Celebrating
THE
WOMEN'S
STUDIES
PROGRAM

HIGHLIGHTS:

POETRY
ESSAYS
SHORT STORIES
FILM REVIEWS
EVENTS
Through the doors of identity

**JULIA SANTOS**

Who am I? What makes up an identity? Are the events which constantly reoccur in Dreams part of who I am?

I am Making myself out of paper and lace... a hand first, its fingers smooth and gray... too dense and heavy to be confused with My body, its model reaches palm and wrist, and is joined to an arm.

Await!

At the elbow there's an eye, and among the collar bones hides a half-opened mouth waiting for demands.

the hull and warmth inside these legs once gave a sweaty release to greedy men and women. It has become difficult to trust and hate others.

Instead, people come for understanding. They open the doors in search of another's salvation story.

Queen America says, "live for yourself, follow if you intend to be followed, Conform!"

Her picturesque beauty satisfies the American icon... upon holding her I feel cold and dead.

With scissors I have clipped her clothes off left her bare... we have begun to point fingers

Still America continues to feed man a capitalist dream. Man swallows shards of glass, with a soft crunching sound, head bobbing like a bird...

He becomes a machine, engulfing the rocks of modern life.

In search of freedom, I will metamorphosize... skin crawling across the sand like a snake's.

Wings are beginning to form, they are hollow and papery... suffocation holds me apart from flight... from closing up the shell which holds my internal organs.

As one can see... I have created for the viewers a landscape of what my life has felt like.

OPEN

THE DOORS OF MY HISTORY...

IT HAS CREATED AN INDIVIDUAL

WHO IS LEARNING TO FLY.

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The Clothesline Project

Between three and four women are killed by their batterers every day in this country; 40% of all emergency room cases consist of women with injuries resulting from battery or assault by their partners; one in four female and one in nine male children suffer from child sexual abuse; and over 100,000 women are raped in the United States each year. Most people never hear their stories. To raise awareness of these issues, on Tuesday, April 21, the Women's Studies Program sponsored the Clothesline Project, a national project which bears witness to violence against women. Clotheslines were strung across the quad in front of Talbott Hall Library, with clothing designed by students at the College. The tee-shirts bore messages like: "Daddy, you can't buy my love" and "It doesn't have to be until death..." and "Break the chain of violence against women." Bedsheets paying tribute to women of African descent who were raped and abused under slavery were designed by one class; another class designed a sheet for survivors of child abuse and incest. Stacey Williams of the Babyland Family Violence Program in Newark spoke about violence against women, Louise Walpin discussed the impact on children of child abuse, and Priscilla Orr and several students read poems they had written about these issues.

This project would not have happened without the energy and perseverance of the following faculty, students and staff: the designers of clothing for the clothesline (including Sisters in Support, Nursing Juniors and Seniors, WS 255, HIS 208, SOC 333, SOC 490, Sigma Gamma Rho, Lambda Sigma Upsilon, Mu Sigma Upsilon, Sigma Phi Delta, the Psychology Club, the Honors house, and others), the staff in Lynn Mertz's office did the publicity for the project; Abby Kane and Harry Creary dedicated time and expertise; Lynn Mertz worked with Carol Contella to organize the set-up; Priscilla Orr and the Gallery contributed the materials including tee-shirts, sheets, paints, cloth, etc.; Sandra VanDyk contacted local agencies and arranged for information tables; and thanks especially to Caroline Eason, Regine Gerard and Sakina Brehon for infusing the project with their spirit and time. The Women's Studies program plans to make this an annual event and hopes that participants in this year's project will donate their shirts to future Clotheslines at the College.

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**The Labor Room**

*The Labor Room* is a publication of Bloomfield College's Women's Studies Program. This issue was produced by the following students:

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Dean Epps  Lynn Mertz  Priscilla Orr

Barbara Machtinger

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America

Edward Testa

America
fine fortunes to be found
Few have something,
many have nothing,
yet, all bless it.
Profound!

Employed,
ambitious,
hard working,
downsized,
profiting.
drug dealers,
sound like capitalists?

