

Trinity College Women's Center Newsletter

"My Fall Semester in Samoa" Beauty, Sex and Gender

By Sara Getman

Imagine being in a country where you are not allowed to drink a beer, because you are a woman. Imagine being in a country where being told that you are skinny or fat is a statement meant to describe your appearance and carries no positive or negative connotations about your body. Imagine being afraid to buy condoms because someone you know will undoubtedly find out and undoubtedly tell your family who will undoubtedly punish you severely for even thinking about having sex.

In Western Samoa all of these things happen. I spent a semester there, studying abroad and encountered all kinds of challenges to my perception of all things having to do with being a woman that I have developed as an American. These challenges I encountered were purely cultural, and I have no desire to judge them as right or wrong. Instead, they made me realize that there are some things that are really great about being a woman in America and then there are others that maybe aren't so great. I thought some things about being a woman in Samoa

Volume 10, Issue 2 Winter 2000

were actually pretty wonderful, while others I was happy to leave behind when I returned home.

Samoan women do not drink. Even in the capital city where western values and ways of living are taking over traditional life-styles, Samoan women do not drink. However, alcohol is widely available and the small country of Western Samoa even has its own beer and brewery. Thus alcohol is definitely consumed, but only by men. I could never pin down a specific reason as to why. When I ask Samoan men or women they would just tell me that in Samoa, women do not drink. They are considered bad if they do and are ostracized by their family and village. There are four or five clubs on the islands and foreign women visiting Samoa were definitely the only females that were drinking.

Samoan's love to eat. They eat a lot and as a result, have large bodies, both men and women. But, in Samoa body size and image is really a non-issue. There are no published ideal weights. There is no calorie counting. There are about two gyms in the country, and these are mainly for

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Letter From The Director

Hey! Did you know that the Women's Center lounge is a great place to hang out and read a magazine, study or do research for a term paper? Some magazines we carry are *Latina*, *Women's Sports and Fitness*, *Essence*, *Off Our Backs*, *Z Magazine* (a left political 'zine), the *Advocate* (a gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender news 'zine), *MS* and *Out*. We also have back copies of most of these 'zines, going back years.

In addition, we have a wonderful library- a treasure trove of books covering all aspects of gender issues, fiction and nonfiction, plus a file cabinet stuffed with articles and materials on gender. Best thing to do is call the Women's Center (x2408) with a time you'd like to come over and I'll open the door for you. Bring a friend, coffee, and just browse, or get needed material for a paper you're writing... the Center is for everyone, men and women!§

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Sisterhood is Global

Firsts For Women In Politics

By: Maggie Kagan

Who says women and politics don't mix? Early in February, Social Democrat Tarja Halonen was elected President of Finland, proudly claiming her position as the first female to serve as president. She managed to slide past her opponent, former Prime Minister Esko Aho, with 51.6 percent of the votes over his 48.4 percent. She will remain in office for the next six years, focusing on foreign policy. Currently, she resides as foreign minister.

When asked by the *Associated Press* about her victory, Halonen said, "We have together, men and women, been successful in both winning this election and in getting Finland's first female president... I promise to do everything so that in six years time you'll be saying, 'We knew it was going to be worth it.'" She is admired for her confidence and integrity. She has been fighting for the rights of marginalized groups throughout her entire career; in the past she served as the leader of Finland's Gay Association. Despite the popularity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland, Halonen decided to break her ties with the church in opposition to its unwillingness to ordain women. Finland looks forward to having Tarja Halonen, and advocate for equality, serve as their next president.

Japanese feminists are jumping for joy as well. According to the *New York Times*, Japan recently obtained its first female governor, Fusae Ota, in the district of Osaka. Ota was strongly supported by all of Japan's political parties known for her esteemed position as senior official of the Ministry of international Trade and Industry. Ota took the place of Knock Yokoyama, who left office when he was accused of sexual harassment. Ota's win not only stands for equality between genders, but it also stands for the Japanese struggle for women to gain respect professionally. Knock Yokoyama was charged with molesting a 21 year-old campaign worker in December and he was forced to pay \$107,000 when he lost the civil suit. The campaign worker's ability to come forward with the crime serves as a model for other Japanese women to be courageous enough to bring other harassment charges to light. Fusae Ota's victory as governor further supports the notion that women in Japan are moving ahead in a male-dominated society. §

Naogan Ma:

Doing Her Job without Trinity's Support

By Beth Miller

At the women's student leaders dinner in December I listened to women express concerns about sexual assault, eating disorders and sexual harassment. Evan and Kit Dobbelle were there to listen to our complaints and concerns. One woman was passionate about another issue.

