

WO+manifesto

NEWSLETTER OF THE MSU WOMEN'S CENTER

NOVEMBER, 2008

How Do We Teach Tolerance?

By: Kelsey Joronen

An article in the Fall, 2008 issue of Teaching Tolerance, published by the Southern Poverty Law Center, gives tips on how to initiate the education of students, as well as ourselves, on the importance of controlling harassment. Teaching Tolerance interviewed Beth Reis, the Safe Schools Coalition's co-chair, for advice. The first few questions focused on anti-gay violence and harassment and how we as a society are doing compared to ten years ago. Reis points out the fact that more cases are being reported hopefully means that more incidences are being acknowledged and uncovered. She doesn't think there has been a sudden influx of hate crimes, but rather that as additional people become educated on how to handle these situations, more will be recognized as harassment.

Reis stresses the importance of acknowledging harassment at an early age, and explaining to children what and why certain behaviors aren't ok. She stresses that we, as adults, need to have an active role even after the problem has been resolved. It is also crucial to take harassment concerns seriously within a school's administration; even if there is opposition from parents to the subject matter, it must continue to be stressed. Reis explains that the only way to stop harassment is to confront behaviors immediately. She states that: "It's not enough to stop anti-LGBT harassment and violence after it's already happened. We must infuse the curriculum with anti-bias messages in the first place." (ctd. on pg. 2)

Montana Women Vote!

You Can Count on it...or Can You?

By Betsy Danforth

September's Sack Lunch Seminar, presented by Shelly Heilweil, organizer for the local chapter of Montana Women Vote! was both interesting and informative. It was disheartening to learn that though lower-income women are the most legislated population (many laws affect their lives in more substantial ways than they might other populations,) they are actually the least likely population to vote. There can be no doubt that women and children are highly legislated populations: from health care, to abortion rights, minimum wage increases, subsidized child care, funding for education, funding for domestic and sexual violence prevention and advocacy programs, and affordable housing concerns; legislation at all levels can have an enormous impact on our daily lives. The problem is, many people don't recognize this, and don't feel they have enough education or knowledge to make informed decisions about candidates or ballot issues.

The question then became, "how do we get people educated about and engaged in the political process?" (ctd. pg. 2)

(Tolerance ctd. from pg.1)

Tips on Addressing Violence and Harassment

- *Stop the behavior. If the situation allows, have a conversation about why it's not ok, what the consequences might be, and explain who could be getting hurt.*
- *Follow up. Let it be known that the situation isn't being ignored, and that it is being taken seriously.*
- *Thoroughly investigate the situation. Do not only listen to one side of the story, and get points of view from others who witnessed the incidences but weren't involved.*
- *If you are an administrator, bring up issues in staff meetings, let it be known that harassment will be taken seriously and all incidences will be acknowledged.*
- *When speaking with an administrator, be respectful, but don't back down. If you have no luck, an initiative may need to be taken to talk to supervisors.*
- *Educate! Anti-bullying education in the absence of prejudice-reduction education will reduce bullying only in the presence of adults and will fail to get at the underlying problem.*

NEWS BREAK!

In recent news, in our very own county, there has been a stride forward to protect the rights of LGBTQ students. On Monday, October 13, the Bozeman School Board added sexual orientation to the non-discrimination policy, with a vote of 6-1. In the October 14th edition of the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, Trustee Carson Taylor was quoted saying, "We really are at a crossroads. We can sit silently, or we can move things forward." Hopefully this giant step forward will send a ripple through to other school districts in Montana, and other states.

(ctd. from pg. 1) Since only a few of us were in attendance, the SLS took on a discussion format with Heilweil facilitating. The most important parts of MWV's work are registering lower income people, familiarizing them with the initiatives, laws, and candidates for which they are voting, and advancing policy that improves the lives of women and families. Accessibility and garnering interest are the two key issues. It is widely believed that women especially have the potential to be the swing vote in our state, and this alone should encourage us to head to the polls.

