

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will." - Charlotte Bronte

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Gender Visibility

As a little girl in the early 1950s, I was aware that boys and girls were different in an anatomical way. Fifth in birth order in a family of thirteen children, I noticed that boys had an appendage that girls didn't. I also noticed other differences. The boys were never told to wash dishes, clean the house, do laundry or cook. I wasn't exactly sure what boys were supposed to do. I don't remember seeing them much. Sometimes they worked in the fields or woods with my father, but I also worked in the fields, carried water from the spring, and chopped and carried wood. I assumed that the appendage the boys had somehow limited their ability to do "women's work."

When I grew breasts, I noticed that I, too, had become limited. My father told me that I couldn't go to high school because I "didn't need an education to change diapers." This ideology became a problem for me. I read a lot and had always assumed that I could become whatever I wanted to be. My older brothers had joined the Army or Marines, and my one older sister didn't want to go to school. She was a waitress in a small town café where she met a soldier that she married the day she turned sixteen. I was only thirteen when I graduated from eighth grade, and instead of going to high school, I was sent to work as a babysitter for another family while the parents worked in town. My responsibilities included feeding the farm animals, as well as caring for a six-month-old and a three-year-old girl for most of their waking hours. I loved the kids and didn't see the scenario as unusual; after all, my older sister had taken care of the family's oldest

child until their next baby was born.

My mother worked all day on the farm alongside my father when she was able, so when I was fourteen, I was left at home to care for my three younger siblings most of the time. A particularly poignant memory for me is helping the young son of an African American hired hand clean the chicken feeders one night; we cried together about our not being in school. When I was fifteen, my mother got very sick and had a kidney removed. The doctor also said mom was pregnant, and at the age of forty-seven, she gave birth to my youngest sister. From then on, passing for eighteen, I helped support the family doing factory work until I was really eighteen. I was numb and felt a need



to get away.

A bus took me a thousand miles away, where I married within a year. Eleven years later I was without a husband and caring for two sons while holding a job and getting my GED. My pursuit of education was a problem for both my first and second husband. While married to my third husband I attained my Associates degree. I acquired a career in quality control and marketing in the electronics industry. My pay, however, never got close to that of my male peers—it seems as if our social structure still holds on to the idea that women are less deserving than men. I'm now a senior in college, and in spite of a social system that sometimes still seems to deny opportunity based on body parts, I persist in seeking a better life for myself and for my grandchildren through my own education.

—Venida Isabelle
(Photo is of Venida's grandchildren.)

From the editor

In *The Gendered Society*, Michael Kimmel recounts the moment "Gender Visibility" became evident to him. While sitting in a discussion group, he listened to a white woman insist to an African American woman that their gender bonded them in spite of race. From there, his account of the conversation proceeds as follows:

"When you wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, what do you see?" [The African American woman] asked.

"I see a woman," replied the white woman.

"That's precisely the problem," responded the black woman. "I see a black woman. To me, race is visible every day, because race is how I'm not privileged in our culture. Race is invisible to you, because it's how you are privileged. It's why there will always be differences in our experience."

At this point, Kimmel had a realization.

"Well," he said, "When I look in the mirror, I see a human being. I'm universally generalizable. As a middle-class white man, I have no class, no race, and no gender. I'm the generic person!"

Kimmel's eyes were opened to what women have dealt with for centuries. Women, and especially non-white women, are constantly reminded that they're still underprivileged. Though there have been movements to change this, there's still oppression like child marriage and laws restricting women's rights. In more recent years, some women and men have attempted to make society a little more "Gender Blind".

This edition of *Attune* offers some interesting perspectives on these issues as well as other topics ranging from finances to cultural differences in showing affection. We hope they will inspire you to contribute your own observations or simply consider working with us on the next edition. We are currently seeking apprentice writers and a co-editor.

—Jessica Smith

Child Marriage

Most parents in modern American society wouldn't want their 11-year-old daughter to get married anytime soon. After all, she's just entering the process of becoming a woman. Yet, in many regions of Egypt, India, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, girls between the ages of 11 and 13 are the brides of choice. These girls are rarely married to boys their own age, but are usually married to men their father's age or older. In some of these countries, it's considered unusual, sometimes even disgraceful, for a girl to reach sixteen and not be married. For many Americans today, this is an unthinkable age to be married. The average age for marriage in the U.S. is 26-27 years old, a decade later.

