

GSC

**Gender and Sexuality Center
Basement Scoville**

OUT OF THE BASEMENT!

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Drawn by Lawrence Dykeman '09 as part of an ongoing series of images representing equality.

Femicides and Justice in Latin America

By Katie Paul '08

Patricia Cervantes was all at once strong, solemn, and inspiring as she explained the growing phenomenon of violence against women in Mexico. Her speech centered on the increased incidence of murders of women (commonly referred to as “femicides”) in Chihuahua and Chiapas provinces in Mexico, where hundreds of women have been murdered or simply have disappeared. Femicide is defined as a kind of gender violence, specifically directed at women simply because they are women. Patricia’s daughter disappeared on May 13th 2004, and her bones were returned to their family on July 14th. The local police accused both her husband and her nephew of committing the crime, in an appalling response from the criminal justice system. Patricia explained that the police understand that people want answers, but they are unwilling to truly investigate these murders.

Because male family members face the threat of incarceration, speaking against the government holds much more risk for them than it does for females. Ironically, this gives women the greatest power to fight against the government and police force. Patricia and many other mothers have joined forces to create an organization of mothers demanding answers and a response from the government. There is danger associated

with speaking out, but Cervantes believes that the government has repeatedly failed to provide answers or investigate murders because it is in their best interest not to do anything; there is no pressure to act. So Patricia and other mothers work tirelessly within Mexico, but they also make speaking tours across America, particularly at college campuses where they believe they can stir up idealistic college students to join them in their fight.



I believe most felt inspired by Patricia’s tireless drive and terrified of the violence directly south of our country. I personally felt helpless and unsure where I could direct my desire to do something, anything. But I believe more than anything, Patricia wanted us to be aware, to know that this is happening, to know that we have a voice to make it stop. She’s using her voice and she’s looking for answers. And her hope was that American college students will help her in seeking these answers, that we will educate ourselves and that we will realize our power to affect change, whether it be through contacting our representatives (a bill is in the works in the House of Representatives at present) or by simply

talking about what is happening. This cannot go ignored. As the trends of globalization continue and America becomes even more interconnected with Mexico, we have an obligation to stand by our sisters in other parts of the world. Their fight for justice is a fight for all women. And they should not be working alone.

NOT ON OUR CAMPUS! PLEDGE

SPEAK



OUT!

On Thursday, October 19 in Great Space, twenty students voiced their concerns about sexual violence at Carleton. Over 200 people signed the following pledge. More signatures are being sought to support the pledge, which will be printed winter term in the Carletonian.

I will establish consent, only with a partner who is able to give *meaningful* consent,
before I engage in any sexual activity.

I will interrupt conversations that promote a culture of sexual violence.

I will use my influence to intervene when I see potentially dangerous situations.

I will have the courage to confront my friends when their judgment is impaired.

*I will recognize the power of my voice and my actions to
prevent sexual violence.*

A Gay in the Life

By Derek Zimmerman, '07

Less Than Apparent

In common parlance, we have come to throw around the word “queer” to encompass all the people in the ever growing acronym (you know, GLBTQSQAPRM...) that defines those of us within the “not just a breeder” crew we call our community. But many people within this group have stated their objections to the overuse of this word. Because “queer” is so often used in a derogatory manner outside of liberal havens like Carleton, they do not believe that reclamation is possible or helpful.

They have a point. The word itself is defined by strangeness; in some ways its dictionary meaning is best apprehended by considering what a Minnesotan means when they say that something is “different”. For those who aren’t familiar with this particular colloquialism, it means that it’s just left a bad taste on their Midwestern palate. On dictionary.com, the majority of the definitions indicate the distinctly negative connotation of the word; and the definitions of “queer” as a verb indicate that to queer something is to spoil and ruin it.

So why are we so able and willing to sling this word around? Reclamation of a word can be a powerful way to show the dominant group that we have established our own identity and our own dominance over the language that defines us. And some embrace the

idea of our community being a bastion of strangeness, a land where common expectations are subverted as an alternative to the mainstream.

But I worry that when we start to make this catch-all “queer” the main method of referring to ourselves, we start to set up a binary. Lest I be accused of being too deconstructionist, let me explain: when those of us who make alternate gender or sexual choices start lumping ourselves together in the big umbrella of Queerness, we create two categories. Queer, and not-Queer. It’s quite similar to the problems that many of us have with the binary associated with Hetero- and Homo-, or Woman and Man.

In fact, that very binary of Woman and Man is the root cause of most of the oppression and difficulty that LGBTQA people face in life, family, and politics. Culture ascribes a certain set of characteristics to Woman, a certain set of characteristics to Man, and essential in these lists of roles is “desires the opposite sex”. Many of the traits associated with Woman, for example, are seemingly designed around her need to attract Man, while Man’s traits revolve around his active need to capture and define Woman.

