

The Women's Center Newsletter

Gender News

Spring 2002, 2nd Ed.

Letter from the Director

As You Head Off...

by Laura Lockwood

This summer, as you work, travel, play or continue taking classes, be aware of the treatment of women around you. Pay attention to issues in your workplace, like child care, pay equity and the "glass ceiling." Examine the policies on sexual harassment and maternity/family leave, and note whether your employer offers sexual harassment training to supervisors. (It is the law in Connecticut to train all supervisors in a workplace with 50 or more employees.) If you travel, notice how women are viewed in the culture. Are billboards covered with half-clad women, hawking cars and liquor? Is the "Red Light

District" a tourist attraction? Do women make up at least half of the seats in government? If you take classes, notice if your professor calls on the women in the class as often as the men. Be an ethnographer - observe your culture and others, and speak out if you view injustice. Remember, when one of us is oppressed, we all are.

On a lighter note, please enjoy the summer, relax, have fun, and congratulations to graduating Seniors!!!

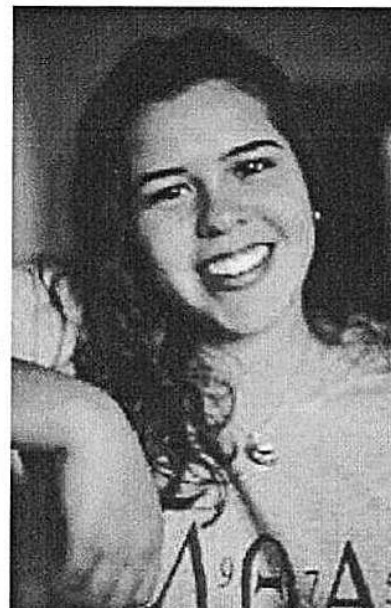
Trinity, she is also the president of Trinity's chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers as well as a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the Society of Women Engineers. She was recently awarded a NASA grant for her senior design project studying air flows around an airplane's wings.

Not only an academic role model, Shakira's work extends far beyond the classroom. She was a P.R.I.D.E. leader for two

years. Currently she is president of La Voz Latina (LVL), president of Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, a senior building manager, a Girl Scout leader, and

Feature Woman: Shakira Ramos by Amara Westheimer & Daniella Bonanno

Somewhat senior engineering major Shakira Ramos does it all. Not only is Shakira distinguished as the only woman of color in this white, male-dominated field at



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active on the Multicultural Affairs Council. During her four years at Trinity, she has taken advantage of incredible opportunities both Hartford and the college have to offer.

Shakira's participation in various community service projects stems from her desire to give back to Hartford. "That's what I love about my sorority, we empower the community through community service," she explains. With her Lambda sisters, she tutors at-risk students and she is currently a Girl Scout leader for a middle school-aged troupe. She and her sorority sisters also give seminars at Hartford High School to mostly African American and Latina women on continuing their education. "I want to show them that they can do it because I did it."

As a role model for minority women, Shakira's sincere dedication inspires all. Her academic accomplishments as well as her involvement with P.R.I.D.E., LVL, and Lambda are testimony to her charismatic leadership. Shakira decided to come to Trinity because of "the opportunities to really voice my opinions and change things." LVL and Lambda have provided her with an outlet to affect change. Acknowledging her Latina heritage, Shakira joined LVL as a freshman. Despite the strength of the

organization, she noticed the lack of continuity from year to year. Shakira set out to change this by reforming the internal structure of LVL, she says "Now I see a continuation."

Along with the changes in LVL, Shakira notices changes on campus. "It has become more open minded and diverse with each new class. I see more people reaching out and coming to events." As a senior admissions associate Shakira interviews prospective students and is optimistic about Trinity's future. She describes her job in the admissions office as extremely rewarding because she meets so many prospective students who can all bring something unique to the school.

