American pizza at my flat, and my students met my very “feminist” husband when he visited in October. He did all the cooking on pizza night (he makes a much better pizza than I do!). My Russian students also spent time with my 17 year old daughter Maureen, and her friend Haddie. They introduced the students to American rap groups (that are not your standard misogynistic fare), and our Russian friends introduced us to lipstick, fancy stockings and the enjoyment of men from a forgotten angle (help me with my coat, really?).

I attended a conference on Canadian/Russian relations, with many fine presentations by graduate students and professors, and yet I noted, not one presentation in two full days on any contributions by women. When I pointed this out to the Director of the conference, he agreed with me, and stated, “We will work to remedy this at the next conference!” I hope I can attend that one too!

Maureen, Haddie and I also attended a Russian play at the Volgograd Experimental Theater, which portrayed the murder of a woman because she is suspected of adultery. I was unhappy with the ending, because it was my perception the murdered wife forgave her husband after death (she comes back as a ghost), despite the fact that she was innocent of adultery. My Russian friends (faculty members all) did not understand my dismay. They said, "He did what he had to do, given the times. It is a classic play. It portrays the forgiving nature of woman." "And so" I ask, "would she have been allowed to murder him if he were suspected of adultery?" "No", they admitted, "probably not."

I also had the opportunity to share my views with a young local reporter, who was intrigued with my course and had heard that some students were skipping their scheduled classes in order to attend mine (I did not encourage this!). She interviewed me alongside some other women reporters who had much narrower views on feminism. "How can you say that women and men are not different?", they argued, "We have seen much literature that discusses the differences between women and men!" "The question is not are there differences" I replied, "the question is why?" Russian women too easily accept second class status because they are "women", yet they are often capable of far more than is attributed to them. The thought of achieving equal treatment, as noted by feminist researchers in *We/Myi*, is often not on their agenda;

In the current situation, where women comprise 70% of the unemployed, when women's incomes are dropping catastrophically and the feminization of poverty is growing, when education increasingly costs money and the possibilities of women finding work are shrinking, which in effect makes it impossible for women to get an higher education! How will women defend their constitutional rights, when the ideas of equality and rights do not even enter their heads? Kotovskaia, M., et al (1999).

So what can American feminists do to help Russian feminists? In December, our lively classroom debates ended, and though I had only 15 weeks with my Russian students, we learned much from each other. Perhaps I have planted some seeds, and the Russian men and women who interacted with me will carry these tender roots forth, to plant their own futures. Futures which will hold a more prominent place for women, more respectful, more equal, and more democratic. Perhaps they will join the ranks of many other Russian feminists who have gone before them. I hope to return to Volgograd soon, to teach once again, for I believe American feminists have much to give, and to learn from Russian women. Russian feminists have a long history of working towards equality for women, but they can use help, and we can help.

Kotovskaia, M., Osipovich, T., Kolesnik, S., Goscilo, H., Voronina, O., Kostikova, I., Azhgikhina, N. (1999). Round table discussion: New themes for dissertations, *We/Myi: The Women's Dialogue*, ISSUE 2; (18)

Did You Know? The Clothesline Project is coming to Mansfield! Help Fight Violence Against Women!

The clothesline project, a community project begun in 1990 will be held on the Mansfield campus, South Hall Mall Nov. 1st. Sponsored by Theta Chapter, Phi Sigma Pi National Honor

Fraternity, many students, faculty and community volunteers will participate in an event designed to raise awareness regarding violence against women. Please plan to attend!

The Women's Studies Faculty also encourage all students and faculty to continue to assess and advocate for the safety of women on the Mansfield campus. Blue lights, escorts, and women carrying baseball bats are all being considered.

*******Celebrations*******

Several Women's Studies faculty, supportive staff and students participated in the 1890's parade marching as suffragettes! The strength and determination of our foremothers reminds us all to go forward to do great things!

