

Women's Center Newsletter

September 2006



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A Note from the Director

The anticipation and excitement that surrounds a new academic year far exceeds that of a new calendar year. There is something very special and rewarding about the anticipation of everyone returning to campus, welcoming new students, and executing the plans developed during the summer months.

In case you did not know, the Women's Center staff had an industrious summer, to say the least! If you look in the Women's Center you will see new furniture, a new floor, and a new library system. Thanks to the library staff (Bob Dilly in particular), we have merged our holdings with the library holdings and you will now find our books on the Voyager database.

We also hosted the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) Conference this summer, and what a pleasure it was to host this pro-feminist men's organization. You can find out more about NOMAS and view the schedule at www.nomas.org.

The Women's Center is a vibrant place, with many resources and events. Please stop in and get involved. Throughout the first week of classes we will be having free giveaways (affectionately called "consciously cool collectables") and candy, so if you need an excuse to come in, you have one! We have an exciting schedule of fall events that you will find in this edition of the newsletter, commencing with two annual events, the Women's Center Open House and Female Friendly Funk.

In this issue you will also find articles about the music industry and ways that you can support positive artists that are not producing misogynistic, racist, or homophobic music.

Please enjoy this issue, and best of luck to you this semester! - Mandy Restivo

Women's Center History

In 1974, it was decided to start a Women's Center at Ramapo College. Desire for the Center was related to having a Women's Studies program on campus. An aroused consciousness is needed to start a Women's Center and Ramapo certainly had one. Betty Tallen and the two women who had the adjoining offices to hers broke down the walls of their offices and that became the first Women's Center at Ramapo.

In the beginning, there were 5 women staff members who served as managers of the Center. In August, 1974, a half-

time director was hired. The celebrated search brought 300 women interested in the position. When the Center first opened, it was multifunctional, but on a limited basis. Emphasis was placed on crisis intervention; since Ramapo at that time had the only Women's Center in Bergen County, 20 to 50 women a week would call about being battered.

In the summer of 1977, the Center acquired a library of 300 feminist books. In 1978, the "Women's First Conference" was held here, which was represented by 20 feminist groups in the country. This brought further attention to the Women's Center.

Over the years, the Women's Center became an active place on campus. Clubs such as Feminist United and Ramapo Pride were started and programs were held regularly on issues such as women in culture, music, sports and more.

A challenge emerged in 1991, when it was proposed that the Women's Center be shut down. After countless letters written by Ramapo's students and staff, in addition to those in the surrounding community, it was determined that the services the Women's Center offered were invaluable to its supporters. Thus, the Center remained at Ramapo and continues to flourish.

Today, approximately 175 people utilize the Women's Center per week. The staff has expanded to include a Graduate Assistant, Office Manager, Queer Peer Services Coordinators, and a Men's Outreach Coordinator among other positions. The Women's Center is a place of empowerment and a symbol of Ramapo's commitment to diversity, understanding, and equity.



Music Matters!



• Misogyny is hatred of or strong prejudice against women. In feminist theory, misogyny is recognized as a political ideology - similar to racism or anti-Semitism - that justifies and maintains the subordination of women.

• Music can be enjoyable without degrading and offensive references. While there are issues in the world that need to be confronted via lyrics, derogatory terms are not necessary to get an artists' point across. What better way to make a difference than by supporting artists who don't support misogyny?

Hip Hop's Bad Rap?

By Dana Williams for tolerance.org

If the voice were in your home or on a street corner, it might terrify you.
Now I don't wanna hit no women when this chick's got it coming
Someone better get this bitch before she gets kicked in the stomach
And she's pregnant, but she's egging me on, begging me to throw her
Off the steps on this porch, my only weapon is force

But on the radio or from a CD, you're invited to sing along.
They are lyrics from "The Eminem Show," for which Eminem received the best rap album award at the 2003 Grammys.

And if industry nods of approval like the Grammys are any indication, lyrics promoting hatred, objectification and exploitation of women are increasingly accepted as authentic forms of artistic expression - particularly in some rap and hip hop music [but not exclusively].

Though Eminem has received a great deal of flak for his woman-hating lyrics, he is merely one of many artists cashing in on misogyny. But at what cost to society?

A very high one, according to Dr. Gwendolyn Pough, assistant professor of women's studies at the University of Minnesota.