Shakira's accomplishments speak for themselves, and her leadership is truly inspiring. She believes that, "Trinity encourages women leaders, but you have to take the initiative. Trinity has a lot to offer, Hartford has a lot to offer...but people need to take full advantage of these opportunities." Shakira has wholeheartedly grasped these opportunities and in speaking with her, she obviously finds her work deeply fulfilling.

The "Global Gag Rule" and Controversial US Policies

By Daniella Bonanno

Around the world women and their children suffer and shifty US policies are to blame. President Bush reinstated the "Global Gag Rule" during the first month of his presidency. The mandate bars international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from receiving US funds even if they provide legal abortion services with their own money. The anti-abortion slant of the "Gag Rule" is, by its own nature, counterproductive. The International Planned Parenthood Federation finds that without essential US funds to support education, counseling, and family planning, the need for abortions will increase.

The "Gag Rule" has a rather long and contentious history. In 1984, under the Mexico City Policy, the Reagan administration denied funding to all NGOs involved in abortion rights advocacy (ARA). In the first days of Clinton's presidency, he revoked the Mexico City Policy. However, in 1999 Clinton succumbed to pressure from the Republican dominated Congress and upheld the former "Gag Rule".

Organizations were forced to sign an agreement stating that, "No other funds should be used for ARA counseling, lobbying or clinical services."¹ NGOs refusing to sign the waiver were eligible to receive only partial funding by USAID, yet the funding could not be used for ARA. Then in 2000 Clinton increased the Family Planning budget and promised to increase funds for international family planning clinics. Not surprisingly, a Catch-22 lurked in the shadows of his promise. No funds would be allocated until January 2001, the first month of the new presidency.

All this bi-partisan haggling is undemocratic and undiplomatic. It denies women and international family



planning clinics the right to free speech. In other words, the US tells international organizations, "Don't speak out about abortion rights' advocacy if you want funding." It essentially bans lobbying, a practice that would not be tolerated in the US. And it thrusts domestic debates over abortion onto the international forum.

Unfortunately, the people most affected by the "Gag Rule" are poor women and their families. According to Planned Parenthood, "The global gag rule disproportionately harms poor women for whom family planning services are out of reach without publicly funded programs." The "Gag Rule" is also anti-family planning because it cuts funds used for counseling, education, and advocacy. Family planning is in no way equivalent to forced abortions or sterilization, as the current Bush administration seems to think. Rather, family planning promotes women's

health and reduces infant mortality. Through education and contraceptives, the need for abortions decreases. Family planning promotes a sustainable environment by helping families make choices about the right size of family for them.

When funds for family planning are desperately needed around the globe, the US slashes these funds based on a shortsighted political agenda. "There is an unmet need for family planning...but 350 million couples around the world lack information and access to a full range of family planning services, and 150 million couples actively want to use family planning but do not have access."² These

figures clearly indicate a need for greater funding and greater advocacy, not less.

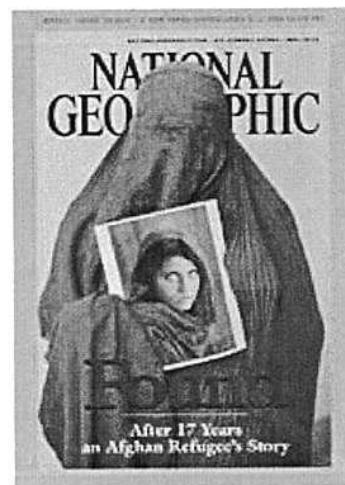
For more information on this issue visit:

www.plannedparenthood.org
and www.heldtoransom.org

National Geographic: Images of Women

by Daniella Bonanno & Amara Westheimer

Since its inception in 1888 *National Geographic Magazine* is one of the primary sources of information about the world outside the United States. *National Geographic* identifies itself as a source of educational and scientific knowledge. While much of the magazine covers geographic and scientific stories from around the globe, many of its articles and photographs are devoted to the peoples and cultures of developing countries.



