

ATTUNE

I've always felt that sexuality is a really slippery thing. In this day and age, it tends to get categorized and labeled, and I think labels are for food. Canned food.
—Michael Stipe

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But Words Can Never Hurt Me: "Re-Languaging 'Women'"

In her 1996 work, *The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women*, Marilyn Frye calls for an "independent" category of women that is not a "patriarchal construct" (Frye 1996, 998). She maintains that society currently defines women as "not men" and that this results in negative connotations of women (Frye 1996, 994). For instance, decisions that women are typically judged by: whether they marry, have children or choose not to, stay at home with these children or work, etc. . . . are **not** measures of men's worth because, according to both Frye and de Beauvoir, men are the center but women are "the other" (de Beauvoir 604).

The key problem with the "not man" definition of womanhood, she would argue, is that it forces one to think in terms of false dichotomies (Frye 1996, 1000). Thus, women are judged as sluts or teases, straight or gay, smart or stupid, stay-at-home mothers or working moms. These false dichotomies breed inherent tensions among women that men are not subjected to. They are men: the patriarchal center of society. This is reminiscent of her much earlier essay, "Oppression," in which she first delineated these double "binds" for women (Frye 1983, 81).

These double-binds are still obvious today in the language of sexual practice in our popular culture. The language associated with young men who are sexually active is typically positive with some of the most common phrases being

"player," "stud," "playboy," and the less positive but glamorized in hip-hop "pimp." Indeed, the very idea that a heterosexual male would not be sexually active as a young adult spawned the movie spoof "The Forty-Year-Old Virgin."

Note, however, the degrading, misogynist phrases for young women who are sexually active. According to male and female TTU students, these include: "promiscuous," "slut," "whore," "hoe," "skank," and "tramp," among others. Reflecting yet another double-bind, conversely, young women face the accusations that they are a "tease," "prude," "Mary," "bitch," or a "lesbian" if they will not agree to have sex. The language and impact seem to have become even more harmful since Frye's original 1983 essay, according to lesbian author Suzanne Pharr (Pharr 2004). It is time for women to "construct" their own terminology, because, until then, these words will always hurt us.

—Dr. Lori Maxwell,
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Letter From the Editor

Whore. Gay. Prude. Has being called such names ever affected your sense of self? Stupid question. Of course it has. Such labels are meant to hurt. The trick is to be comfortable enough with our sexuality to acknowledge the origin of the label thereby taking away its power.

This issue of *Attune*—the sexuality issue—includes a range of articles expressing the authors' perspectives on various aspects of human sexuality. The complex nature of sexuality and the arguments that occur when discussing it are displayed particularly in two articles dealing with sex education in schools. One side argues that the lack of sex ed. in their high school left graduates unaware of all of the possible outcomes of sex and how to prevent the unwanted ones. The other contends that the abstinence program offered by their school seemed to result in an increase in teen pregnancies. The popularity of the topics of teen pregnancy and birth control seem to correlate the two issues in my mind. In fact, one article calls for the government's help in preventing teen pregnancy, while another seems to argue that lowering birth control prices should be the action taken by the government.

Yet another topic addressed within the following pages is **tolerance**. Sexuality is an individualized trait. It should not be labeled. It should not be subjugated. It is something with which we all need to become comfortable. It is up to all of us individually to decide where we stand. Where you stand is up to you. Find your own perspective and respect those whose perspectives may differ.

—Tara Bates

Sex Education In Public Schools

Unsafe sex, unwanted pregnancies, sexual insecurity, and the risk of catching a disease are all problems that could be prevented if the proper precautions were taken. What would you call a “proper precaution” though? Proper precautions against unsafe sexual practices could be any number of things. No one could argue that abstinence is not the surest and safest precaution. However, as a young adult, I realize that it does not always work that way. Abstinence is not always that easy. Knowing this, we might as well deal with the fact that young women and men *do* have sex.

