

WAGON

Volume 2, Issue 2

April 2011

WAGON Editorial

WAGON is the Women and Gender Studies Student Organization, and we are committed to spreading awareness of contemporary issues affecting the lives of women on CU's campus and in the larger community. The articles in this newsletter express our commitment to social justice and represent the voices of our members. Critical issues of concern for WAGON members include the defunding of Planned Parenthood, the health rights of transgendered people, sexual violence, and the need to bring minority voices to the center. Every year, WAGON coordinates academic, activist, and community outreach events to promote feminist thought and action at CU. This semester, we organized a panel on women and the military and a children's book drive to help the women and children at the St. Vrain's Shelter of Longmont. We also participated in the Denim Day march and rally. We are proud of the work we have done, and we hope that this issue of our newsletter engages you in critical thought about the world around you or inspires you to act up.

Editors: Erin Kane, Natalie Tsantes, Meg Staires, and Sara Luer



Denim Day 2011

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 ***Editorial; Not all Rapes are Considered Equal***
- 2 ***Voids of a Complex Legal System***
- 3 ***Balancing the Budget on the Backs of Those Who Can Least Afford It; GOP's "War on Women"***
- 4 ***The Hypocrisy of "Cultural" Violence; The Constraints of a F-1 Status Student***
- 5 ***Black Women in Challenging Territory***
- 6 ***Do You Have What It Takes?***
- 7 ***WAGON on Campus***
- 8 ***Apply for WAGON***

Not All Rapes Are Considered Equal

Hannah Chatelain

In late January 2011, Republican Chris Smith and 173 co-speakers presented a bill for an act known as the "No Taxpayers Funding for Abortion Act." Republican Party member Michele Bachmann, a main sponsor of the bill, stated, "Not only would defunding Planned Parenthood and affiliated federal grants to abortion facilities at the federal state and local levels save us 630 million in taxpayer dollars, but it's simply the moral thing to do." While the main impetus of the bill is to curtail abortion rights (the most recent in a long line of attacks since *Roe v. Wade*), this act originally included a provision limiting the definition of rape to only "forcible rape," so as to reduce the use of taxpayer and health insurance funds to cover abortions. Currently, legislative provisions such as the Hyde amendment already limit the use of federal and state funds for abortion. This provision would have moved beyond the restrictions of reproductive rights and served as an attack on victim rights.

Neither the sponsors nor the bill provided a clear definition of what "forcible rape" might include. This narrow definition of rape could have served to limit women's rights in courts. It would have excluded from

(continued on page 2)

the definition of rape forms such as acquaintance (the most common form of rape), drug and alcohol influenced, statutory, and those perpetrated against mentally ill women. With a narrowed definition of rape, prosecution of this crime (which is already under-reported, under-prosecuted, and under-sentenced) could have faced major setbacks. The ambiguity in the definition of “forcible rape” could mean that intimate partner rapes and other rapes without explicit use of force are not acknowledged for what they are. Some court systems, already reluctant to pursue these other forms of sexual assault, could have used this redefinition to dismiss charges against criminals who deserved to be punished or to decrease punishment because their violation did not fall into the ambiguous category of “forcible rape.”

Fortunately, the backlash against this provision was swift and loud. Less than a week after the news broke, the bill’s authors backed down and removed the provision. Yet this close call serves as an example of how fragile women’s rights are in this country. It is easy for those who would be able to afford an abortion in cases of incest or date rape, to support legislation that would deprive access to those who cannot. Rape survivors facing the continuing trauma of an unwanted pregnancy would have lost financial help for an abortion because those in privileged situations decided it was more “moral” to save money, ignore the problem of rape, and let women figure out the details on their own. Somehow my own moral compass is not on the same page as Bachmann’s, and I wonder if any of the 275 people who backed the original language of the act really thought of all the implications this provision could have had on women who have experienced any sort of rape.

The Voids of a Complex Legal System

Jenny Koenig

Violence against women is a widespread and grievous human rights abuse, but one that has disparate effects on different communities. Sexual violence against Native women is shaped and continually reinforced by a legacy of systemic human rights abuse and persecution. Additionally, Federal government’s erosion of tribal government authority and under-resourcing of service providers that help protect and aid victims of sexual violence exacerbates gender violence. Subsequently, Native women continue to experience high rates of sexual violence while the perpetrators evade conviction. The current legislative

policy depicts a political indifference to Native women’s justice and security, denying them their dignity and humanity.