¹ www.heldtoransom.org. "Gag Rule History".

² www.plannedparenthood.org. "The Global Gag Rule".

The magazine conveys important concepts about the non-Western world that often reflect an American understanding of “us” and “them”. Simultaneously, *National Geographic* responds to scientific and political changes in American history.

In Reading National Geographic, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins examine the ways in which the magazine produces its articles and photographs of “us” and “them”(13). The magazine conveys complex messages about sexuality, gender, and race. *National Geographic*'s photographs of women tend to reflect post-World War II American gender issues as much as they tell stories about third world women. Striving to serve as a window to the world, *National Geographic* is one of the few mainstream scientific/educational magazines that provides many images of non-Western women to the public. The photographs illustrate issues of femininity and race. “For the overwhelmingly white readers of the *Geographic*, the dark-skinned women of distant regions serve as touchstones, giving lessons both positive and negative about what women are and should be” (166).

During the 1950's, photographs of a mother with her children were prevalent in the magazine. The images reflected middle-class norms

epitomized by TV moms such as June Cleaver and Mrs. Brady. Often, benign pictures of mother and child successfully placate fears toward “the racialized other”(168). Dark-skinned infants are generally the main focus of these photographs. Their role is to ease “white racial anxieties by virtue of constituting an acceptable black love object”(171).

In the 1970's breasts figured largely in photographs of non-Western women. These racially charged images of nudes conform to Western stereotypes of black women's sexuality. Women are often portrayed next to men in blatantly sexual poses. “Given the pervasive tendency to interpret skin color as a marker of evolutionary progress, it is assumed that white women have acquired modesty along with other characteristics of civilization”(172).

Turning towards the images of women at work, the story *National Geographic* weaves is slightly more complex. On one hand, the photographs idealize hard-working female laborers as beasts of burden. In these photos a woman's beauty is as significant as her work; bright clothing, flowery patterns, and glowing skin is emphasized with retouching. On the other hand, the images of women's progress coincide with colonial notions of the feminization of developing countries. Sure,

developing countries are progressing but the *Geographic* suggests that their progress is not up to par with masculinized Western civilizations. Women's work is manipulated to reinforce these ideals.

Despite nuances in the images of working women, the overall result is a rift between women's actual roles and how white readers perceive them. The authors argue, “In stories of progress and/or decline, Western and non-Western women have often been played off against each other in this way, one used to critique the other in line with different purposes and in the ending leaving each other feel inadequate”(184). For all of its success as a “window to the world”, the *Geographic* captures what the average reader expects. The magazine often relies on stereotyped images of women, thereby boxing them into age-old frames of race and gender.

“A Manifesto for Sex and Gender Liberation”

by Amara Westheimer

Leslie Feinberg, transgendered author, activist, trade unionist, and coalition builder spoke at Trinity about the struggle for sex and gender liberation.