When I think of ways to control or at least ease the problem of unsafe sex, one thing really sticks out in my mind—mandatory sex education in schools. But should it be mandatory? I realize that some would argue against

mandating sex ed. They would say that if we informed students about sex, students would be encouraged to experiment. Then somehow the sex ed. teacher would be blamed for the experimentation of the students. I totally disagree with that argument, though.

The real question we should be asking is why we are not ready to take all of the effective precautions to prevent such social problems as teen pregnancy associated with unsafe sex. I know that whether we teach sex education in schools or not, students will still learn about sex, and with sex education maybe they will actually learn something that will help them in the long run.

Sex education is not only informative about sexual intercourse. It could teach about a lot of things beyond safe sex-

ual practices and human anatomy. Sex ed. could teach students what they need to know about unwanted affection, loving their bodies, and other things that could really make a difference in some students’ lives.

I am from a small town, and sex education was not offered at all in my high school. Most things I learned about sex in high school came from other high school students—as if they really had any knowledge about it. Looking back on my lack of experience with sex education, I think it is ridiculous to not at least offer sex ed. in high schools. I feel as if I missed out on something that is really important to becoming a well-adjusted adult. I think not offering it also causes many students to miss great opportunities in their later years due to the consequences of unsafe sex. Without some sexual

knowledge, it is hard to understand certain aspects of maturity, the opposite sex, and even life in general.

When I was in high school, a couple of students became pregnant each year. This might not sound like very many pregnancies to you, but understand that there are only about 45 students to graduate from that school each year. In fact, during my senior year, one of my best friends became pregnant. She did not intend to, and I really feel that if our high school had taught us some facts about sex, she would have had a better chance of avoiding an unwanted pregnancy. While learning from your mistakes is part of life, I feel it would be nice if schools taught us how to avoid the biggest ones.

—Danielle Poore

Upcoming Events

March—Women’s History Month

March 13—Dr. Carol Ventura, Dr. Patricia Coleman, and Kimberly Winkle, *Women’s Art: TTU Women’s Vision*, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., Tech Pride Room

Dr. Paula Hinton, *An Iron-Jawed Angel Fights for “Ordinary Equality”: Alice Paul and the Vote for Women*, 5 p.m., RUC 342

March 18—Bonnie Askowitz, *Quilting-Women’s Art, Women’s Vision*, a Center Stage event, 11 a.m. shortened presentation in the Tech Pride Room, 6 p.m. longer presentation in the RUC Multipurpose Room

March 25—Patrice Gaines, *Finding Power in a World Fixated With Race and Maleness*, a Center Stage event, 7 p.m., Derryberry Auditorium

April—Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April 8—Clothesline Project, Tech Pride Room, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.

7:00 p.m., Take Back the Night, *Students Take Back the Night*, sponsored by Pi Sigma Alpha, Student Affairs, Tech Ladies Coalition, Women and Gender Studies, the Women’s Center, and the President’s Commission on the Status of Women.

April 22—Equal Pay Day

Birth Control Prices

Birth control prices have risen over the past few months; many women are paying double what they used to. Some prices have gone from \$10 a month to \$22 a month. How could these prices increase so much in such a short period of time? It is the result of a 2005 deficit-reduction bill which focused on a health insurance program for low income populations. Some women are choosing the option of switching to generic brands, but some wonder if these generic brands will work as well as the name brands. I have a friend who used the same birth control for five years at an affordable price. After she and her husband had a baby, she tried to get back on the same oral contraceptive, but she found that the price had doubled so she

is now using a generic brand.

Many women use birth control, so this should be something easy to obtain. There are many newlywed couples who look for inexpensive birth control because they do not have a lot of money when they first get married, and they are not ready to have children. Birth control should be affordable so they can save money for a house or other expenses which could help stimulate the American economy. I think birth control is something that should be easy for all young women to get because there are many babies that are born and not loved. Birth control should be available at an affordable price for teens so abortion does not cross their minds. I do not agree with premarital sex, but it is something that happens every day. When I was in high

school, I heard many stories and I saw many girls end up pregnant and resort to home schooling. Teenagers and women should be protected if they do not want children.