A 2007 Amnesty International report concluded that Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be raped than the average woman in the USA; over one-third of Native women will experience rape in a lifetime. It is important to note that much of this violence comes from outside of a tribe, with Non-Native men believed to perpetrate about 86% of rapes. Moreover, because sexual assault is highly underreported, these statistics may not accurately portray the true extent of sexual violence against Native women.

There are many barriers prohibiting Native women from attaining justice and regaining dignity within the current judicial and legislative systems. Jurisdiction is the main barrier to investigation and prosecution of sexual assault against Native women. The location of the crime determines which police force investigates the crime and which judicial system is responsible for justice. The Major Crimes Act of 1885 legislates that “major” crimes committed on Native land, such as rape or murder, are under the jurisdiction of the FBI and not under individual Tribal Nations. Survivors of sexual violence must often navigate through tribal, state and federal law. Jurisdictional issues are often confusing and take a long time to sort out which result in inadequate investigations or a failure to respond at all. US federal government’s complex interrelation with the three jurisdictions often allows the perpetrator to circumvent justice and gain impunity. Jurisdictional irregularities effectively create an area of lawlessness, which encourages additional violence against Native women.

Much progress needs to be made in order to support victims and end sexual violence against Native women. The US government needs to realize the legacy of sexual violence against Native women and develop an active response to it. Congress needs to eliminate the complex jurisdictional rules and legislation, which will expedite justice for the women. With more funding for tribal justice systems and more support for survivors of sexual assault, Native women will not fall into the voids of a complex legal system and will receive proper justice and security. Securing funding for tribal justice systems and supporting survivors of sexual assault will be major gains for Native women. Long histories of abuse cannot be easily undone, but Native peoples nationwide are ambitiously working to enforce their rights to dignity and security.

Balancing the Budget on the Backs of Those Who Can Least Afford It

Sarah McCullar

Across the country this month, the political atmosphere has been electric with the ramping up of the legislative sessions in all fifty states and in the 112th Congress. This is the time for the representatives and senators to make good on their campaign promises by courting their constituents with a flurry of bills and resolutions. While some of these pieces of legislation will end up dying in committee, others will end up making an impact on the way that many live their lives.

One new measure is H.R. 217, the now-famous resolution that could potentially defund Planned Parenthood, among other programs. Though this would not cut funding for abortion procedures (there is currently no federal funding appropriated for abortions), it jeopardizes the 800 clinics across the country and the health of over three million patients who use the services Planned Parenthood provides. \$70 million is up for revocation. Planned Parenthood offers sexual health screenings, education about safe sex, the provision of birth control, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. It is a crucial resource for people who might not otherwise be able to access these services. Though the organization's budget could absorb the loss, Planned Parenthood would serve fewer people and would have to downsize its services.

The plans for downsizing assistance to underprivileged populations do not stop at reproductive health in the federal political realm. On February 15th, the governor of Colorado, John Hickenlooper announced his proposed budget for the 2011-2012 fiscal year with \$375 million in cuts for public schools and higher education. If the budget is passed as is, this will be the largest cut to education in Colorado's history. In a time when many families in this state are making sacrifices due to the strain of a dire economic situation, cutting education is one of the most dangerous ways to balance the budget. By reducing the amount of money invested in our children today, our leaders risk creating less competitive students and less informed citizens for the future. The effects of this will be long-reaching.

Both of these budget proposals reflect the oppressive attitudes espoused by some legislators and state leaders. Their willingness to sacrifice health and public schools is a commentary on their priorities; those who can least afford to pay full price for schooling or reproductive health services are the first to experience the consequences of a shortfall in the budget. Thus the most vulnerable in our society will feel the brunt of sacrifices in the budget in their well-being (health-wise, economically, and educationally). Their futures are

endangered by the choices made by officials whose decisions echo the oppressive attitudes that have marginalized them in the first place.

Why the GOP's "War on Women" is Not Just a War on Women

Chelsea Mullen

The House of Representatives has recently passed several controversial pieces of legislation: most notably one that cuts all federal funding for Planned Parenthood, as well as an attempt to redefine rape as only "forcible rape." These acts have been part of a broader trend of extreme politics within the Republican Party that have garnered significant media attention as "anti-women," which--I think it's safe to say--they are.

