Cheer, Cheer for Feminism!

Lauren Curatolo, president of Feminist Action at Middlebury, defies a prevalent stereotype that cheerleaders can’t be feminists.

“You are a cheerleader and a feminist? Is that even possible?” I get this question too often for it to be funny anymore. There exists a very disturbing misconception about feminism. For many people, feminism is just an infectious and contagious “thing,” like the plague. If you have it, you cannot spread it, and cheerleading is perhaps the one thing that is so public that people cringe when they find out I do both (that is, if he/she does not understand feminism or cheerleading).

Can a feminist be that “cool”? Can a feminist put on a short skirt and show her legs? Can a feminist show spirit and be enthusiastic about anything other than fighting for women’s rights? The answer is an overwhelming “YES!” The beauty of cheerleading is that it is the ultimate gender performance. When I apply make-up, (yes, I wear make-up, too!), put on my short cheer skirt, and do my hair, I am performing my gender in the most obvious of ways. Part of me is doing so mockingly; another part of me is embracing the fact that I am a woman, and can choose the ways in which I express my sexuality, and my athleticism. Beyond that, let me also say that the cheerleaders at Middlebury are perhaps some of the most talented and intelligent people I have met. They are passionate and creative, witty and daring, loving and strong. I will admit that I never cheered in high school because I thought it was completely superficial, and it was a culture with which I never wanted to be associated. The cheerleaders in high school were thought to be “airheads” and “sluts.” I, too, thought so, cringing at the very thought of even talking to a cheerleader. At that time, I was also not a self-proclaimed feminist.

Looking back on that experience, I feel ashamed because while I chose to play soccer, others chose to cheer, and who am I to say what a person can and cannot do athletically?

The major problem underlying all of this stems from the fact that stereotypes have largely dictated how individuals view the world, and view certain groups of people. I am a feminist, and so I have to deal with the prejudices people have against feminists; and I am a cheerleader, which means I have to endure the stereotypes of being one as well. The fact that the cheer team has only one male member this year is a testament to how “off-limits” cheering has become to men. Perhaps men at Middlebury are not as progressive as I would have hoped; or, maybe stereotypes are that strong, and that pervasive, that a man would be committing social suicide if he cheered. I therefore challenge everyone: escape stereotypes and embrace reality!

After facilitating Feminist Action at Middlebury meetings, I run to cheer practice. It is not about what you do, it is about who you are, and for what you stand. I am a cheerleader, and I am a feminist; if this it too overwhelming for you, call me a contradiction, but I will just call myself a WOMAN!
WAGS SPRING COURSES

WAGS 0200 Foundations in WAGS
We will use the interdisciplinary nature of women’s and gender studies to explore three or four topics from a variety of perspectives. Our study of each topic will be informed by readings in a wide range of fields. A section on women in the arts might include readings in art history, musicology, theatre and dance history, and literary theory. The course is an introduction to the entire field of women’s and gender studies, as well as a detailed exploration of several important areas of our culture. 3 hrs. lect. SOC CMP (S. Moorti)

WAGS/SOAN 0262 Mobile Women: Transnational Work Patterns
The course examines women’s work in the formal labor sectors to offer a critical perspective on contemporary local and global patterns. The materials will cover concerns central to women in the U.S. such as the glass ceiling and the wage gap. The course will also offer a transnational perspective through an analysis of the central role migrant female laborers have come to play in the global economy. This section will cover issues such as the traffic in domestic workers, nannies, and women in prostitution. We will interrogate how feminist theories are able to accommodate the uneven development of women’s rights on the global and local levels. (S. Moorti)

WAGS/ENGL 0233 Telling Stories: Narrative and Feminist Ethnography
This interdisciplinary course will hold as its unifying theme the concept of narrative and critical intertextuality. In the first half of the course we will read widely from theories of narrative in both the social sciences and the humanities in order to become thoroughly grounded in feminist methods through the lens of narrative study. In the second half of the course we will apply these theories to the close reading of several feminist interdisciplinary works in anthropology. Readings may include Spivak, Ilfunkiwe, Smith, Boyce Davies, Anzaldua, Benjamin, Marcuse, Althusser, Locke (I. Kerlee)

WAGS/WPR 0201 Writing Across Differences
This course will explore the many choices we face as writers and readers when communicating across human differences such as race, gender, sexuality and class. Organized by literary genres, and drawing on writers such as Julia Alvarez, Bell Hooks, Dorothy Allison, Martin Luther King, Barbara McIntosh, Julian Diaz, Jamaica Kincaid, Leslie Marmon Silko and others, the class will analyze and produce a range of works that employ diverse methods of argument and inquiry, including personal narrative, reasoning and analysis, empirical research, fieldwork, and poetic expression. As writers we will create personal and public domains for our work, using everything from scratchpads to weblogs. Students will respond to one another’s work, creating a writing community that is both supportive and challenging. 3 hrs. lect. /disc. ART LIT (C. Wright)

WAGS/RELI 0290 Women’s Religious Life and Thought: The Female Pursuit of God in Late Antiquity and Byzantium
This course will explore the female religious experience in Greco-Roman antiquity and Early Christianity. We shall trace the transition from the mystery religions of Demeter and Isis in the Eastern Mediterranean to the cult of Mary the Mother of God (Theotokos) and the worship of female saints. Drawing on a wide range of sources, we shall study the varieties of female devotion and examine the roles available to women in the early Church: deaconesses and desert mothers, monastics and martyrs, poets and rulers. Different theoretical approaches will enable us

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

WINTER/SPRING TERM

Wednesday, January 12, 4:30 p.m.
R. A. Jones ’59 House Conference Room

“’Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt’: Fanny Mendelssohn’s Wilhelm-Meister Songs as a Chiffre for Female Creativity in 19th Century German Culture.”
Lecture by Bettina Matthias (German Dept.)