Child marriage has extreme dangers. Most of these young girls are just reaching puberty and although they may be able to become pregnant, their bodies are not ready to carry a child, nor are they emotionally or mentally ready to become mothers. According to UNICEF, pregnancy and child birth is the leading cause of death in girls aged 15-19 in developing

countries; the death rate for young girls who become pregnant is twice as high during the pregnancy or childbirth than women in their twenties. The babies are also less likely to be healthy.

These young girls are at high risk for developing vaginal and anal ruptures from giving birth. They're also at a higher risk for becoming infected with STDs. They have little to no access to contraception, and due to being married so young and being expected to stay at home, they often have little education. Child brides are at a higher risk of becoming victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and murder. They're usually socially isolated; the only women they have much contact with are their mothers and sisters who also faced childhood marriage.

The *L.A. Times* printed a story about child brides in Yemen and the actions being taken to protect them. According to the article, a 12-year-old girl named Sally Sabahi

was forced to marry a 21-year-old man who repeatedly raped her. Sally's family told her that it was acceptable, and her husband and family even drugged her with painkillers so her husband could easily force himself on her. She eventually found out what was happening and began to hit herself with glass bottles so she wouldn't fall asleep.

The Public Broadcasting Service compiled statistics about child marriage worldwide and the results are alarming; if child marriage continues at its current rate, more than 100 million girls will be married within the next decade. This means 25,000 child brides *every day* for the next ten years.

Margaret Green, director of Population and Social Transitions and the International Center for Research on Women, says "Child marriage occurs when there are few other options—when parents see no viable future for their daughter apart from her traditionally prescribed role in the family. Education provides

alternatives. Education can lead to employment, to earnings, to an economic future worth investing in—for the sake of the daughter, for the sake of the family, for the sake of the community." Education is a necessity for both children and parents. India, for example, has actually cut their child marriage rates nearly two-thirds by providing educational opportunities.

The United Nations' Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on leaders around the world to support the developing world's push to ban child marriage. The UN is doing what it can, but because the tradition is so ingrained in some societies, it's a slow process. UNICEF's Global Girls' Education Program operates in more than sixty countries to educate people in an effort to stop child marriage. UNICEF suggests, "this is another step in a growing movement to end the silent despair of millions of children, especially girls, who are being shuttered away in lives often full of misery and pain."—Cassandra Wilkerson

Sexuality is a personal issue that elicits a strong response in most people. Control of their own sexuality is basic to many of the rights for which women have fought. My intention is not to tell anyone what to do with his or her sexuality, but I have observed a disturbing trend among many young women and men today: casual sexual relationships that may undermine their sense of self worth.

According to researchers Robyn Fielder and Michael Carey, "Penetrative hookups may lead to an increase in distress in females." One feature of this distress that was identified in their report, *Predictors and Consequences of Sexual "Hookups"*

Precious Essence

Among College Students, is the inability to remain emotionally uninvolved despite initial intent (Fielder & Carey 2010). The study showed that men, on the other hand, experienced less emotional involvement and when regret was registered it was usually related to physical satisfaction.

A University of Florida study, *Hooking Up and Hanging Out*, identifies consequences of casual sexual encounters. Casual sex may have negative effects on psychological well-being, can interfere with the development of relationship skills and competencies needed for healthy long term

relationships and can lead to an increase in sexual risk-taking (Daniel & Fogarty 2007).

These reports highlight many of the psychological impacts of casual sex relationships, but to many, sexuality has a third component: spirituality. I believe sex is a powerful force that is deeply tied to our personal identity. Human sexuality is precious and valuable. The sharing of our bodies is an avenue to our spiritual being, the essence of who we are as humans. The vulnerable opening of ourselves through the sexual act is an essential part of deepening a relation-

ship with someone we care about and trust. Treating our bodies as if they are not attached to our heart, psyche and spirit can be a painful mistake.

Sexuality is not a commodity to be bought, traded or bartered; this is the basis of slavery, prostitution and arranged marriages. Sexuality is not a marketing tool to make the latest products appealing. Our sexuality is not a cheap trinket to be thrown out like a Mardi-Gras necklace, only to be trampled by the traffic the next day. Our sexuality is a powerful and precious essence of the root of our humanity. Respect yours.
—Johanna San Inocencio

Affection or Affectation?

After meeting for the first time in the Women's Center, Hiromi and I found ourselves deep in conversation. I talked about my hometown (Crossville, Tennessee) and how I had never been far away from home. Hiromi spoke of her hometown (Fujisawa, Japan) and how this was her second long-term stay in the U.S. When the topic got to our families, our discussion heated up as we discovered a huge difference in the way we show affection. I started telling her about the relationship I have with my family and she followed by explaining the relationship she shares with hers.