If it wasn’t for such spacious skies,
many would be living in the tropics
feeding their families
nothing
nothing but the fruits of happiness.

Malcolm, Martin, and Mumia
have been silenced.
Bill, Al, and Newt can reform you now!

The gates have always been open,
open for all, all with the white last name

Greater opportunities!
Opportunity
to become homeless
to get murdered
are much greater.

Justice for all,
the American way.

Take in the street, get a number,
take in a suite, get numbers.

Democracy,
for whom?
You?
just the few,
that’s who!
Some swing from the elephant’s trunk
others from the asses’ tail
most with a rope around their throat.

Land of promise!
Promise to burn
in the Eurocentric melting pot.
Promise: your mind will bleed
like a slit wrist
mind raped by the few that feed it!

“In the Closet of the Soul”

Vera Porter

There are some things that happen to us in our lives that we prefer to lock away and just not remember. While reading “In the closet of the soul,” I remembered an incident that happened to me many years ago in school. Since the good ones are always with me just below the surface of my mind, this remembrance had to be an unpleasant incident. It is a very painful memory that has affected me adversely all of my life. I really thought I had forgotten it but apparently it was just buried waiting to be released.

It was an event that was the turning point in my life because of its viciousness. I was in the seventh grade in what was called Junior High School. The neighborhood and the school were predominately white. In my class of twenty students there were two black girls of whom I was one. My teacher Ms. Gaillard was white-Irish. It is important to say I was an honor student who got on quite well with my class mates. It was time for the class to elect a class president. I was nominated along with two other girls. The class elected me by a large majority. When my name was announced as the winner, Ms. Gaillard refused to accept me. She offered no reason to the class or to me. The class elected me by a large majority. When my name was announced as the winner, Ms. Gaillard refused to accept me. She told the class I could not be president. She offered no explanation to the class or to me. The election was held again and one of the other candidates was elected.

I thought this pain was long ago forgotten and buried with some other baggage but, Alice Walker’s story brought it all back. This act by a teacher left an ugly mark on me. To this day, I prefer not to run for office. If I am chosen I can and will accept. However, I will not accept any kind of nomination for an office. The humiliation I suffered as a child was too painful to ever willingly go through again.

I remember this woman very clearly. She had gray hair and light eyes. She was middle-aged and heavy. She also walked with a cane. Since she never gave a reason for her petty action, I was forced to draw my own conclusions. I was only around eleven or twelve at the time and I believed she resented a black child being president of a class of white students. I will never really know. I do know that she ruined my self-confidence because she made me feel there was something wrong with me that should preclude me from being president of the class. However, I realize now by letting this painful incident back into my mind that this is the reason I do not accept nominations for any office where a vote is involved. I never really thought about why I always declined any nominations. Perhaps, now that I have brought it to the surface of my mind and analyzed it I can feel confident enough to face an election for office.

Ms. Walker is right when she says we should let the unhappy ghost of the past into our selves because then we will be able to put them to rest. I will never know why Ms. Gaillard refused to have me as class president of the seventh grade. However, now that I have brought it back and reviewed it, I realize it no longer matters. The next time I am nominated for an office I will put this new found self-confidence to the test and accept.
Growing up, I can remember feeling awkward. I was too tall, all bones and angles. My home life was different from my friends. They had fathers who lived with them all the time, a concept I didn't understand. My father was absent most of the time, visiting us on rare occasions. These visits are remembered as a period of intense preparation for someone very important coming. He would stay about a month and, quickly, without warning, leave.

My father was in the US Air Force. My mother told me that early in their marriage, she would travel with him to different bases. When I was born, she elected to settle in one place while my father traveled the world. Their decision, while it was meant to help the children, shattered the innocence of my childhood.

One day, when I was eleven years old, a stranger came to the door to see my mother. He handed her a paper. She looked frightened and asked him who could possibly be suing her. The Sheriff replied that she was being sued for a divorce. This news hit her like a lightning bolt out of the blue. In that instant, she became a victim who never recovered.