Lynn Pifer, Languages and Literature, has had her conference article, "Teaching Civil Rights Literature Next Door to Potter County, or, The Personal is Pedagogical," published in *-Local Colors: The Proceedings of the 2002 Annual Conference of the English Association of the Pennsylvania State Universities*. She has also been named a Faculty Mentor for 2003 by Outstanding Senior, Amanda Webb (English).

The Sisters of Alpha Sigma Alpha named her Professor of the Week for September 22-26, 2003. and Student-Athlete, Josh Wooten (Liberal Studies), has invited her to the Student-Athlete Luncheon, October 29, 2003, as his faculty guest.

Judith Sornberger's fourth collection of poems BONES OF LIGHT was published by The Parallel Press in May 2003. She also has poems forthcoming in THE WOMEN'S REVIEW OF BOOKS, CALYX: A JOURNAL OF ART & LITERATURE BY WOMEN, and FEMINIST STUDIES, and a chapter from her book manuscript THE ACCIDENTAL PILGRIM: FINDING GOD AND HIS MOTHER IN TUSCANY is forthcoming in the journal TIFERET.

Linda Rashidi sponsored Moha Ennaji as a Visiting Fulbright Scholar here at MU over the past summer. With him came his wife, the amazing Fatima Sadiqi. Fatima taught a terrific Women's Studies course on Gender and Islam and supped with the Women's Studies Steering Committee at Judith Sornberger's home. We were so fortunate to have these two committed feminists among us. Intellectual sparks flew! Linda also presented a paper on her work with the oral narrative of the Berber women of Dousderm at the 30th LACUS conference in Victoria, BC, in August.

Adrienne Reilly, a visiting scholar at Cornell University, took time out from her busy schedule this fall to share with Mansfield students and faculty regarding her research *Gender, Truth and Transitional Justice*, which examines the prosecution of rape as a war crime. Adrienne shared graphic true stories of atrocities, and the legal attempts to prosecute these crimes. It was a highly educational and sometimes shocking presentation.

Denise Seigart, Department of Health Sciences and Program Director of Women's Studies, along with her Co-author Sharon Brisolaro, has had a paper accepted for publication in the fall 2003 issue of *Equal Time*, published by the Group on Equal Rights for Women in the United Nations. The paper examines similarities between Feminist Evaluation and Peace activism.

*******Coming Attractions*******

Please mark your calendars for the visit of **Ann Crittenden**, a noted author and lecturer, who will be on the Mansfield campus March 18th! Ann is the author of *The Price of Motherhood: Why The Most Important Job in The World Is Still The Least Valued*, a well known journalist and Pulitzer prize nominee. Ann will start off the March Women's Studies celebrations for Women's History month. Speakers, art displays, poets, and student presentations will round out our activities during this month.

**SIGN UP NOW
for Spring
Women's Studies Courses!**

Psyche 4422 Psychology of Women. Designed to introduce students to the myriad factors influencing the development of girls and women in a variety of cultures and societies. Areas covered include feminist scholarship and research, gender socialization, women's biology and health, sexuality, relationships and family, and work, career and power issues. MWF at 2:00pm, Professor Launius

WS 4410-01/Eng 3320 Women of Mystery -Senior Seminar. This course is a sustained in-depth study of literature which draws on the expertise developed in previous English courses. Topics vary, and this spring students will study the portrayal of women in mysteries. Wed. 6:30-9:30 pm. Professor Judith Sornberger

WS1100-01 Introduction to Women's Studies

Although most American women believe in their right to equality, a basic definition of feminism, many of them do not define themselves as feminists. In this course, we'll consider the relevance of feminism for women today by examining connections and differences between women as well as feminist approaches to work, families, race, class, and sexuality. We will focus on the significant impact of the feminist movement on American life particularly in the past 40 years. Professor Judith Sornberger T-Th 2pm.

HST 2210-Women's History-The American Side of Women's Past. This course explores the life stories, experiences and thoughts of American women 1607-present. Themes include the changing expectations of women and men in society, women in the labor force, and the equal right movement. MWF 2pm. Professor Shawndra Holderby.