The trouble is (as I’m sure most of you know, if you’re reading this newsletter) that not everyone is solely attracted to the opposite sex. A good deal of sex research shows that a higher percentage of people than those who self-identify are actually bisexual. And thus, a ma-

ior problem of identification is presented for those people who have some desire, to put it bluntly, to have same-sex sexual relations, yet don’t feel, well, queer enough to call themselves queer.

As a plainly identified gay man who has questioned his sexuality both towards men and then back towards women many times, I feel no qualms about announcing the sex/gender of my objects of desire. But what happens if you are, say, a woman who has sexual desire towards other women, but is reasonably satisfied with the love of men and additionally, the dominant culture? Will you suppress your love for a woman, because it’s just too queer?

I’m not planning on any linguistic revolution within our community anytime soon, and as long as the multiplying number of identifications continue to spawn, “queer” is a useful if problematic blanket word for those of us who know that our sexual choices aren’t “normal”. But couldn’t we find a better word, one without connotations of our separateness from normality?

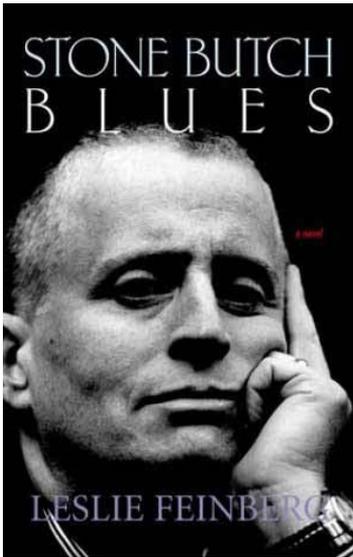
It seems to me that we’ll have to wait for cultural attitudes towards sex in general to change; like it or not, those of us in the LGB part of the acronym are a part of that acronym because of our sexual actions. If society can grow to a point where it views the expression and performance of sex (especially of the non-procreative variety) as healthy, we will not have to be “queers” anymore. We can just be the ones having the most fun.

GSC Book Review

Come check out the GSC library to find this book and others.
Lots of others.

By Dominic Vendell, '09

As we grapple with the complexity of our genders and sexes, it is illuminating to learn about the stories of those who have experienced physical and emotional consequences because of this complexity. Activist and writer Leslie Feinberg's semi-autobiographical novel *Stone Butch Blues*



Blues is perhaps the best example of this kind of work.

Traversing at least three decades, Feinberg sensitively relates the story of Jess, a person who grows up in a number of different social and political contexts, forcing her to communicate her gender in contradictory ways. As a budding butch woman and union activist in the 1960s, Jess finds love, friendship, and community in ways she had

never imagined as a child.

Facing rejection from the feminist movement of the 1970s, Jess attempts to pass as a man through seeking medical options. In the end, though, she learns to love all the richness of gender that her life has given her. In short, I encourage all of you to pick up this book from the GSC or from anywhere else it can be found. As a confession of one person's experiences with gender and sex, it profoundly breaks a silence that is so often upheld even within progressive movements. But perhaps more importantly, it unveils complexities of difference that affect us all.

Women's Moment in History

November 5th, 1872: Susan B. Anthony arrested for attempting to cast a ballot.



November 22, 1909: "Uprising of the 20,000" in New York City was began over women's rights in shirtwaist factories. It was the largest demonstration of female workers at the time.

"What difference does it make if the thing you are scared of is real or not?"

— *Toni Morrison*

Let's Talk About SEX...

This advice column is produced by an alliance of SWAs and GSCAs in order to bring you the most up-to-date and comprehensive information about anything and everything you ever wanted to know about sex. Have sex questions of your own? Thought you'd never be able to have them anonymously—and thoroughly—answered? Well, place your questions in mailbox 1344 or 1143, and we'll try to have them answered in the next newsletter.

What's the difference between circumcised and uncircumcised penises? Is there any difference in sexual pleasure?

Research committed to the differences between circumcised and uncircumcised penises has been mostly inconclusive and controversial. Some common beliefs are that circumcised penises have a decreased chance of spreading and contracting STIs, get penile cancer less often, and have a lower risk of bladder infections as infants, leading to a lower risk of some kidney problems as an adult. There is, however, some evidence that finds no difference between circumcised and uncircumcised penises. One myth that still lingers is that circumcised penises are cleaner. There is no evidence that supports this claim.

As far as sexual pleasure is concerned, the most common theory today is that circumcision decreases sexual pleasure. According to this research, the foreskin's job is to protect the head (glands) of the penis. These glands are a particularly sensitive area, which, without the protection of the foreskin, become desensitized due to consistent rubbing and chaffing, thus decreasing sexual pleasure. Additionally, the foreskin, itself, is filled with nerves, which could increase sexual pleasure. Thus, according to this research, sex is more pleasurable for both partners with an uncircumcised penis. On the other hand, some research claims that circumcision has no effect on sexual pleasure.

Adapted from AskDrSears.com (<http://www.askdrsears.com/html/1/T012000.asp>) and MayoClinic.com (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/circumcision/PR00040>).