This event also meant that our economic status changed. We went from middle class to poor overnight. This added more weight to the burden I was carrying. As the eldest, I became my mother’s confidant. She shared all of her fears and none of her hopes with me. She wailed about her lot in life being horrible because of my father’s behavior. She hid the fact that she was divorced because this was not something that happened in her religion. I learned to hide it too, although I didn’t understand why. I only knew that I was different, and different was what I didn’t want to be.

I didn’t know that I had grown up in a dysfunctional family until I was well into my adult years. The word didn’t exist earlier, but the meaning did. I knew that I couldn’t fit in so I didn’t try. I learned to converse without confiding. I learned to hide my soul from the world. It is only in the last decade of my life that I can say “I have recovered, I’m OK!”
Darlene, the Mother Child

MARIBEL HERNANDEZ

She knew her grandmother would be leaving soon, as she heard the keys rambling between her grandmother's fingers. Darlene was five, her younger brother was three and the baby, he was a year old. It was a daily routine when grandma finished dinner and headed out to work. Darlene watched her from the peephole giggling, while her grandmother adjusted her stockings, making sure they were even.

Darlene admired her grandma. Though time had aged her, it had not taken the best of her. She was still a lady. A lady who carried herself proudly. Darlene watched her now just like many other times when she was getting ready for work. It was something she couldn't get enough of. Grandma was a formal lady who dressed appropriately down to her style of shoe. She knew exactly what her grandma would wear because of her shoes.

After she said her goodbyes, Darlene hurried to her grandmother's closest. Since she always watched her grandmother, she knew how to open the closest. Darlene pulled out her grandmother's necklace with matching bracelet and earrings. She pranced around the room wearing grandma's silk evening jacket, which had been covered in plastic from the cleaners. Benny put on one of her many feathered hats. Since he hardly had a father figure, he could only imitate his grandmother's whinnying.

The baby was sound asleep. As he lay restless in his pampers with the bottle half way out, his lips still posed as he sucked away in his dream. Darlene hushed her little brother, reminding him that the baby that was sleeping. Immediately, Benny covered his mouth with grandmother's long sleeves. She cuddled the baby as she covered him with a blanket. Carefully, she closed the door behind her, leaving only a shadow.

They stood on the bed and fought over the center of the mirror. Eventually they became exhausted by their own imaginations and impersonations. They both placed their grandmother's belongings back in their confinements. They hid every trace of their performance. Darlene made sure that the jacket was left untouched. They both hurried to the kitchen, tip-toeing across the wooden floor, avoiding any sound that would awaken the baby. Their spectacle was fresh in their minds, as they waited on the kitchen floor. Benny still had grandma's bobby pin; she had so many of them, perhaps she wouldn't notice that one was missing. They sat against the stale wallpaper, which barely resembled what it once was. Darlene picked up her doll from the same place she had left it earlier. She picked it up as though it was the first time she saw it. Despite its smudged body and finger-marked face, she held it close to her, holding up its blond hair, revealing its blue eyes and red lips. She sat next to her brother as the doll stood in between. Darlene wrapped her arms around her brother, as he toyed with the bobby pin against his knee, pinching it and discovering new features.

As Darlene and Benny sat down waiting for grandma to get back from her night shift, they stared at an old wooden clock. The same old clock that had watched their play. Darlene was beginning to discover a crack at the corner of the dividing walls. She eagerly snatched Benny's bobby pin and he stood up as though prepared for battle. Darlene was too amazed to notice Benny's outrage. Benny searching for attention, picked up her doll which she had thrown across the room.

Darlene made her way to the corner of the dividing walls, as Benny threatened the doll's life. After a while, Benny surrendered to his curiosity, as he joined his sister with their new discovery. As Benny began to yawn, the baby's pampers could be heard as he fidgeted in the next room.