A significant theme of h/ir talk was the diversity and

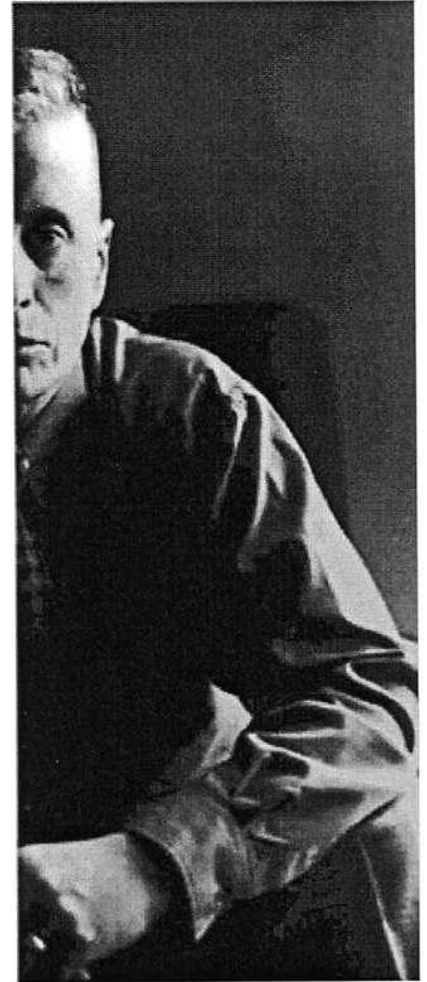
complexity of sexuality. There is a whole spectrum of human gender and sex, yet from an early age we are taught that there are only dichotomies, there are only boys/girls and gay/straight people. However, roughly 1 out of every 200 babies born in the U.S. is intersexed, in other words, a hermaphrodite, but there are only two options on a birth certificate, male or female. Surgeons are called in do “corrective” surgery, sometimes with parental informed consent and sometimes without. Leslie likened this procedure to genital mutilation and advocated the right of these babies to grow up and make their own informed decision. Many intersexual babies who grow up as a “boy” or a “girl” spend much of their lives feeling that something is not quite right. “How can you live out your aspirations, if you don’t even feel comfortable in your body? We all have the responsibility to create safe spaces where people can live out their aspirations.”

It is imperative that those who choose to come “out” organize and fight prejudice. Leslie acknowledged that being “out” is scary, “but everybody dies a slow suffocating death in the closet,” s/he said gravely. This doesn’t necessarily entail everyone “coming out,” “we can’t just drag each other out of the closet. Sexuality is complex

especially when we are surrounded by prejudice.” Being “out” does not end oppression, “Women and African Americans are out,” Leslie said ironically.

In the struggle for gender liberation Leslie emphasized the need to look at the entire system of oppression. During the 1960’s the anti-war movement, the women’s movement, the Black Liberation movement, and the gay movement worked together. Even though the oppressions each group faces are not identical and might not appear related, they stem from the same source, the dominant political system. “We must bridge, and learn more about each other’s struggles. Our destinies are linked. It is especially crucial today in this political climate to recognize that what is a gay issue is a women’s issue, a trans issue, and a race issue. Leslie spoke of building a movement that is so large that it has the power and ability to override the political system and transform it, “When the streets are boiling, those in power listen.” S/he encouraged people to take a stand, to move across lines and attempt to understand differences. “We must be allied and willing to stand up for each other. This is our strength. We should be the best fighters against each other’s oppression. An injury to one is an injury to

all, a victory for one is a victory for all.”



“what is a gay issue is a women’s issue, a trans issue, and a race issue”

Letter To the Editors

April 1, 2002

I am writing to express concern over a term used in the last issue of the Women's Center Newsletter. My complaint is about the use of the term "anti-choice" to refer to groups that oppose abortion. This term was used in the article "Vox: The New Reproductive Rights Group at Trinity!" I was quite offended by the term "anti-choice". I am not a strong pro-lifer, but I understand and agree with much of the pro-life position. When it comes to Roe v Wade, I am torn on the issue. However, my personal views on abortion do not much matter in this case. The point is that "anti-choice" is an offensive term because it immediately turns the pro-life position into something negative. This is not fair. People who oppose abortion are for something - the right to life for all. The fact that they oppose choice is a byproduct, if you will, of this primary belief. To call them anti-choice is to reverse this set of values. Furthermore, I believe that any group deserves the respect of being called what it desires to be called. Those who support abortion rights desire to be called pro-choice, not anti-life or something equally offensive. Those who oppose abortion rights desire to be called pro-life, and their chosen identity should be respected. To deny a group this right is unjust. I very much enjoyed the newsletter, and I respect all the work that the Women's Center does for this campus. I urge you to continue stimulating discussion about serious issues, but more care should be used in describing opposing viewpoints.

Sincerely,
Matthew Kozlowski '05

*Please feel free to
voice your thoughts
and concerns in
response to articles
printed in this
newsletter.*

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