Her concern was about a teacher who had changed her life. A teacher who continues to work year to year on one-year contracts despite sixteen years of service to the college and despite having been one of the creators of the Eastern Studies Department at Trinity. (She finally got a two-year contract this year.)

My ire was aroused. I would write about it, Goddamn it! I would invoke the power of the pen to rectify and expose a crime against a great woman educator, a righteous mission! I went to office 40A in Seabury to interview a stranger. I left an hour later with a promise for a lunch date, a hug and a renewed faith in the strength of Trinity's teachers. My mission remained, though my mood was tempered by Naogan Ma's gentle insistence on what was most important to her, teaching.

The first question was from Naogan to me. "Is everything OK with your thesis?" I had called earlier to tell her I was going to be a late for the interview because I needed to talk to my thesis advisor.

"Yes, thank you. Actually, I just started writing and things worked themselves out. I feel like I have a plan now."

"Who is your advisor?" Naogan asked.

"Dr. Sicherman," I answered. "Though I consider Dr. Hedrick my advisor as well."

"Oh, wonderful women," she replied. I liked her already.

"Not many people know this, but Joan was one of my first English teachers at Wesleyan," Naogan added. Dr. Hedrick was also my first teacher after a 5 year break from school, even more we had in common. Of course, I only speak one language and only had to come from

Rocky Hill to Hartford to attend school, not across the Pacific and North American continent.

Naogan came to the U.S.A. from China when she was 28. She attended Wesleyan University working in the cafeteria while mastering her third language, English. Her husband joined her here in Connecticut a few years later and both were offered positions at Trinity to teach Chinese.

"When I came here, it was not planned that this was going to be my career. There was an opportunity and I came. The more complicated aspect was I started liking it," Naogan said. She explained that she does not have a PhD nor was the position she acquired in 1984 a tenure track position.

"The program started as an experiment, whether we would actually build anything was unknown. So that's how I came in, and after two or three years the Chinese Program was doing extremely well." It was not until the Modern Languages Department established the Asian Studies Program that a tenure track position was created. They hired Professor King-Fai Tam for this position.

Naogan cannot be a tenure track professor because she lacks a PhD. This has not stopped colleagues and students from fighting for her to get a more secure contract from the College. According to Naogan, getting this done has been difficult because there have been many different Deans of Faculty over the past few years.

The biggest problem she cites is that she is not eligible for academic leave to write. The first time the lack of leave affected her was when her son was born. In 1990, when Naogan was pregnant with her son, Trinity did not have maternity leave available, in 1990! I couldn't believe it either.

"I arranged with the department to take four weeks off." She did this for the bulk of winter break only missing a bit of the next semester. The problem she faces now is that she cannot take time off to write. Writing (and getting published) is an integral component to gaining tenure-which we know she is not techni-

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cally eligible for, unless the College allowed her some time to finish her Doctorate (hint, hint). Writing is also important to Naogan, but she does not have the job security to take the time off to get the credentials she needs or to write.

Considering all of this I expected a bit more anger, a bit more bitterness towards the College. I was wrong.

"So basically I worked and worked and taught and taught. Everything I have ever done here, I have enjoyed it." She added that sometimes during her rare quiet moments she would begin to get angry about her situation.

"It bothered me for a long time. It is not an issue because of my credentials; because I don't have a PhD. So, on the one hand, you can look at a very plain, simple explanation, 'This is your job and this is how you were hired. Your job is such that, as an adjunct faculty, there are no guarantees, no security. Live with it.' On the other hand, I don't know how many people have been working the way I have over the past 16 years.

"So I think, I was sort of confused, and I wanted a direction. So I did a lot of soul searching. Rather than looking at the negative, I have to look at the positive side, which is: I have had a wonderful 16 years. There are some really, really good people on this campus. And I get letters from past, present and current students, who really see me as a person they can trust. I just can't trade that in. It is amazing how sometimes I think I haven't done anything. I still make so little. I'm not advancing. I don't have a career. But on the other hand I think, 'My goodness! All the students! What they think when they think about Trinity; it's not just the curriculum, they think about me as a person.' I think I have made connections."