Darlene grew bored of meddling with the crack; she still remembered that strange night when a piercing voice called for the door to be opened. Darlene had insisted on turning off the lights, while Benny stood in darkness, searching for grandma's hand towel that lay on top of her drawer. Benny's cries for the hand towel startled the baby and Darlene hurried as she searched her way into the darkened room. The baby was too tired to realize Benny's despair. After patting her baby brother to sleep, Darlene quietly slid off the bed to calm Benny's fury. She knew that the hand towel would make him fall asleep. Perhaps it was grandma's sweet perfume that lured him to sleep. For now, she had to put aside the curiosity of Benny's obsession and find the hand towel that held magic for Benny's dreams. Through the darkness she found grandma's hand towel and wiped away Benny's madness. She washed his face like grandma would do and changed him into his pajamas. The sirens could be heard as they drove down the street. Benny peeked through the shades in hopes of satisfying his curiosity. Darlene patted him on his back, consoling his wonder. She grew tired as she lay between her two younger brothers. She knew grandma would be home soon as the night guided them into the world of dreams.

I WANT TO BE AN EGYPTIAN PRINCESS

HOLLY REDEL

Wrap Me In Lazuli
Embrace My Arms In Gold Bangles
Caress My Dark Skin In Royal Silks
Satin
Taffetas

Crown Me With A Gold Tiara
Imprinted With The Words
Of The Goddesses
Embossed With Sapphires
Jades
Diamonds

Wrap Your Arms Around My Jeweled Waist
Enchant Me With Your Amber Eyes
Gold-Laden Fingers
Dark Mane
Blood Red Lips

Place Me Upon A Throne Of Gold
Shower Me With Treasures
Of Spices From The Far East
Silks From China
And Wines From Greece...

Imprison Me With Your Love-
Like The Silks Which Caress Me.
Film Review: “Once Were Warriors”

ALISE ALMINEUR

Violence against women and children is clearly depicted in the film, “Once Were Warriors.” Although the story takes place in modern New Zealand and focuses on male-female relationships among the Maori, the behavior patterns identified in the film are very much present in our own society. Men have always been taught to be tough, aggressive, dominating and controlling; women, on the other hand, have been taught to be gentle, passive or submissive. These gender roles greatly affect male-female relationships everywhere.

The film explores interactions between members of a family: Jake, the husband, Beth, his wife, and their five children. Jake is out of the house all day, either at work or at the bar with his friends. He is hardly ever at home with his family. Beth stays home and cares for the kids, like all women have been taught to do.

At the beginning of the film, Jake comes home and tells Beth that he got laid off from work. She becomes very upset because she has no income to support her children; she depends on Jake. He is supposed to be the financial provider and she is supposed to be the homemaker. From his perspective, she is useless; he is unaware that attending to the children’s emotional needs is just as important as taking care of their financial needs.

Left without a job, Jake spends his whole day and all night at the bar with his friends, drinking, smoking, and getting into fights. It turns out that he brings these behaviors home where he uses his manhood and his toughness on his family. He is very abusive—physically and emotionally—especially to his wife and eldest daughter.

Under the influence of alcohol, Jake is violent. Otherwise, he is generally loving towards his wife. One night, Jake and Beth are singing and kissing and having fun at a party at their house. For the moment they seem really happy. A few minutes later, when they are both drunk, they act as if they are two completely different people. Beth refuses to cook some eggs for Jake’s brother. Jake smacks her. She spits at him. He slams her against the wall, and punches and kicks her all night, as though he were fighting with one of the men at the bar. Then he rapes her. The next day she wakes up bruised and deformed; she can’t even walk or sit down.

Beth’s friend arrives and is not at all surprised to see that Beth has been beaten up: “Same old story,” she says, “women should keep their mouths shut and their legs open.” Apparently, this situation is not new to her; she has seen it many times before. Jake comes in and acts as if nothing has happened. He tells Beth to “go clean yourself up. Looking at you makes me sick.” To their daughter, Gracie, he adds, “You’ll end up just like your mother.” Jake clearly has no bond or relationship with his children, not even his sons. It is obvious that he does not care about his children, or if he does, he doesn’t know how to show it. And, Beth, not unlike many other sufferers of domestic violence, continually makes excuses for Jake.

The worst form of abuse depicted in the film is sexual abuse. One night at one of the parties, Gracie is raped by her uncle. He tells her that it is their secret and that she shouldn’t tell anyone. After the rape, Gracie seems totally disconnected and lost. She runs out of the house to see a friend who lives in an abandoned car. Although she has never done drugs before, she decides to smoke dope. She becomes a different person. This may not have happened if her father had paid more attention to his family.