"My family is very emotional, physical, and passionate about showing love. I do not go to bed without calling my parents to say 'I love you,' I do not leave my house without giving my

parents hugs, and until the day I moved out I never went to bed without kissing them good night. When I get home from school each weekend my parents always greet me at the door with a big hug and kiss, lunch waiting for me on the stove and a freshly made bed. Even my younger brother tells me how much he misses me being around the house to hang out with," I said, in an effort to explain how affectionate my family is.

Hiromi responded by describing the way her family expresses their feelings. "When I go back to Japan once a year, my parents first welcome me with warm words and a smile. Compared to hugging and kissing, the gesture may seem less affectionate. But this is not so. I can feel, in their more subtle gestures, their love and care. It also shows in the dishes my mother prepares, the warm fluffy com-

forters that have been sun-bathed and my father repeating 'You must be exhausted.'

Many Japanese feel that love between close ones is something understood and does not have to be expressed all the time. The more concrete the love, the less it needs to be shown. Some (often males) even view affectionate gestures as annoying, showing off and/or unreal. Having lived in the U.S. for 6 years, I know that this idea is not true. But it shows how foreign the gestures of hugging and kissing are for many Japanese."

We couldn't easily end this discussion about physical affection and the cultural expression of love, and we even asked others in the Women's Center to



join our conversation. The U.S. and Japan have contrasting cultures; one speaks English and the other Japanese, one uses a knife and fork to eat and the other uses chopsticks. So, it's only natural that our expression of love is different too. But we found our cultural similarities as well. Both of our families put a lot of effort into making our homecoming as comfortable as possible. What we agreed on in the end was that both of us are fortunate to have a family who loves and cares for us.

—Cammie Keck & Hiromi Kawamura

Feminism is a word that is not likely to come up in common conversation, but if it did come up would it even be understood? It is something that runs deep within the heart of its activists and offers so much more than just "advocating the rights of women."

Feminism has a rich history. It started with individuals, like Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Adams, who spoke out against systems that subjugated women. However, these women did not call themselves feminists. They just spoke out against injustices that they had experienced. Alarming, it was more than fifty years after Wollstonecraft died that any organized action was taken.

The first women's rights convention in America was in Seneca Falls, N.Y., in 1848, with another reform move-

ment taking place in England during the 1850s. The success of this first wave of feminism included higher education for women, property rights for married women, and better child custody rights for divorced and separated women. Unfortunately, this wave was not able to earn women the right to vote. The right to vote was finally won in the U.S. in 1920 and in the U.K. in 1928.

The second wave of feminism began in the 1960s with a focus on social and legal equality for women. Some of its major successes were the Presidential Commission on the status of Women, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Women's Educational Equity Act, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of

Making Waves

1978. However, just as the first movement didn't earn voting rights for women, this movement didn't succeed at having the Equal Rights Amendment added to the constitution. (This amendment was written by Alice Paul in 1921, and it simply states that men and women have the same rights under the law.)

Many say that we are in a third wave of feminism, but there is still much that needs to be accomplished. In many countries, women are subjected to government-sponsored inequality and discrimination which renders them unable to make what we would consider basic decisions about their lives. Women from all around the world, even

here in the U.S., are bought, sold and trafficked into prostitution. In workplaces, gender discrimination is still a major factor in what jobs are readily available to females. Women are still routinely beaten at alarming rates, and there is still a sense of prejudice against bisexual, lesbian, and transgender females.

Women have been working to improve their lives and those of other women since the beginning of time, but it is their more recent organized efforts have been recognized and referred to as the Women's Rights or the Feminist movements. Labeled in whatever way, women continue to work on behalf of themselves and others towards equality.

—Casey Anderson

Your Money Matters

According to the U.S. Department of Education, women now account for the majority of undergraduate enrollment and degrees awarded. They also make up just under half of the workforce. As women begin to take charge of their education and their careers, it only seems natural that they should also take control of their finances. Unfortunately, according to several recent studies, while women seem to be getting better at *making* money, they aren't making any remarkable strides at managing it. Financial literacy among women is still lacking when compared to men.

Financial guru Suze Orman advocates that women have a better understanding of their financial resources. In

her book *Women and Money: Owning the Power to Control Your Destiny*, Orman says, "Women have been thrust into an entirely new relationship with money that is profoundly different from anything we have encountered before. The shifting roles of women at home and at work have dramatically changed where and how money interacts with a woman's life." It is this transition that demands that women acknowledge the power and obligation they have to become fiscally responsible. Unfortunately, many of them just don't know where to begin.