"It definitely has an impact on young women - especially young black

women," said Pough, who teaches a course called "Women, Rap and Hip Hop Feminism" and currently is writing a book about black women in hip hop culture.

"There are messages in the music that tell us what we should do to be desired - and in some cases, respected. I do believe there is some connection to those messages and how some young women view themselves or behave."

Consider the lyrics of "Down Ass Bitch," by popular rap artist Ja Rule.

If you'd lie for me, like you lovin me
Baby say yeah
If you'd die for me, like you cry for me,
Baby say yeah
If you'd kill for me, like you comfort me,
Baby say yeah,
Girl I'm convinced, you're my down ass bitch

"There's a trend now in rap to talk about the 'ride or die chick,' - a girl who will do anything for her man," said Pough. "That music can create a mindset for some people. And right now, there is a growing prison population of women in jail for their relationships, in jail for selling drugs and committing crimes for their boyfriends."

The connection to misogynistic music and behavior may be evident in other areas of young people's lives, too, says Dr. Michael Rich, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Boston and spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics' Media

Matters campaign.

"The music portrays this kind of dating violence and coercion around sexual activity as normal relationships," said Rich.

"I see an acceptance among teenagers - both girls and boys, of the kind of sexual objectification celebrated in this kind of music. There is this notion that it's okay to be used for sex and that there is not any emotional commitment necessary."

That sense of acceptance is one of the reasons the AAP started its Media Matters campaign in 1998. In addition to lobbying for stronger music-industry standards, the program explores the impact of media messages on children's health and behavior and advises pediatricians and parents about addressing the problem.

"Media are a source of information and a source where young people learn about relationships," Rich said.

"Although no one can claim a 100% causality for behavior, there is certainly a strong association."

"Young people have always listened to whatever is popular and anything that comes with a harmony or a nice beat is easier for people to accept," said Jenga Mwendu, 24. "But that's the problem - people may say, 'I'm not listening to the lyrics, I just like the beat,' when really those messages are sinking in whether it's consciously or subconsciously."

And the problem is compounded by radio, she says.

"Adults have a right to buy this music and listen to it. But children are exposed to it just by turning on the radio because so much of what's played on the radio is explicit and misogynistic." (continued on next page)



Many times, even “clean” song versions contain explicit messages.

Mwendo cites West coast rapper Nate Dogg's newest track, “I Need Me a Bitch.” Changed to “I Need Me a Chick” for radio, the core of the song remains unchanged:

I need me a chick, who ain't scared to flirt
I need me a chick in the middle of the grocery store she'll lift up her skirt
I need me a chick, like I need my crew
I need me a chick to pass on to my boys soon as I get through

"You can bleep out the dirty words, but the message is still there," said Mwendo. "It's shocking. It's a message that says women are objects, that it's okay to use women and just pass them along to your boys."

Mwendo says the music industry needs to accept more responsibility for what it's putting out, too.

"We know that the record industry puts this music out there because it sells. And those who sing it make more money," said Mwendo. "But we have to have a balance, and I think the music industry needs to be responsible and promote positive artists with positive messages too."

Still, Mwendo and Pough both say society can't fail to look at itself.

"Misogynistic rap wasn't created in a vacuum," said Pough. "We also have to look at how this music reflects society." For Mwendo, it's simply two sides of the same coin.

"Artists write and sing these misogynistic lyrics, but people keep buying it and the radio keeps playing it," said Mwendo.

"We live in a society that accepts misogyny. If they considered it too gruesome or extreme, it wouldn't sell. At some point, we have to look at what that says about the world we live in."

(Dana Williams, 2/28/03)



Make Room For Conscious Hip-Hop!

by Bakari Akil II for
GlobalBlackNews.com

There is a lot of negative publicity concerning Hip Hop these days. It seems as if every week for the last few years, hip hop artists have made headlines due to troubles with the law, warranted or unwarranted. In addition, many of these artists, who enjoy levels of money, fame, and companionship most people crave, constantly associate themselves with the world of drugs, guns, violence and misogyny.

Whether the images that most popular hip-hop artists portray are real or made for TV, most will never know.

However, for those who love the music but could do without the negative lyrics and lifestyles that are usually associated with the art form, the question arises: Is there room for positive/conscious (PC) listeners in hip-hop?