In the end, Beth decides to leave Jake and move back to her family with her children. At one point in the film Jake talks about how his family had at one time been enslaved; at the end of the film Beth tells him, “You are still a slave to your fist, your drink and yourself.” He was a big, tough man who thought he had to control everything. But alcohol and his anger seemed to control him and he was always ready to use his fists to solve his problems.

The film touches on many problems which serve to destroy the family: a battered wife, a sexually abused daughter, a son in custody of the State, and a son who joins a gang. Evidently, the mother and her children are abused in many different ways. They are clearly the victims but are not the only ones who are suffering. The husband is a threat and poses a danger to his family and to himself. His anger and his drink control him and he doesn’t know any other way to communicate except by using his fists.

It is true that battered women need help to repair the damage that has been done to them; but batterers also need help. In order to deal effectively with these social problems, I would advocate first abandoning the traditional approach which frequently blames the victim for his or her situation. I would adopt a feminist approach which seeks alternative solutions to help people cope with the problems that confront them. Consideration of environmental factors would help us to analyze the whole family and to identify the main problems that cause the husband to be abusive. Alcohol was one of the most immediate problems. A substance abuse center would be needed to help the father deal with his alcohol dependency.

After dealing with his alcohol problem, I would advocate finding more employment opportunities. A good job would create a sense of responsibility and power for the father and would also help to keep him out of the bar. A good job would also help the eldest son who had joined the gang; having had nothing to do all day had left both of them vulnerable to social pressures.
Feminist social work practice recognizes domestic violence and the sexual abuse of children as symptoms of social problems like oppression, inequality and the subjugation of women. This practice is concerned with gender roles, attitudes and expectations which affect male-female interactions. Violence can be prevented by encouraging partnership rather than dominance and subordination in relationships (Feminist Practice in the 21st Century, p. 325). Men have to be resocialized so they can stop thinking they need to be in control all of the time. To address this issue, I would create programs that would help develop equal relationships. Another important aspect of a family-centered, feminist approach to social problems is to encourage empowerment. This can be designed for both men and women so that they recognize power as "an internal source of personal control rather than as control over others" (p. 268). As a society, we have tolerated domestic violence for too long. If there were equality among the genders, men would not feel the need to dominate all the time. There should be more community support groups that help the victims of domestic violence as well as the perpetrators of violence to share their experiences. More treatment programs are needed to help men deal with their problems of control, in order to break the chain of violence against women and children.

State of Womanhood

Sakina Brehon

Sister, you’re looking for a man to understand you,
No man ever will
Sister, your cause is great,
But you’ve been looking in all the wrong places
My Sister Child,
When will you learn to lean back and enjoy the air you breathe?
My Sister Friend,
Take your time for I’ve been waiting for you
on the other side of the track for a while now,
and a little longer won’t hurt
My Sister Poet,
Will you comprehend the words I’ve waited to whisper to you?
I will understand you better than any man.
You are my kind,
My Sister Sufferer,
you’ve been running in thirst,
water awaits to quench your desire.
My Sister,
you are living the journey incomplete,
al I can do is squeeze your hand and tell you to go on.
No, I cannot shelter you from the pain because there are no joys.
Life, part of the rule is that you have to live on.

WRITING the BODY

Julia Santos

When tears begin to cloud my eyes or pain gets trapped
within my heart, I write. Dreams and words seem to be the only escape. I like to write stories or metaphorical analogies to go along with the pain. It eases my inner conflicts and makes them more bearable. When I write down these emotions and then read them aloud, they sound like someone describing a dream. In essence, when I write it is to leave the world I am currently in, through deep, fantastical thoughts. My writing shows this in the images that I try to put into words. Some people label this type of writing "creative" or "poetic" writing; I call it "deep thoughts". These people are impressed by the poetic writing while I am relieved to know that the pain will be forgotten for at least a little while.