Women face some unique issues that affect their earnings beyond just childbirth and maternity leave. They are

often the managers of their family's domestic affairs in addition to their own career, leaving little time to contend with the latest Wall Street news. With nearly 41% of marriages ending in divorce, women often find themselves restarting their lives as single parents. Their longer life expectancy means that many women may find themselves widowed in their later years. These roles require some level of financial savvy to navigate them successfully.

Websites such as dailyworth.com and learnvest.com are tailored towards women and their unique financial perspective. While the task of managing finances may seem daunting, these websites have purposed them-

selves to providing information that is easy to access and understand. Along with books like Orman's, there are plenty of tools to educate even the most financially naïve. It takes time, but it is an investment that guarantees a return. As student loans mount, financial aid dwindles, and life gets more complicated, it is important to have a financial roadmap in place before college is over.

TTU's Women's Center has many resources available for checkout, including Orman's *Women and Money*. This is the perfect time to start taking control of your financial security and to ensure yourself the ability to make sound decisions about the money you expect to earn as a result of your efforts to further your education and credentials.

—Sunshyne Morack

How green is your monthly?

Think of the number of tampons flushed, the multitudes of pads and pantyliners continuing their slow decay in landfills around the world, and the accumulation of plastic tampon applicators that will never degrade, but break down into smaller and finer plastic particles. Periods are killing the planet.

Think about it. According to the book *Flow: The Cultural History of Menstruation*, the average woman will throw out 250 to 300 pounds of "pads, plugs and applicators" during her lifetime.

Now imagine that you had an alternative to these possibly chemically-tainted resource hogs: something safe, something reusable, and something that can hold more menstrual fluid than a tampon. What if I told you this product *does* exist?

The menstrual cup is a small device designed to rest within the vagina to catch menstrual blood and uterine lining. The cups are made from either silicone or natural rubber, depending on which brand you buy, and are shaped like a bell with a pronounced, thick rim that forms a seal along the vaginal walls to prevent leakage. At the base, each cup has a flexible hand-

hold in the shape of a cylinder, a ring, or a ball that serves as a grip during removal.

The cups can be used for up to 12 hours without being emptied. Yes, emptied. As the name implies, they are *literally* cups that catch your menstrual flow instead of absorbing it like tampons and pads. This makes them reusable and also necessary to empty.

Also, just like bras, there are different brands and cup sizes to fit every woman. Some brands are longer than others and will hold more, which is good news for those with heavy periods, and others are shorter and can only hold as much as the average tampon. As for the actual cup sizes, most brands have two options; one is recommended for women younger than 30 or who have not had children and the other is recommended for women over 30 or who have given birth.

Due to their nonabsorbent material, menstrual cups have never been linked to Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS), an often fatal condition caused by the build-up of chemicals in the cells of the vagina or by improper tampon use. An added bonus of their rubber or silicon design is that they're



easily sterilized with boiling water between periods and can last up to ten years before needing to be replaced.

Imagine buying one menstrual product every 7-10 years— or more than one if you like, especially since they now come in a vast array of colors. At an average price of \$30, you're spending hundreds of dollars less than you would on all of the pads, tampons and panty liners you use on a monthly basis. The cups can be found online at Amazon, Ebay, and through company websites like gladrags.com. Don't be alarmed if this all sounds just a little awkward to you; after all, you probably had the same reaction the first time someone told you how to use a tampon.

—Haley Smith

Gender Blind

What if the stereotypes associated with gender didn't exist? Would society start to view an individual as a *person*, rather than as a man or a woman? These questions made Kathy Witterick and David Stocker of Toronto, Canada, start to think about a world without gender. They proposed that children are treated differently based entirely on their gender, and that this treatment can have adverse effects on the children. Consider children's toys. The "girl" aisles are almost always drenched in bright pink and glitter. The selection of toys ranges from Barbie dolls to baby dolls, some shouting out things like "I love you, Mommy!" Now take a look at the "boy" toy aisles. These aisles are littered with plastic work benches, fake weapons, and toy motorcycles. All of these toys mirror what society is trying to tell us: boys should be physically active, tough, and strong whereas girls should stay at home and take care of the family.

Kathy and David decided to not let this message from society influence their children's lives. Their oldest child is a spunky five-year-old named Jazz. Jazz is biologically a boy but doesn't like to be limited to that. He loves to wear his hair up in pigtails as well as parade around the house in dresses and call himself "pretty". His parents received some harsh remarks about their decision to let Jazz dress up as a princess for Halloween last year. Many other parents thought the decision was foolish and that they were only confusing Jazz, rather than helping him. However, Jazz's parents disagree wholeheartedly. They say that all of the so-called "girly" things Jazz likes make up who he is. Essentially, they want Jazz to be able to explore his gender identity.