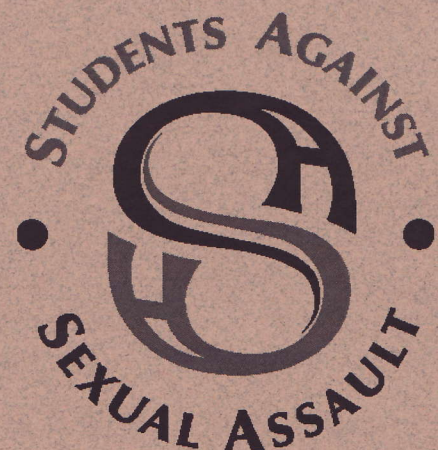
On a college campus, our challenge is not necessarily accessibility, since we have, in effect, a captive audience, but rather, it is apathy. How do we engage college students? What issues might they care enough about to get them to the polls? Funding for education? Employment rates and job opportunities? Accessibility to reproductive and abortion services? The vast majority of MSU students should be voting in their first national election, yet many are choosing not to vote. Though various campaigns to register voters have apparently been successful, one wonders how many students will actually make it to the polls. According the Montana government website, the percentage of registered voters who actually cast votes has declined substantially over the past few decades. (ctd. on pg. 3)

(ctd. from pg. 2) Conveying the importance of voting is challenging, not only to college students, but often to the average citizen as well.

As we well know, students digest information from their peers more readily, so it makes sense that we need to activate student groups who might lead their peers in the movement to vote. Potential voters can be overwhelmed by the choices they have to make, and Heilweil pointed out that many will fill in their vote for the presidential race, leaving the rest of the ballot blank. Admittedly, the multi-page ballot can be quite intimidating, and reading up on the initiatives time-consuming. Candidate choices can also be confusing for those who don't vote a straight party line. I found the mt.gov website to be extremely helpful with current ballot issues, and fascinating as a resource about voter history. Montana Women Vote's website also has tons of useful information regarding the candidates' opinions and priorities. Check it out at: www.montanawomenvote.org. Be sure to check out their new Montana state guide as well.

If you need a little extra inspiration to get you to the polls, or to convince your friends to do the same, think about our foremothers who fought so hard in the early 20th century for this basic human right. Remember Alice Paul, Dora Lewis, Lucy Burns and countless others who risked their lives to fight the patriarchal system to win the vote for women. Read up on the "Night of Terror" on November 15th, 1917 when 33 women were imprisoned and beaten by an army of guards in Virginia for daring to picket the White House, and watch *Iron Jawed Angels*, HBO's depiction of this crucial part of women's history detailing the lives of these heroines who were imprisoned and tortured when they dared challenge the status quo. Check out the American Memory website at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/suffrage/nwp/prisoners.pdf> to see pictures of the many women unjustly imprisoned for their work in the suffrage movement.

We are facing an extremely important election, so be sure to read up on the candidates and issues and get out there and vote... and strongly encourage your friends and family to do the same!



***BUST* : Got Something to Get Off Your Chest? This Rag's for You!**

Are you sick of the vapid shallowness of the “traditional” women’s magazines? Does it annoy you when



people tell you the many ways that you should change yourself to catch (and keep) the man of your dreams? Do you feel like ripping your hair out whenever someone shows you an article that tells you how to get the perfect, anorexic, celebrity-like bod?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be interested in *BUST* magazine. This inspiring publication is self described as a magazine “for women with something to get off their chests,” and it is just that. *BUST* is up to date with pop culture, but has some actual substance: think models with actual flesh, interviews with women who have real personalities and opinions, and stories about activists who are working to change the world. With a great regular DIY (do it yourself) feature, you can learn how to brew your own beer, make a computer cozy, and PIMP out your bike, among other fun projects. If you’re a music fan, *BUST* has pages of new bands and CD’s to check out. If reading or watching movies is more your thing, you are also in luck. This magazine is well rounded with something for everyone, and is filled with humor and wit. Interested? Come to the Women’s Center to check out new and old copies and other great feminist mags!

Who’s Your Role Model?

By Lauren Cerretti

Figuring out who we want to be as women is tough. It’s tough because we grow up with one set of notions, sometimes find new ones in high school through music or involvement with organizations or friends, then change and discover new things in college... and the process goes on and on. Throughout this whole life of processing, however, there is one constant: the media. In past generations, the media may not have always been such a huge part of women’s lives, but it certainly is now. Media—the radio, television, advertisements, the Internet, magazines—permeate all aspects of our lives, including our academic lives. There is no safe-haven from the media and it consequently ends up having an enormous influence on what we think, do, buy, and even at times, feel. This might be an acceptable situation if the media wasn’t biased; but by nature it creates and sustains (and strikes down) trends and popular thought.