Since birth control is not covered by health insurance, it can add up over time. Birth control pills are sometimes prescribed not just to prevent pregnancy but to help regulate a woman's irregular menstrual cycle, help lessen the severely painful cramping that can accompany menstruation, and help ease the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome. Birth control pills can also help with other women's health concerns such as helping to prevent ovarian and uterine cancers, as well as pelvic inflammatory disease.

Several hundred thousand low income women depend on health care providers to give them birth control at a dis-

counted price. In the past few months they have not been receiving a discounted price. This increase has caused many health centers to discontinue dispensing birth control entirely. Some women have to cut costs in other places—like their groceries and other necessities—just to afford their birth control. The Prevention Through Affordable Access Act is something that could reduce the costs of birth control to what they formerly were. If you want to help get this act passed, the National Organization for Women (NOW) advises you to ask your senators to support it. Hopefully these prices will be lowered soon so that families may be planned for and well cared for.

—Rachel Dunn

A Culture of Sexual Exploitation

There has been an overwhelming growth of sexual exploitation in our society's mainstream media. Women, the victims of degradation and discrimination, have been the targets of sexually explicit ideas and perceptions. In particular, the hip-hop culture has been frequently condemned and accused of using sexually explicit messages in music, videos, and album covers. Rap music portrays dating violence and coercion around sexual activity as normal. The acceptance of such portrayals among today's youth has grown substantially, indicating the strong influence that rap and other forms of music have on young people. This media outlet is often a main source of information, providing society's youth with misconstrued ideas about relationships. Furthermore, hip-hop has negatively influenced

the images of modern day women.

Over the years, hip-hop has been condemned for its misogynistic exploitation of women. Many of its messages imply discrimination, degradation, and a negative sense of self-worth. By listening to the lyrics of a rap song, we are directly and indirectly supporting mainstream hip-hop that allows sexism and exploitation of women to continue. For example, the infamous rapper Sir Mix-A-Lot, in his video "Baby Got Back," portrays half-naked young women as objects of sex, lust and desire. Song lyrics, such as 50 Cent's "Candy Shop" degrade women's sexual identities. The chorus, "I'll take you to the candy shop, I'll let you lick the lollipop, Go 'head girl, don't you stop, Keep going 'til you hit the spot," implies that women are sex objects

used to please the male's desires and urges. In my opinion, these messages and images disrespect, dehumanize, and dishonor the status women hold within society.

I suggest that there needs to be a change in the culture and ideology of hip-hop. It is our society's job to educate people to be made aware that women's rights are being violated through this derogatory use of sexually explicit ideas. Many times, women are too compliant, and men exploit our images with our permission and cooperation, such as those females in Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Baby Got Back" video. It is time that we, as women, hold male rappers accountable for their oppressive words and actions.

It is disturbing to me that rap artists feel the need to degrade women sexually in order

to convey a message. I understand that music is a form of expression, but what are rap artists trying to say when they call women sexually explicit names and reduce women to objects of sexual desire? Our self-worth and identity are being compromised by a form of pure entertainment. Lyrics promoting hatred, objectification and exploitation are increasingly accepted as authentic forms of expression. Is this the message we want to instill in our younger generations? We need to examine what this says about our society. The mainstream media needs to take responsibility for its culture of sexual exploitation. Finally, we need to speak out against this distorted concept of women and sexuality, and insist on positive messages regarding sexual relationships and self-worth.

—Amanda Cannorozzi

What's Wrong With Free Milk?

If you want to catch a husband, you need to showcase the goods. You have to bait him, but not give him *too* much, or else that makes you a whore. You can only be a good girl—potential wife and mother—or a good-time girl—sexually promiscuous, not the kind that guys take home to mother. Does anyone still buy this? Do we still allow ourselves to be defined so blatantly as either wife or vixen, good or bad based solely on our sexuality?