It is easy to write or comment about the negative aspects of hip-hop music because controversy and infamy has proven to be a hot seller in this society. But, hip-hop artists who rap positively or about political, social or economic empowerment receive scant attention.

Today, Positive/Conscious hip-hop artists are coming out more often and their styles and topics are diverse and broad ranging. Their beats are just as infectious as any other brand of hip-hop and they are bringing a sense of balance and reality that has been missing for a while.

Although most conscious hip-hop artists still do not receive the attention they deserve, many artists or groups such as The Roots, Mos Def or Common are gaining mainstream attention, which does not hurt when they are promoting positive values. In addition, with the influx of R&B artists such as Erykah Badu, India Arie and Musiq Soulchild who also promote positive conscious lyrics, PC hip-hop is gaining even more credibility and force.

For those who have given up on finding hip-hop that promotes growth and moving in positive directions or parents who are concerned about the music your children listen to, don't “jump ship” just yet. Positive/Conscious hip-hop is not often promoted on your average TV show, radio station or hip-hop magazine, but with a little investigation it can be found. There are more than enough PC artists to keep hip-hop in heavy rotation in your CD changer or to convince your child that “nice beats” can also be accompanied by even nicer lyrics.

Some Positive Hip Hop Artists

- KRS One
(Social/Political/Spiritual/Economic)
- De La Soul (Positive/Social)
- Mos Def (Spiritual/Political/Social)
- Dead Prez (Political/Social/Economic)
- The Roots (Positive/Social)
- Lauren Hill (Positive/Social)
- Wyclef (Positive/Social)
- Common (Spiritual/Social)
- Paris (Political/Economic/Social)
- Kam
(Political/Economic/Social/Spiritual)
- Talib Kweli (Positive/Social)
- Afu-Ra (Spiritual/Social)
- God-dess (Positive/Social)

Activism Corner



What can you do to support positive music?

*Listen to it! Go to concerts, buy CDs, and request music on the radio that does not have negative messages or connotations.

*Be a conscious consumer - buy music from artists/labels who are against misogyny.

*Talk to musicians! Ask them about their lyrics and what is important for them to convey through music.

*Organize a concert or coffeehouse in your community! Invite musicians and spoken word artists with positive messages.

*Start a band! Whether it's a one piece or more, you can create your own unique sound to spread positivity.

*Come to Female Friendly Funk on Thursday, September 21!

Welcome Back from Queer Peer Services

by Courtney Tobin

Welcome back! And welcome new students! Over the summer, we changed our name from Gay Peer Services to Queer Peer Services (QPS) to accommodate our growing and increasingly diverse GLBTIQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer & questioning) population.

Queer may once have been - and still is, in some environments - an example of hate speech, thrown around as a slur against all of those who did not fit in to society's standards, but has recently been reclaimed. Queer has become an umbrella term, used to describe the non-heteronormative community - that is, anyone who does not see heterosexuality as the only option, who does not ascribe to the gender binary that values only men and women, and anyone who identifies as anything other than a straight man or woman. In the words of Dr. Maya Poran, "Queer is a story;" queer describes the realities of all those people who do not fit into our often homophobic society. This includes gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, intersex people, queers, genderqueers, and a variety of other labels - including straight allies, if they so desire.

We are not asking all of our community to identify as queer - indeed, one of the rights that we as a community hold dear is our right to choose or reject labels for ourselves. We are simply changing the name of our organization to best reflect the diversity of our community, and to welcome as many people as we can.

We've changed a bit more than just our name over the summer. As many of you know, one of our Coordinators, Deshawn Cook, left us to work exclusively in Residence Life. However, Will Mazur & I are still here in our same positions of Academic and Events & Services Coordinators, respectively. There will be one support group this year; the general group will meet on Mondays at 9:30, just like always. I'll be running it for a change, because Will is working with a subcommittee of DAC to make our campus even more inviting to the GLBTIQ community.

Of course, just like Gay Peer Services, Queer Peer Services is here to serve the community first. We've done our best over the summer to prepare for a new year with all of you, but we're always open to new suggestions. Come to the Women's Center and talk to one of us if you have any thoughts or ideas. And, as always, we're also here just to chat anytime you want. Hopefully we'll see you soon. Welcome, and welcome back!

Women's Center Events

Ins & Outs of Roommates Coming Out

Tuesday, September 12

9:30 pm Location TBA

QPS Coordinators, Courtney & Will, will meet with students who have concerns about coming out to their roommates, or about their roommates coming out to them. All students are welcome to come and participate in this discussion.