The couple decided to take an unusual approach with their third child. Right after Storm Stocker was born, they announced that they would not be disclosing the child's sex to anyone but immediate family and midwives. The news of this shocking decision soon became viral, and they started receiving feedback from people around the world. Kathy commented, "The strong, lightning-fast, vitriolic response was a shock. The idea that the whole world must know our baby's sex strikes me as unhealthy and voyeuristic." It seems that everyone has a different opinion on how Kathy and David should raise their child. Some child development experts think it's great that Storm is being raised free of gender stereotypes, but warn the parents of the risks of "experimenting" on their children. Others completely disagree with what Kathy and David are doing, saying that raising a genderless child is essentially taking away the child's sense of self. Dr. Eugene Beresin, director of training in child and adolescent psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, even went so far as to say, "To not raise a child as a boy or girl is creating, in some sense, a freak."

It seems that we are so accustomed to treating males one way and females another that we don't know how to treat someone without referencing gender. Our society has made great strides toward gender equality, but perhaps Baby Storm's story is proof that we still need more tolerance of flexible identity expression and less emphasis on labeling a child as just a boy or girl. Kathy and David's attempt to push the limits on this is, at least, an attention-grabbing message that makes us think about the effects of gender constraints on children. —Savannah Cassidy

A Victory For Saudi Women

Many of Tech's international students from Saudi Arabia rejoiced after Saudi Arabian king Abdullah announced that women will have the right to vote and run in municipal elections. This announcement will help to improve women's conditions in Saudi Arabia while relieving an orthodox law restraining their freedom.

"As a sociologist, I hesitate to prescribe any specific policy for those of another culture, but any increase in personal autonomy for women is progress," said Women's Center Director and associate professor of Sociology Gretta Stanger.

Saudi laws forbid women from practicing freedoms such as gaining a higher education and traveling or marrying without the permission of a male guardian. It is also illegal for women to drive. A Saudi woman

found guilty of driving in July was sentenced to 10 lashes, according to BBC NEWS.

"I am handicapped in my home country; if I want to go somewhere I need special permission from a male guardian. I used to wait outside my home every day at 6 a.m., afraid to keep my driver waiting," said female Saudi student Fatihma Alabbad.

Male heirs of King Abdul Aziz Al have ruled the Saudi government since 1992. The Quran is the foundation, and laws are formed based on Saudi interpretation of Islamic Sharia law.

"I never imagined in my life that my king would make such a wonderful decision," said male electrical engineering freshman, Ayidh Alqahtani. "Saudi Arabia is the world's largest women's prison but it will change soon".

—Dhir Joshi

New Books at the Women's Center!

- Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Society
- Macho Paradox
- College Girls: Bluestockings, Sex Kittens, and Co-eds, Then and Now
- Ladies First: Women athletes who made a difference
- Bitchfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine
- Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development
- Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation
- The Rise of Enlightened Sexism: How Pop Culture took us from Girl Power...
- DVD: Rosa Parks Story

These books and many others are available to check out at the Women's Center

***Attune* Spring 2012** **Call for Submissions**

We want *Attune* to be relevant and interesting for our readers and are seeking fact-based articles on any topic profiling and empowering the lives of women. Students, staff, and faculty of all backgrounds are encouraged to submit articles of 600 words or less.

If you have an idea for an article but are not sure that you would like to write about it, send us your topic suggestions. We may be able to help you develop your ideas or do research of our own. Or, if you would like to write but do not have a topic selected, we usually have plenty of ideas to share!

Email submissions to womenscenter@tntech.edu
or drop them off at the center.

Submission Deadline: February 10, 2012

Items submitted early provide the best opportunity for editing and publication.

Get Involved!

The Women's Center has volunteer, HPEO and internship opportunities. Work-Study positions are also available for interested students upon interview. Write for our newsletter, help plan, create and host events, hang fliers and other publicity, or create bulletin boards and other informational displays with our staff.

Interns can receive course credit hours.

Sociology and journalism majors are encouraged to intern but we are open to students from all approved departments. Build your resume, put your knowledge to work and help your campus community.

Get Connected to your Women's Center. **Join us on facebook!**

Check out upcoming events and links to news affecting women nationally and internationally.

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=141764045318>

Or search Women's Center at TTU

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Many thanks to all who contributed to this issue.

Visit our website:
<http://www.tntech.edu/women>

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