What STIs are most common on campus?

It is impossible to know about Carleton's campus specifically, but according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, at least 50% of sexually active people get HPV (Human Papillomavirus) at some time in their lives. Some strains of HPV cause no symptoms, but some types can cause genital warts or cervical cancer. Now, the good news: **There is a new vaccine for HPV!!** Hooray! It is recommended for all females 13-26 years old. All sexually active people should be tested regularly for STIs. And, of course, please ALWAYS use protection (condoms or dental dams!).

A Few Good Ally Tips

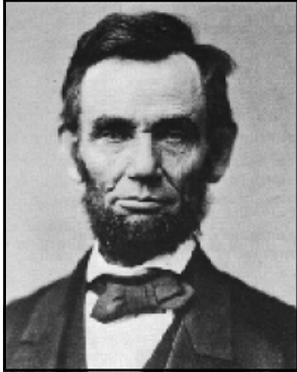
By Katie Paul, '08

- Listening attentively when someone shares an experience about coming out to you.
- Willingness to learn from the stories of others. You will probably learn something about yourself too!
- Don't make assumptions! Use genderless words like "partner" or "significant other" instead of "boyfriend" and "girlfriend."
- Educate yourself. Discover the history of the LGBT and ally movement, read up on what's happening with LGBT issues today, and know about Carleton's policies.
- Challenge yourself. Address internalized homophobia.
- Sense of humor. This doesn't mean homophobic jokes, but it does mean that you don't always have to be so serious in your role as an ally.
- Pick up a Carleton pride button in the GSC!

Putting the language of sexuality in historical context

By Jonathan Rodkin '06

I attended Jonathan Katz's talk entitled "Making Sexual History: A Quarter Century of Work and Questions" on October 25. His presentation traced his own academic exploration of American gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender history since he undertook the task in 1971. He touched on the political roots of his "obsession" with uncovering the hidden footprints of GLBT Americans, and the development of GLBT studies in academia. For me as a listener, I was most interested in Katz's discussion of language.



Gay?

Language is a big deal for GLBT people: there are hurtful words, code words, reclaimed words, outdated words, and appropriate words. Each person has his or her own preferences, affinities, and opinions about which words go in which category. For example, for some, "fag" is an echo of oppression and violence; for others, it is empowering; for others, it's ironic and humorous. Labeling is a crucial and meaningful exercise: sexual and gender identity are inherently personal aspect of self, and the words one chooses to define himself or herself are public expressions of something outsiders cannot see and a means to claim membership to a particular group.

Katz's talk dealt with language in a couple interesting ways. First, he cautioned against applying contemporary categories and definitions to historical examples. Katz rattled off a list of famous 19th century Americans—including Susan B. Anthony and Abraham Lincoln—who, according to historians, may have engaged in same-sex romantic involvement. It is dangerous, however, to call them gay, lesbian, bisexual, or any of the other words people living in 2006 use to describe sexual orientations. These were not terms in wide currency during most of history; Katz reported that sexual orientation has been a rather recent development in the public discourse on sex and relationships.

Katz's second interesting point on language was that "heterosexual" entered the English lexicon in the 19th century as a dirty word. At the time, it connoted untamed, hypersexual attitudes and behavior toward people of the opposite sex. Rooted in definitions of deviancy, it is now used to mean "normal" sexual orientation. The relatively short history of heterosexuality has interesting implications about the embeddedness of heterosexual norms in history, or can be read as a critique of the 20th and 21st century obsession with labeling and categorization.

Thus, it is irresponsible for historians to project contemporary language onto the past. If Abraham Lincoln didn't identify as gay, and the world of mid-19th century America didn't identify him as gay, then he wasn't gay. "Gay" is more than a term describing one's behavior; it is a source of sexual, emotional, social, and cultural identity. Surely, it is important to know that people have been having same-sex relationships for thousands of years, but it is unwise for GLBT people to wish to "re-write" history using present-day labels. The best history is written from the perspective of the people who lived it.



Lesbian?



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**CONTACT INFORMATION AND
 EDITORIAL POLICY**

The Gender and Sexuality Center publishes this newsletter monthly for the campus community and friends. Information in the newsletter is based on the best available information at the time of publication. Items in the newsletter are provided for informational purposes only, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Gender and Sexuality Center or its employees, nor do they represent the views of the students, staff, faculty, or administration of Carleton College.

Please submit articles, calendar entries, letters and news to the Gender and Sexuality Center or via e-mail to: vendeld@carleton.edu. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and space.

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GSC Staff Fall 06-07

Mark your
 calendars now —
 winter term is going
 to be busy!



Looking Ahead: Winter Term Events

- Can I Kiss You?.....January 12th
- Rainbow Retreat.....January 19th-21st
- Boxes and Walls.....January 26th and 27th
- Vagina Monologues.....February 10th
- Not on Our Campus! Pink Party.....February 10th
- Alphabet Soup (MBLGTACC).....February 16th-18th