She made a connection with me. Naogan is the kind of person who calms you just being near her. Her gentle manner made me wish I had taken Chinese, just to benefit from her graceful, intoxicating energy. Her conscious decision to focus on the positive aspects of her teaching career (and it is a career, even if the College will not give her the benefits of one) is remarkable,

inspiring and unjust.

Naogan deserves a better deal from Trinity. Imagine working on year to year contracts not knowing if Trinity is going to renew it. Imagine doing that for sixteen years with two kids. Imagine having to cram scholarly writing and research into your summer vacations. Imagine creating a program for a College that actually facilitates tenure track positions for your new colleagues while you wait to hear if you still have a job for the next semester.

Trinity College owes Naogan. This lovely woman is a teacher who has done her job despite the profound neglect she has suffered. The tenuous nature of her position has not affected her ability to teach and support students. It has not taken precedence over her mission; to bring the Chinese culture to Trinity students through language.

"My dream was to teach American literature to Chinese students and now I am teaching American students Chinese," she laughed at the irony of this, delighted. "It's fun to see how different everyone is. And then, by the time you learn more about the language and the culture and the people, then you see how alike we are instead of how different we are."

At the close of the interview, Naogan showed me one student's final project. He was not a language major. He had taken his favorite Aesop's Fables and written them in Chinese in a volume he dedicated to Naogan. She handed it to me proudly, as if it were a fragile manuscript instead of a final paper. Through this gesture she explained that she considered this final paper to be a precious gift. The result of cultures coming together through teacher and student. Not an empty intellectual exercise for credit. I wonder how many professors share final papers as tenderly with student journalists.

Naogan has done right by Trinity College. She has created and supported the East Asian Department of the Modern Languages Department. She has served on committees, advised and supported students. She has been an educator, not only of required course material, but of culture. It is past time for Trinity College to do right by her. §

(Samoa continued from page 1.)

tourists. Medical and health professionals in Samoa do convey the importance of health, but there is no emphasis on how one's body should look and there are no ideal beauty standards based on body type.

I never even saw a Samoan super model and I would be surprised if they exist. This is because there is no real way Samoan society conveys how an individual should look. Samoa has no beauty magazines, either Samoan or foreign, because beauty based on one particular look is not emphasized. Beauty is recognized in many ways in Samoa and has much more to do with the individual person than their conformity to a particular ideal.

A Samoan might tell you that you are fat, or that you are thin. But this only means that they think that you look fat, or thin. It carries no connotation whatsoever about how you are measuring up in terms of how someone else thinks you are supposed to look and it isn't meant as a compliment or an insult. It is simply a description of what you look like.

Like all people, Samoan's have sex. And, like a lot of young people, Samoan young people have sex as well. Sex is a huge issue in Samoa in a variety of ways. One of the most prevalent issues in regards to sex is birth control. One of my Samoan friends told me

about her sister's first sexual experience. Young people in Samoa are not expected to have sex. Their parents work hard to prevent these activities from happening by never allowing them to be alone with boys. And because of this, when young people do have sex it is usually very fast and spontaneous.

However, this young woman and her boyfriend were different. They decided to have sex and they wanted to use condoms because they thought birth control was important. In the end, it turned out to be impossible for them to get condoms. In Samoa, condoms can be bought at one of two pharmacies in the town or at the small *faleoloas* or shops in their village. Privacy is nonexistent in Samoa and these two young people knew that if they bought condoms at one of the *faleoloas* their family would definitely find out from the shopkeepers.

These two young people also knew people who worked in the pharmacy in town and were afraid that these people would somehow find out and tell their families as well. Thus, they decided to have sex, and not use condoms after all. A few months later, the young woman realized she was pregnant, something that she hadn't wanted to happen, and something that could have been prevented.

These issues surrounding food, alcohol and sex are just a few of the things that really

struck me in regards to being a woman in Samoa. Samoan women are expected to do certain things, not to do certain things and act in certain ways based on their culture. As I studied there for a semester I really became aware of how powerful these cultural mechanisms are in shaping who Samoan women are. I was also able to really step back and look at myself, and realize how much my culture shapes who I am expected to be as a woman.