Policies that limit women's sexuality and reproductive rights, excuse violence, and limit the childcare resources available to low-income women are certainly not pro-women. However, in this discourse we lose the full significance of the GOP's actions; they do not just affect women's lives, and saying so continues to exclude entire groups of people.

Reproductive rights are not just women's rights; they apply to all people, especially those with a uterus. When we refuse to recognize the state violence that is also being perpetuated against trans-men and people who are genderqueer (gender identities that lie outside of the man/woman binary), we continue to erase them in the discussion of health care and rights. These are populations that are already frequently denied access to important health services including reproductive services around contraception and pregnancy, and sexual health services like STI testing and treatment, and cancer screenings. While trans-men may be turned away from other physicians and hospitals in the community, Planned Parenthood provides a full range of services for people of all sex and gender identities. Threatening essential institutions like Planned Parenthood is not just threatening cisgender (individuals whose gender expression or identity conforms to socially assigned gender roles) women, it threatens people of all cisgender, transgender, and genderqueer identities.

In our efforts to defend these important rights and services we must be conscious of the people who are being harmed and excluded in our discussions, and refuse to continue to perpetuate that oppression in the form of silence. The attacks of the GOP are not just against women, they are against all people who face discrimination and inadequate access based on their sex and gender identities, and we must demand recognition for them.

The Hypocrisy of “Cultural” Violence: The Link Between Female Genital Cutting and Intersex Reconstructive Surgery

Sarah Lavorgna

Unfortunately, violence against women is a prevalent issue that takes different shapes and affects women all over the world. Yet a violent act that takes place in the United States and a similar violent act that takes place in a developing country are usually viewed completely differently. There is a binary in place and gendered violent acts that take place in the United States are seen as more “normal” and “commonplace” while violent acts in developing countries are viewed as horrific and disgusting. I am not saying that people accept and tolerate violence in the United States because most people do not. However, gendered violence is viewed as more civil when it takes place in this country as opposed to a developing country. This cultural hypocrisy is apparent across a range of gendered violent acts such as the cultural acceptance of intersex reconstructive surgery in the United States and the severe condoning of female genital cutting abroad.

Female genital cutting is a severe form of violence, which mostly affects young women in the Eastern horn of Africa (such as the countries of Ethiopia and Somalia). FGC is a painful procedure that involves removing all or part of the external female genital. There are various reasons why FGC is practiced; the major one being that the surgery decreases a woman’s sexual pleasure, which is thought to lower promiscuity and keep women pure and modest. This “atypical” practice done by the “Other” is often talked about and viewed by those in the West as a horrifying act that could never take place in the United States. Western culture is thought of as more progressive and it is hard to fathom anything like FGC happening in Western countries. However, a form of this gendered violence also takes place in the United States on a daily basis.

Every year children who are classified as “intersex” undergo reconstructive surgery to make them “normal.” Intersex individuals are people who are born with both male and female sex characteristics. 1% of babies (roughly five children a day) are born intersex and most of them are forced to have genital reconstructive surgery in order to make them a “normal” gender.

Both female genital cutting and genital reconstructive surgery are gendered violent acts, which are very painful, involuntarily forced on children, and strip them of their ability to experience sexual pleasure. While both of these acts are violent and detrimental, many in the Western world view female genital cutting as a sick practice that could only happen in a developing country. These same people either completely refuse to see the link between intersex reconstructive surgery and female genital cutting or are completely ignorant to the fact that this surgery takes place daily in the United States.

While both of these violent acts need immediate attention, many Westerners only see female genital cutting as a senseless and culturally based phenomenon. The hypocrisy of cultural violence is detrimental because it degrades other cultures that differ from Western culture, and it fails to address the violence that is taking place in the United States. When thinking about forms of gendered violence, the United States needs to stop linking the “backwards” and “uncivil” culture of developing countries to brutal forms of violence. Instead, we need to accept the fact that many similar forms of violence exist in the West and it is our obligation to address these violent acts as well.