This dilemma—the Virgin/Whore Dichotomy—has plagued women for generations. In the 1950s for example, to be labeled the whore of one's school was devastating. A girl would lose any chance of marrying well, and that was the shining achievement that society peddled to women of that era. Some girls were labeled whores simply for being different—enjoying math class or asking a boy to a dance for a change.

The Virgin/Whore Dichotomy seems doubly unfair when compared to the situation faced by men. Men were

often encouraged to sow their wild oats before settling down with a good girl. Essentially, the message we are presented with is that men are not real men unless they want sex, but women are whores if *they* want sex. This double standard can still be seen today. For instance, female rape victims are often blamed for the crime committed against them: “It was her fault . . . She was asking for it . . . She shouldn't have worn that skirt.” Men are expected to be sexually aggressive, so if they get out of hand, it simply makes them appear more masculine.

The entire situation leads me to ask why. Why is the label of whore so powerful? Why are rumors of sexual promiscuity so hurtful to women while at the same time men are eager to assume them? Emily White, author of *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut* suggests, “Slut rumors hinge on the fear of female sexuality and its mystery; they evoke fear of the woman . . .”¹ I believe there is some truth to this argument. People do tend to distinguish

themselves from things they fear by putting “the Other” into a reviled category. Rumors are a method of enforcing social values and essentially keeping women in check. We simply cannot have women running around who are at peace with their sexuality. The result of these rumors is that women are made uncomfortable with their sexuality. They are afraid to embrace it because to do so risks being affixed with a cruel label.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) concludes that this practice of labeling and sexual rumor spreading is an example of sexual harassment. *Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools* was originally conducted in 1993 but was updated in 2001. This survey determined that “the most upsetting examples of sexual harassment in school life involve speech as well as actions.”² In fact, 75 percent of students surveyed claimed they would be very upset if sexual rumors had been spread about them. This is particularly dis-

turbing when compared to the mere 69 percent of students who claimed they would be upset by someone spying on them as they dressed or showered.

Everyone should remember that words are hurtful. However, you should not be upset only because you fear that rumors will damage your prospects of finding a husband. There is more to life than that. Sexuality is something to be enjoyed, not coerced or repressed. I suppose the point that I am trying to make is this: You should not be worried that no one will buy the cow if they think they can get the milk for free. You should be offended at being called a cow.

—Tara Bates

¹White, Emily. *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 2002

²http://www.aauw.org/research/upload/ExecSummary_HostileHallways.pdf

Attention! New Editor Needed

Alas, dear readers, this is to be my last edition of *Attune*. I must graduate and move on with my life outside of academe. Unfortunately, this will leave a vacancy to be filled by a new editor at the Women's Center.

So, as my final act as editor of this newsletter, I would like to encourage interested parties to contact the Women's Center for more information (e-mail womenscenter@tntech.edu). Duties of the editor include: selecting a theme for the biannual newsletter, putting out a call for submissions for said newsletter, and editing any articles submitted to the Women's Center. Also, the editor should of course expect to write articles of their own, so if you would like an opportunity to voice your opinions in a printed medium, this is the job for you.

However, your power as editor is not absolute. You must work in conjunction with the other staff members, the Direc-

tor, and the secretary. In addition, you will cooperate with TTU Public Affairs and Printing Services as well as various other departments. In order to be considered for the position, applicants must be current students of Tennessee Technological University, recipients of the University Service Scholarship, prospective interns, or Work Study employees.

My experiences as editor and contributor to *Attune* have been very enriching. I am grateful for the opportunities my position has provided me to work on issues relevant to women today. If I have somehow inspired even one person to reconsider the way they think, I believe I have truly accomplished something.

Thanks for reading!
Tara Bates

~Our Readers Speak~

Hold the Door, Share the Elevator

Sexuality, as defined by the Webster Online Dictionary, is the quality or state of being sexual. In many instances we define ourselves by our sexuality. Society constantly judges people according to their sexuality. Whether it is sexuality in the sense of dress and attitude, sexual activity, or even sexual preference, sexuality weighs hard on all people of America.