Being thousands of miles away from home, out of my country, made me aware of how much of who I am is based on generalized American ideals. I now question the degree to which I want to conform to those ideals and I see even more clearly the opportunity to take the decision of who I want to be and how I want to act into my own hands. I am thankful for my experiences in Samoa for so many reasons, and in particular for this freeing and empowering realization. §

**Life magazine
published interviews
with five male
psychiatrists who
believe female
ambition was the root
of mental illness
in wives. emotional
upsets in husbands
and homosexuality in
boys.
(1956)**

How to Stuff a Pepper

By Nancy Willard

Now, said the cook, I will teach you
how to stuff a pepper with rice

Take your pepper green, and gently,
for peppers are shy. No matter which side

you approach, it's always the backside.
Perched on green buttocks, the pepper sleeps.
In its silk tights, it dreams
of somersaults and parsley,
of the days when the sexes were one.

Slash open the sleeve
as if you were cutting a paper lantern,
and enter a moon, spilled like a melon,
a fever of pearls, a conversation of glaciers.
It is a temple built to the worship
of morning light.

I have sat under the great globe
of seeds on the roof of that chamber,
too dazzled to gather the taste I came for.
I have taken the pepper in hand,
smooth and blind, a runt in the rich
evolution of roses and ferns.
You say I have not yet taught you

to stuff a pepper?
Cooking takes time.

Next time we'll consider the rice.§

The Woman's Bible

By Elizabeth Cady Stanton

I think that the doctrine of the Virgin birth as something higher, sweeter, nobler than ordinary motherhood, is a slur on all natural motherhood of the world. I believe that millions of children have been as immaculately conceived, as purely born, as was the Nazarene. Why not? Out of this doctrine, and that which is akin to it, have sprung all the monasteries and the nunneries of the world, which have disgraced and distorted and demoralized manhood and womanhood for a thousand years. I place beside the false, monkish, unnatural claim of the Immaculate Conception my mother, who was as holy in her motherhood as was Mary herself.§



"Gee, I had no idea you were married to a supermodel."

National Alert

Gay Couples Gain Equality in Vermont

By: Maggie Kagan

Is there hope for the legalization of homosexual marriage? Vermont is leading the nation in granting equal rights towards homosexual couples. In December of 1999 the *Nuando Times* reported that the Vermont Supreme Court claimed to back "domestic partnership" of gay couples in order to support the state's constitution's "common benefit clause." This clause claims that gays and lesbians should be afforded equal rights as heterosexual married couples. With the publicity of this support, many in Vermont have been trying to influence the Legislature to actually allow gay marriage there.

Since that time, there has been further support for granting equality to homosexual couples. *The New York Times* reported on February 10 that the Vermont Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives voted in favor of granting homosexual couples a "civil rights package," or rights that would allow couples to receive the equal benefits. However, domestic partnership does not equate to "marriage" laws that would allow gay couples the same full rights as married heterosexual couples. Marriage allows for health insurance benefits, hospital visitation rights when one spouse is ill, and over one thousand other federal and state benefits. At the same time, gay rights advocates see domestic partnership as a step in the right direction towards obtaining the marriage right for gay couples in Vermont in the future.

Vermont's governor, Howard Dean, predicted early on that all the Legislature would allow for would be domestic partnership. In December, the *Boston Globe* quoted him with, "I think the Legislature will probably pass a domestic partnership act guaranteeing equal rights... There is no possibility a gay marriage act is going to pass." Other officials, including State House Speaker Michael Obuchowski, supported his opinion.

In opposition to Dean and Obuchowski, some Vermont lawmakers are now predicting that with the recent passing of the "civil rights package," the rest of the nation will follow in granting equality towards gay couples. In discussing this possibility, the *New York Times* reflected on Hawaii where in the past refusing gay marriage proved to be a form of sex discrimination. However, gay marriage is still not legally acknowledged in Hawaii, nor is it in any other state in the nation.

While the Judiciary Committee sets out to write up a domestic partnership bill to bring to the House of Representatives, Vermont's Legislature is being bombarded with right wing protest to the passing of such a bill. It is clear that this is a divided issue in Vermont, among both leaders and the public.5

Further information on Vermont's bill can be obtained at the following web sites:

<http://www.glad.org>

<http://www.vtfreetomarry.org>

<http://www.vtmarriageaction.org>