The Constraints of an F-1 Status Student

Manaslu Bista

Despite an espoused commitment to creating a more global campus, the University of Colorado at Boulder fails to create an environment that accommodates the needs of students with international student visas (F-1 students). While many CU students receive some form of financial assistance, international students face many restrictions and limitations. For example, there are governmental restrictions on where F-1 students may work. F-1 students are only allowed to work a certain amount of hours and only on campus; however, most jobs on campus are reserved for work-study eligible students, something that is denied to F-1 students. This puts international students in a tough bind when they need contribute to the funding of their education.

Before coming to the United States, my family and I believed that we would be able to handle the financial

burden; however, in circumstances beyond our control, our situation changed. With my parent no longer able to provide the same degree of financial support, it is necessary that I contribute in order to complete my education. But, because of the work restrictions, I am unable to find adequate work, and the University is not able to meet my needs. The nature of University policy and National laws makes it difficult to complete school. I am faced with a significant dilemma: Should I leave with an incomplete degree? Should I work illegally to support myself? Whatever the case is, international students are vulnerable in both of these situations. With an incomplete degree, we have very thin chances of getting a promising job in our home countries. And if we were to decide to work in the U.S. without proper documentations, we are exposed to a high degree of work violations.

I am not arguing against the government's laws that constrain F-1 status students from many opportunities. However, if the University is truly committed to creating a more global environment, it should consider a campus environment that is more accepting and accommodating towards the needs of all its students. The University can start by providing more student job opportunities, including those for students with F-1 status. I believe these measures would help protect all University students from financial vulnerability.

Black Women in Challenging Territory

Schermisia Chambers

One of our claims to fame here at the University of Colorado at Boulder is our so-called "diversity." Campus flyers and university websites include pictures showing a multicultural, multiracial student body. You hear the word "diversity" thrown around left and right from the time you enter this campus until the time you graduate.

Having a double major in both Ethnic Studies and Women and Gender Studies, as well as being a woman of color, I cringe every time I see or hear the word "diversity" misused. Instead of talking about diversity, the University should be focused on developing methods to prevent the actual lack of diversity from being harmful. The potential damage caused due to false advertisement of the University campus climate

has left people confused when they enter this campus. Some students of color suffer from increased amounts of stress due to their placement within the University community.

As a class project, but also out of person interest, I conducted a small-scale study with eight Black women on the University of Colorado at Boulder's campus. The project was focused on finding out what their definitions of mental health might be. During the interviews one of the questions that stuck out to me was about the atmosphere on this campus. The question I asked was one that had been concerning me: "What role does being on such an "un-diverse" or white campus have on your health?"

The answers I received varied, but all responses supported the theory that being a Black woman on a predominantly white campus has an effect on a person's physical and mental health—mostly mental. The most common word that I found in responses was "stress," in regards to being a Black woman on a predominantly white campus. Although many other students suffer from extreme amounts of stress, Black women on this campus have added factors, among them, the feeling of being misunderstood or experiencing low levels of acceptance.

Being on a minority on campus heightens the already existing pressures of work and school, because there is not always someone to turn or relate to in the classroom or campus community. Some of the women expressed how they had to further extend themselves to make the campus bearable at times, thus adding more stress to their lives. For some Black women on CU's campus, the lack of diversity can affect their health negatively, with the most important factor being that the university is not sensitive to the needs and concerns of all its students.

The lack of diversity on this campus is more than just a disturbing visible reality—it's a health concern. How can the University of Colorado at Boulder truly be proud to flash around how "diverse" it is when its own students are suffering from a lack of diversity? This may go a long way to explaining problematic trends in the retention of "diverse" students. Thus, if the administration wants to make the rhetoric a reality, it needs to come up with more effective means of addressing the well being of these students.

Do You Have What It Takes?

Tiya Trent

The Women's Resource Center recently implemented a program called "The 48 Hour Feminist Pledge." To find out what this feminist pledge was all about, I spoke with Evy, one of the women who organized the event. According to Evy, there are a number of reasons the feminist pledge was put in place, including the pervasive negativity that surround women's images and race. Additionally the pledge is something she and others at the Women's Resource Center hope to continue next year.

The feminist pledge was implemented to help with the campus climate not only concerning women, but racism as well. The women at the Resource Center believe, as we in WAGON do, it is essential to take what you learn in the classroom and implement it into your everyday life. The women at the Resource Center believe that most people have a little bit of feminism in them, they just don't know it. By taking the 48 Hour Feminist Pledge, people have the chance to see what feminism means to those in the CU community, as well as the extended community. Since the pledge is only for 48 hours, people are able to explore certain notions within our society that they do not necessarily need to commit to.