Women's Center Open House

Tuesday September 19

3:30 - 6:00 pm Women's Center

Come and enjoy our new atmosphere and hear about our programs and services. Presentations about our services will be given at 4:00 and 5:15.

Female Friendly Funk

Thursday September 21

7:00 pm J. Lee's

Enjoy music with a conscience and learn how to support pro-feminist, gay affirmative, anti-racist bands and musicians.

Unitarian Society of Ridgewood

Sunday, September 24

10:30 am Depart from Visitor's Circle

QPS has arranged to bring a group of students to the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood to participate in a spiritual service. This Society provides a safe environment in which to express individual beliefs and values, and to be respected as a part of a spiritual community regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, ability, or any other identity.

Queer Peer Services Support Group

Every Monday

9:30 pm Women's Center

The QPS support group is a peer run group in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and questioning (LGBTIQ) students can meet to discuss issues related to the community.



Women's Center Mission

To advocate on behalf of women to ensure an equitable environment.

To help women empower themselves, realize their strength, find their voice, and discover their options.

To strengthen the understanding, communication, and connection among people so that we can work in alliance with one another.

To work to end all forms of discrimination, including those based on ability, age class, ethnicity, gender, race, and sexual orientation.

To offer programs to celebrate women's creativity and accomplishments, and to promote understanding of women's studies and multicultural scholarship across the disciplines as a part of students' intellectual development.



Women's Center Services

Crisis Intervention Counseling

The Women's Center provides counseling for anyone in need of assistance with a crisis, problem, or issue. The Director or a peer will listen and discuss any concerns you may have with confidential support. We are here to identify options and provide any information or referrals you may need.

Advocacy

The Director serves as an advocate for all students, faculty, and staff in regard to discrimination, harassment, assault, or violence. The Director provides confidential assistance and supports all individuals in filing a complaint or utilizing the college judicial/grievance system.

Resource Collection

The Women's Center offers an extensive library collection of material concerning Women's Studies and multicultural literature, including books, reports, fact sheets, articles, videos and a variety of pamphlets. We can provide individualized assistance on research projects.

Books are available for a two-week check out period.

Safer Sex Supplies

The Women's Center promotes responsible intimacy and safer sex. Our condoms are 10¢ each and include Extra Strength, Snugger Fit, Extra Large, Ribbed, Rough Rider, Dual Pleasure, and Kiss of Mint for oral sex. Dental Dams are 25¢ each and are available in a variety of flavors including strawberry, banana, mint, grape, and vanilla.

Educational Programs

How can you get involved? Throughout the year, and especially during March, the Women's Center organizes workshops and hosts speakers to enrich your college experience. We sponsor educational campaigns on a variety of issues such as body image, relationship violence, and more. We also offer assistance to Resident Assistants and all student clubs and organizations in designing programs, and sponsor special events for Women's Studies minors. Let us know what programs you would like to see, or better yet, let us help you plan one.

Annual Women's Leadership Retreat

Let your inner leader emerge! The Annual Women's Leadership Retreat focuses on what women bring to leadership. The retreat allows you to explore yourself, develop your abilities as a leader, increase your confidence, and appreciate the diversity among women's experiences. Contact the Women's Center for applications and more information.

Queer Peer Services Coordinators

The Queer Peer Services Coordinators provide peer counseling and advocacy for students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered as

well as students who may be questioning and/or struggling with their sexual identity. Other services include a resource collection on LGBT issues and educational programs on sexual identity.

Men's Outreach Coordinator

The Men's Outreach Coordinator provides peer counseling and advocacy for students who have questions or issues on domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual violence and rape. Other services include programming, forums, and conferences that encourage men to become involved in preventing violence against women, and explore masculinity. There is also a growing resource collection on men's health and masculinity.



Reproductive Justice

Reproductive rights, the foundation for women's self-determination over their bodies and sexual lives, are critical to women's equality and to ensuring global progress toward just and democratic societies. These rights include:

1. The right to a full range of safe and affordable contraception
2. The right to safe, accessible and legal abortion
3. The right to safe and healthy pregnancies
4. The right to comprehensive reproductive health care services provided free of discrimination, coercion and violence
5. The right to equal access to reproductive health care for women facing social and economic barriers
6. The right to be free from practices that harm women and girls (such as female genital mutilation)
7. The right to a private and confidential doctor-patient relationship

(Center for Reproductive Rights)

Why are women being denied reproductive justice?