Many men and women feel the pressure to obtain a certain degree of sexuality in today's society. Magazines are constantly picturing men and women of the ideal body type, the ideal clothing, the ideal person. These are all ideas based around sexuality. Skin tight shirts, short skirts, and bulging abs are all seen as ideal. We feel as a society that we need to reach this in order to be accepted in today's world. We must have that degree of sex

appeal. Society tells us that men should find women sexy when out in public. This is only one example of how we define ourselves by our sexuality.

We also define ourselves by our sexuality in cases of our levels of sexual activity. Those too sexually active are often labeled as whores and those with too little sexual activity are seen as prudes. This is unfair to people, especially to women. Society seems to be a little more relaxed in this labeling process when it comes to men. Regardless, this is often a problem in social settings.

Sexuality defines people most in the aspect of sexual preference. Being straight or gay seems to identify a person. As a whole, we seem unable to look past sexuality in this sense. Anything abnormal in this aspect is instantly

shunned by society. It becomes the most important thing to people. Many have trouble simply riding on an elevator with someone of the gay community. It makes us uncomfortable, and we want absolutely no part of it.

Defining ourselves by our sexuality comes naturally in today's world. However, in many cases it is hurtful. We judge far too harshly by these standards, shunning many people rather than accepting them as different. People are labeled and thus hurt by society. Somehow, America needs to find a way to look past this definition of a person. We are made of much more than our sexuality can speak of.

—Emily Brown

“Just Do It”: How Media Affects Our Thoughts About Sex

We have all heard the slogan “Just do it.” Nike made it famous many years ago, yet people still say it, and it remains well known today. Thinking about this slogan when talking about Hollywood, its meaning completely changes.

In today's society, the television really influences our culture's everyday life whether we realize it or not. Just as a child mimics the actions of its parents, our culture mimics what it sees on television, good or bad. About forty to fifty years ago, seeing people on television go any further than a kiss was shocking and considered x-rated. Now, if a couple kisses, it is nothing and making-out is still no big deal at all. Even kids do not see it as surprising. My point is that we should pay attention to what has changed and what we have become accustomed to. Think about going to the movies today. Seeing sex on the screen is even okay as long as the actors do not show “everything.” I keep wondering where we will draw the line. How much is too much?

Now, consider teen pregnancies. According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, the U.S. has the highest teen pregnancy rates in the industrialized world. When I graduated from high school, there were almost thirty girls in my graduating class who either had a baby already or were currently pregnant. I come from a small town and was shocked at the number of teen pregnancies in my school. We had abstinence programs and informed teens about the effects of sex before marriage such as pregnancy and STDs, but it seemed like the pregnancies only increased. I truly feel that movies have

been a major contributor because in our society, we make it appear okay to have sex whenever we feel like it and with whomever we choose.

Not only are movies and television an influence, but also popular music. Many songs speak of sex, drugs, alcohol, violence, etc. which kids sing along to. If children grow up singing these songs, the lyrics could have a brainwashing effect in that they will think the topics of the songs are acceptable and that “everybody is doing it.” Then society wonders why kids end up with addictions and engage in premarital sex! We have inadvertently told them that it is ok by allowing them to listen to anything they want.

I really feel like we as a nation should step up and take control of our increasing problem. We should inform teens in a way that almost scares them about STDs and pregnancy because they are after all a big deal. STDs and pregnancy can seem ruinous to a young person's life. In addition, many teens end up on welfare because they cannot raise a child without the government's help. This in turn affects the nation because the more people we have on welfare, the worse the effects on our economy. So, in a way, I feel the government should step in and propose solutions. Anything that would bring about a decrease in rates of teen pregnancy and STDs would be beneficial to our nation. Perhaps censoring popular films and music more closely would help change societal attitudes, too.

—Jaime Holman

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