The media is currently abuzz with political updates. Political debates, slander campaigns, and commentaries grace every media outlet from the Internet, the news, and MTV, to magazines like *Marie Claire* and *GQ*. In all of this noise, what is truly interesting to me is the media’s treatment of the two female candidates who have been in the presidential /vice presidential race.

Democrat Hillary Clinton is the first woman to ever run for President of the United States. She is a New York state Senator and has a strong record of working for health care reform and other social welfare programs even before becoming a politician. While covering her candidacy, much of the media dismissed this. They cared more about her looks, her age, and whether her attitude was pleasant or not. Various media outlets called Clinton unattractive, ugly, and in all seriousness, reported that she is now "too old." Even fellow democratic candidates seemed especially tough on her policies and political connections and history.

Placing value on a woman's looks over her intelligence is not a new concept; yet it is undeniably an arcane (and very common) way to gauge a woman's worth in our society. A woman's age, particularly in her later years, tends to be an established way to insist that she is now useless, since she is "past her prime." Historically, a woman's "prime" comes long before a man's. (How old is John McCain again?) Clinton was relentlessly critiqued by the press *not* for being unqualified or unintelligent, but for being unattractive and having a husband who strayed. The last time I checked, infidelity in the White House was an old boy's game, and not something to be held against their wives.

By contrast, however, the media originally received GOP Vice Presidential Candidate, Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin with open arms. She is pure camp and bluster, hokey and downright *silly*, and the media have latched on to her appearance with noticeable approval. They obviously enjoy her winking and pandering. She is clearly inexperienced when it comes to international policy, and might be considered by many as ill-informed, but yet she receives loads of media coverage, perhaps because she is non-threatening to the patriarchy. It is still unclear whether or not there is a concrete platform underneath all the jokes and careless comments. Palin is an example of the ways in which the media, and by default, the U.S., accepts their women: basically powerless but looking good with lots of make-up and charm. In the last presidential debate, John McCain told us that Palin is a role model for young women everywhere. Likely, he is referring to her roles as both a mother and a politician. Palin is certainly not the first woman to accomplish this feat, nor is she necessarily handling it better than other women. She is, however, making a strong attempt at charming audiences with her appearance, her constant joking, and constant smiling.

Considering these examples, who is a young woman to look to for guidance? Where do we find our role models? The answer isn't clear or simple. We all need to use a critical eye to see through the smoke and mirrors presented by the media. We need to remember we have the ability to interpret and reject anything we choose. It is very easy to be a passive observer in this world; it is harder to disagree and challenge the status quo. I urge all the young women reading this *Womanifesto* to think, to interpret, and to act on what they believe is fair and right. Remember that the media is not something we need to measure ourselves by, but it is, at times, a reflection of what we've let our world become. We can change that.

Women's Center Staff:

Director: Betsy Danforth

Assistants: Kelsey Joronen & Jessica DeSarno

Volunteers: Cassandra Sargent & Lauren Cervetti

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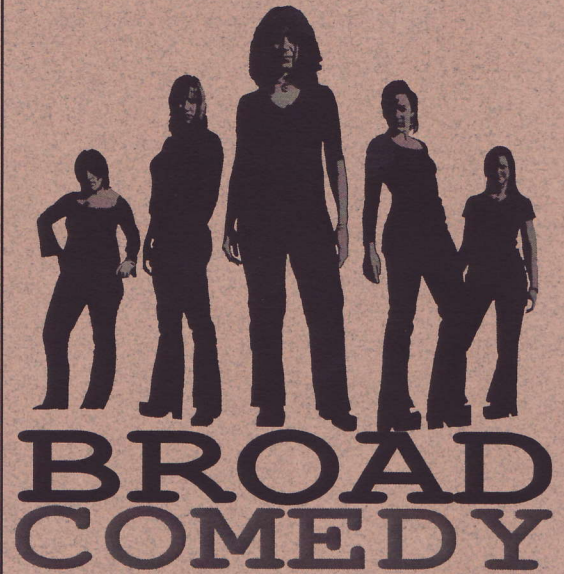
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Women's Center

372 Strand Union Building
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