This pain comes from being born into a body I do not belong in. I have always noticed the injustice and inequalities of the world. This causes me grief: to know that there are other people starving and suffering because of racism. As long as this body listens to society, she will not belong. I am white, radical, and a woman. The "normals" (people who listen to society and never form their own beliefs) wonder where such an odd combination comes from. Could it be the college I am attending, "the wrong crowd," or the books I am reading? All of these are justifications made by the "normals" to reason out my craziness. They say things like, "Why are you like this? You have everything you need, you are not suffering, stop flogging someone else's cause!" This makes me feel helpless, like I do not belong in this body. I scream back, "I cannot ignore such ignorance and inequality!"

The normals continue to try and rob me of my beliefs. They try to discourage me, they fear my boldness, and warn me about getting in trouble. I feel like I do not belong in my body because what I believe in does not exist in the minds of most white women. I have read about African history; I know of its great civilizations. I realize that Egypt was way ahead of its time and that European scholars stole many of its ancient secrets. I also understand how the dehumanization of Africans still affects them today. I would like to wake up the masses of zombie-like people. I wish they would realize that there is more to life than material objects; that happiness does not solely derive from the amount of things one can accumulate. I want to teach children about the history they have never learned about, something else besides Columbus, Washington, and Lincoln. This brings me pain; the fact there are adults and children who do not know about their histories or where they come from. These people are blinded and believe the history of Europe is the only one that matters. This is why I feel like my body is not in accordance with the mind inside of it. I would rather let my brain float in the air, to drop words on paper for others to read and acknowledge, but never to have to see where it comes from.

My refuge comes in writing, teaching, and finding people with minds like mine. I would like to make a difference. I want to be remembered upon death. Existing in this world as a woman is very difficult. Men sometimes take advantage of our bodies. I also write about how sexual abuse can affect women's lives. In writing about my experiences I hope to let other women know that they are not alone, and that they are understood. I would like all of the dirty men with itchy underwear to know where "we" as women come from.
Green Carpet,
In Four Seasons

HOLLY REDEL

A patchwork quilt lies in the forest,
silent dense plushness spread indefinitely
like pulverized jade in mortar and pestle--
Spring.
New threads stretch towards the skies
Summer creeps on tiptoe--
verdant lushness embracing every
footstep,
raindrop,
like two lovers stretched in the cool blue shade.
Days grow longer,
Nights colder,
The patchwork quilt loses its tenderness,
liitered with
specks
of
crumbled
leaves
like
tissue
paper.
One snowflake,
then another,
surrendering to definite slumber beneath
soft white snow.

Kaleidoscope Fantasies

JULIA SANTOS

If I were a man
I would be a part of that “father-son relationship”
I have always fantasized about.

There would no longer be
lonely corners to sit at
in little chairs

The light outside the window-
whose paint flakes off of it
like the skin of burned summer bodies
would turn from a bruised purple
to a gleaming yellow.

And... If I were to wish upon a rainbow
I would capture all of its
colors, tints, and hues
in a baby-food jar.

Although I would love
to experience all of this,
I would rather be contained
in my female, almond shell.

The Women’s Studies Program

The Women’s Studies Program consists of curricular and co-curricular components. The curriculum is interdisciplinary spanning the arts, humanities and the social sciences. Students interested in focusing their studies on gender issues from feminist and humanist perspectives can elect to carry a minor in Women’s Studies. Requirements for the minor include at least six Women’s Studies courses -- two of which are seminars (WMS 255: “Changing Women’s Lives” and WMS 334 “Junior Seminar”), and four other courses which are cross-listed with departments such as Philosophy, Psychology, History, Sociology, English, etc. Ten Women’s Studies courses will be offered this coming Fall 1998, two of which are new (WMS 225: “Philosophical Perspectives on Women” and WMS 333 E2: “Social Welfare Institutions”). In addition, WMS 417: “Feminism: Theory and Practice” will take the place of the required Junior Seminar.

To find out more about the Women’s Studies Program, call the Co-Coordinators: Sandra VanDyk (Humanities - ext. 278) or Erica Polakoff (Social and Behavioral Sciences - ext. 776), or visit with us in Seibert Hall! Note: Barbara Machtinger is on leave until Fall 1998.