Once I learned what the feminist pledge entailed—standing up against sexism, womanizing comments and even issues such as racism, classism, homophobia, heterosexism, sizeism or jokes about any of the above—I went out and recruited. I recruited my 15-year-old son. I let him read the pledge contract before committing to anything, and as he was reading he started laughing. He was laughing at some of the phrases that were on the pledge that were examples of sexism, so that if he heard them he would know to speak up. An example of one of the phrases was, "You are such a pussy." My son, O'Shea, thought the phrases were quite amusing, but realized soon enough that phrases like this were commonplace among high school students, and in particular high school boys. In the end he took the pledge and kept the paperwork. After recruiting my son, I recruited my fiancé, David. My fiancé thought that the pledge would be easy enough, but he too was mistaken. He works at a hospital and some of the women nurses made him mad and he called them a derogatory sexist name. As soon as he was finished, I called him out on it and told him

not to forget that he was taking the 48-hour pledge, so he asked if he could start his 48 hours over. He is usually very cognizant about the way he speaks because he is a single father who is raising boys and girls. I think because David was actually forced to think about what was coming out of his mouth in regards to women it made it his work life a little bit harder.

After having gone through the 48-hour pledge, I have not had to do any correcting except for my son and my fiancé. The pledge made me more conscious of what I said and thought as well, especially when being frustrated on campus or in a classroom. Every time I wanted to say something negative to a friend about what somebody said in class, I resisted the urge and tried to take a more positive attitude and outlook. Since I already practice feminism in my daily life, taking the 48-hour pledge did not have a huge impact on me. However, for others who do not normally think about feminism, the 48-hour pledge will have more of an impact on them and influence some of the words that come out of their mouth when it comes to womanizing and so forth. If we do our part in recruiting, the 48-hour pledge will continue to have a positive impact on campus and our surrounding community. Each year that the 48-hour pledge is implemented, more and more people will be educated as to what feminism means to each individual and to our campus community.

Children's Book Drive

WAGON had the pleasure of hosting another drive this semester for St. Vrain's shelter in Longmont. Our ongoing partnership with St. Vrain's has provided great opportunities for us to learn about responsible activism as a group, and in particular to let our activism be fueled by actual needs of the community. When trying to decide what kind of drive to do this semester, we were all throwing out ideas until one of our members suggested that we ask the shelter what they *needed*. This was a great reminder that our project was not about *us*, but rather about the community we are trying to serve. All it took was a phone call to the shelter to learn that they needed books for young children. Learning this helped bring focus to the project and also helped us provide things the shelter really needed.

Denim Day 2011

Brittany Burton

In 1999, an Italian judge overturned a rape conviction stating the perpetrator could not have removed the victim's jeans without her consent because her jeans were so tight. A blatant example of the prevalent phenomenon of victim blaming, this case served as a mobilizing point for what is now an international movement to raise awareness of sexual assault. This semester, six seniors organized CU's first Denim Days: a series of events featuring a two-day denim art display on Norlin Quad, a silent march through campus, and a rally at Farrand Field. Students were encouraged to decorate denim patches and jeans to share their stories as well as to show their resistance to sexual assault. The Denim Day display and event symbolized a movement to change the campus and community culture that is characterized by sexual assault. But the event went beyond raising awareness of the prevalence of sexual assault. An important goal of the event was but to shift the emphasis in rape prevention off of women's behavior to one of more widespread societal responsibility. An important part of the effort was to reach out to men as allies. The event had a great turnout with the support of both men and women, and ended with a powerful poetry slam. The Denim Day Team is extremely grateful for the support of the campus and community, and hopes that Denim Day will become an annual event at CU.

Women in the Military

This semester, WAGON sponsored a discussion panel on women in the military, inviting a female Captain, male Sergeant Major, and female prior enlisted speaker. We discussed issues such as women in combat, female physical fitness standards, how men react to women in the military, and how women deal with balancing a family while being in the military. The panel provided for a provocative and informative discussion. The people who came learned a lot about what it means to be a woman serving in the military from the perspectives of people who have actually served in active duty.