In the continuing assault on women's right to abortion, the majority male and millionaire Senate voted 65 to 34 on July 25 for a bill ironically named "Child Custody Protection Act" that makes it a federal crime to help a young woman obtain an abortion by crossing state lines to avoid parental notification laws.

Is this law necessary? Those who support it claim it's needed to defend parental rights. But in reality, there are a number of important reasons why a young woman would go to another state for an abortion and not want her parents to find out! Incest, rape, fear of punishment for getting pregnant and fear of being forced to carry an accidental pregnancy to term are obvious reasons.

That contradiction only exposes the bill's real purpose: to further limit, stigmatize and punish a young woman who wants an abortion and to make it virtually impossible for her to avoid a pregnancy she doesn't want. The bill will force a young woman to carry an unintended pregnancy to term, thereby exposing her to parental retaliation and totally denying her reproductive rights.

Who will be hurt the most by this bill? Poor young women of color, particularly those living in rural areas, who already have the fewest opportunities in the capitalist U.S. That makes this bill not only sexist and anti-youth but racist and anti-poor as well.

Passage of this bill is yet another in a long list of reasons why those who support women's rights need to fight to defend them.

(Workers World, 8/6/06)

International Women

Working to End Violence Against Indigenous Women

The United Nations estimates that one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime-usually by someone she knows. Violence against women and girls is a universal

problem of epidemic proportions that shatters women's lives, harms families and communities, and undermines development and the enjoyment of other human rights.

The likelihood that a woman will be targeted for violence-and the forms that violence takes-are shaped not only by gender (the social roles that men and women play) but also by one's race, class, caste, religion, sexual orientation, geographic situation, ethnicity, and other identities.

For Indigenous women, violence occurs in a context of ongoing rights violations against their communities as a whole. Indigenous Peoples have survived the systematic expropriation and exploitation of their ancestral lands, which are the source of their cultures, identities, and wealth. This attack has left Indigenous communities among the poorest and most marginalized in the world and has contributed to violence against Indigenous women in several ways:

1. Gender-based violence was a main weapon in colonial conquests of Indigenous lands. Indigenous women were targeted for rape as a weapon of war in Guatemala during the 1980s. Since the 1990s, Indigenous women in Chiapas, Mexico have been subjected to sexual harassment, rape, forced prostitution, and compulsory servitude in paramilitary camps. In Kenya, the legacy of British colonialism continues to produce violence against Indigenous women. As recently as the 1980s and 1990s, at least 1400 Indigenous Samburu women were raped by British soldiers stationed on their lands.

2. In communities worldwide, gender-based violence increases when men are threatened by poverty, discrimination, displacement, cultural disintegration, and other crises that have disproportionately affected Indigenous Peoples.

3. Many Indigenous traditions include an egalitarian understanding of gender relations that have helped combat violence against women. However, these traditions have been eroded by colonization and capitalism, while power disparities between men and women-the root cause of violence against women-have been reinforced. Today, most Indigenous women have lower rates of literacy, health, education, and employment than Indigenous men. As in

non-Indigenous communities, there is a close correlation between women's economic dependence on men and physical abuse.

4. Indigenous women are effectively denied access to most public services-including education, medical care, police protection, telephone service, and transportation-that could prevent or redress violence. In fact, public services are themselves a site of violence against Indigenous women. In numerous Latin American countries, Indigenous women seeking professional healthcare have been forcibly sterilized. Many rural Indigenous women do not speak Spanish-the language of public education, mass media, and the courts. Even programs to combat violence against women usually do not include segments designed by Indigenous women and therefore do not adequately address the problem as it affects them.

Indigenous women know that combating violence within their communities is linked to ensuring the collective rights of those communities, such as sovereignty and self-determination. Strategies to end violence against Indigenous women must therefore work to defend both Indigenous women's rights within their communities and the rights of their Peoples as a whole.

(MADRE, 2004)

On the Web



Visit the Women's Center website at

<http://www.ramapo.edu/studentlife/womenscenter/>

for

Staff Profiles

Positive Music Links

Hot Topics Reference Links

and much more!

Newsletter created by Elyse Jankowski