Self Care for Activists

Brittany Burton

As activists, it is difficult to maintain sanity and the drive to continue our efforts because being invested and proactive with high intensity often leads to feelings of complete burnout. Because our endeavors often have very low turnover and success rates despite great time, effort, and energy, it can be difficult to convince ourselves that

we should continue. While it is important to immerse ourselves wholeheartedly in our activism, it is also important to remember that an activist suffering from burnout is not necessarily helpful and can even be counterproductive. While it may seem all too easy to carry the burdens of the world on your shoulders alone, it is important to remember that we must rely on each other for help and support and ensure that we are taking care of ourselves and each other, both as activists and individuals. As a feminist activist I must consciously find the time to separate myself from my activism. While such activism has been extremely fulfilling, I have also had many trying days—days when I feel that no amount of activism or optimism can possibly conquer the horrors of the world, and I would rather simply remove myself. It is when I am feeling this that I find time to clear my head and free myself emotionally so that I may return to my activism fully rejuvenated and hopeful.

Here are some simple questions to ask yourself when you feel that you are reaching a state of burnout in your activism:

- How are you feeling? Make sure to constantly check in with yourself at every stage of your activism. By regularly checking in with yourself, you can foresee your burnout ahead and be sure to avoid it.
- Are you getting enough sleep, healthy food, and exercise to maintain yourself both physically and mentally?
- How are you coping with the stress of your activism? Do you have a support system to discuss your work and emotions with? Activism is heavily tied to our emotions. In fact, our work demands that we are emotionally invested which means it is that much more important that we consciously process the impact of our work so that our activist selves may thrive.
- What are some things you enjoy doing that are detached from your activist endeavors? It is important to take time for these activities as these are often what will rejuvenate you for your activism.

Graduates

WAGON would like to take a moment to recognize its graduating seniors and thank them for their commitment to our organization and the Women and Gender Studies department.

Congratulations to: Sarah Lavorgna, Natalie Tsantes, Brittany Burton, Erin Kane, Tiya Trent, Schermisia Chambers, Sarah Luer, and Manaslu Bista. We wish you well in the next stage of your journey.

BECOME A MEMBER OF WAGON

If you are a Women and Gender Studies major or minor and are interested in finding a way to put more of what you learn in the classroom into practice, consider applying to become a member of WAGON. Below is the application for membership. Print out or detach this page and return the completed application to the Hazel Woodruff Gates Cottage.

The Women and Gender Studies Organization, or WAGON, is a program-affiliated student group that is committed to bringing positive social change to our community, on and beyond the CU campus. Members are undergraduate majors/minors in Women and Gender Studies, nominated by faculty for their strong academic performance and leadership potential. Members are enrolled in a practicum and meet weekly as a group with the faculty advisor, working together in three main areas. They plan **academic events** such as speakers or film viewings followed by critical discussions. They coordinate **activist and community outreach events** each semester. In addition, the WAGON members publish their own **newsletter**, with student articles focusing on different feminist issues. With these publications, they hope to “spread feminist voices” and “bring awareness to persisting feminist concerns.”

Name: _____ Student ID# _____
Address: _____ Phone # _____
WMST 3940 for 1 credit during Fall / Spring semester _____(year)
WAGON will meet weekly on _____ at _____ .

WAGON is pass/fail, but in order to receive credit for WAGON you must

1. Attend all meetings.
2. Contribute to the newsletter (on a topic of your interest).
3. Attend and participate in the planning of a WAGON sponsored academic event.
4. Participate actively in the planning and execution of a WAGON sponsored community project.
5. Participate in the planning and execution of a WAGON sponsored activist event.
6. If scheduling or other issues interfere with the above, the student must present an alternative activity to participate in or contribution to group efforts.
7. As with an independent study, students are expected to put in a minimum of 25 hours per credit hour a semester. This includes meetings as well as outside activities.

Students who do not meet the above requirements will not receive credit and may not be re-nominated or apply for WAGON the following semester (although they may the following year).

Eligibility:

Major or Minor of WMST: _____
of WMST Hours: _____
University GPA: _____
Major/Minor GPA: _____
Faculty Supporting Nomination: _____

Please attach a paragraph or two about why you want to participate in WAGON and what contributions you think you can make to the group (it should be no more than one page single spaced).