Tuesday, January 18, 12:15 p.m.
Chellis House

Brownbag lunch talk by Diane Tomkinson (Religion Dept.) in the “Life of the Mind” lecture series. Coffee and deserts will be provided.

Thursday, January 20, 4:30 p.m.
Bicentennial Hall 104

“Painted Nuns: Live, Dead and Learned.”
Lecture by Nina Scott, Professor of Spanish at Amherst University. This illustrated lecture features the art of portraiture of nuns, one of the most important social groups in colonial Spanish America.

Monday, February 14, 7:30 and 9:30 p.m.
McCullough

“The Vagina Monologues.”
Student performance of Eve Ensler’s play directed by Eliza Hulme and Rebecca Kanengiser. Silent auction of works by local and student artists to benefit WomenSafe.

Tuesday, February 22, 4:30 p.m.
Johnson 304

“How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?”
Fashioning the Virgin in Renaissance Venice,

Lecture by Katy Smith Abbott, Department of History of Art and Architecture.

Friday, March 4, 4:30 p.m.
110 Sunderland Building

“How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?”
Lecture by Robin Blaetz, Associate Professor and Chair of the Film Studies Program at Mount Holyoke College.

Wednesday, March 9, 12:15 p.m.
Chellis House

“Feminist Methods Revisited: Understanding Identidad in the Global Age.”
Brownbag lunch talk by Northeastern Consortium Fellow Ime Kerlee (WAGS/English Dept.) in the “Life of the Mind” lecture series. Coffee and deserts will be provided.

Monday, March 14, 4:30 p.m.
Warner Hemicyle

“Martin Luther King and Muhammad Ali, Bigger Thomas and Ernest Gaines: The Conundrum of the Prison in Black Men’s Literature and Culture.”
Lecture by Keith Clark, Professor of English, George Mason University.

April 7, 2005 - April 10, 2005
FAM Symposium:
“Art as Activism: Exploring the Intersection of Rape, Pornography and Violence.”
Details TBA.

Wednesday, April 20, 4:30 p.m.
John 110 Sunderland Building

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"An adequate way to open a discussion of my work is to refer to it as ‘boundary events.’ For me, what is cinematic, poetic and political thrives at the boundary of cinema. Yet very few artworks deal with the boundary of art (…). My films are all in a way experiences of limits. And each is realized at the threshold of several cultures, genres and events such as visual and musical. Each constitutes in its own way an investigation of these thresholds and if none of them are made to respond once and for all to the question ‘What is the film about?’ they have all helped me to open a space for creating experiences and critical reflections on cinema, art, (…) and cultural politics.

In experimenting with words, and images, I find myself constantly struggling with the limits of both languages and images. Certain viewers have related to my films as to musical scores. Others have repeatedly used the terms ‘poetic,’ ‘sculptural,’ ‘spatial,’ and ‘architectural.’ The film ‘Naked Spaces: Living is Round’ has been compared to an Indian musical ragas, while ‘Reassemblage’ was said in its use of silences to induce in the viewers a way of seeing and experiencing film. Because my work has often proven to be disturbing in the way it unsettles old viewing and thinking habits and because of the ensuing hostility it has encountered, I have had to learn to speak lucidly with it. But because of the ensuing hostility it has encountered, I have had to learn to speak lucidly with it. But for me, it touches (…) Preconceived ideas have a very limited role in the creative process. Most fascinating are the impasses, the blind procedures, the magical accidents, the unwanted discoveries, as well as the time wasted, the useless moves, the resonances generated despite one’s wishes and unknown to oneself in advance, hence unforeseeable to performers and the viewers during the unfolding of the film."

As stated in ‘Reassemblage,’ but realized in all aspects of my film practise, I don’t intend to ‘speak about, only to speak nearby.’

The making of each film transformed the way I see myself and the world around me. Once I start engaging with the process of making a film or in any artistic endeavor, I am also embarking on a journey whose point of arrival is unknown to me. The work here is a gift. Whether it is worth passing it on depends on whether it succeeds in taking me elsewhere than where I started out. It is only in the transformative potential of the work that I can hope to make a difference in other people’s way of seeing and experiencing film. Because my work has often proven to be disturbing in the way it unsettles old viewing and thinking habits and because of the ensuing hostility it has encountered, I have had to learn to speak lucidly with it. But for me, it touches (…) Preconceived ideas have a very limited role in the creative process. Most fascinating are the impasses, the blind procedures, the magical accidents, the unwanted discoveries, as well as the time wasted, the useless moves, the resonances generated despite one’s wishes and unknown to oneself in advance, hence unforeseeable to performers and the viewers during the unfolding of the film.

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Mary Smyth Duffy Website

David Bain has created a website for his late wife Mary Smyth Duffy, former director of Chellis House, who tragically passed away in 2002. When you go to http://www.davidbain.com/msdmainpage.html, you will find many of her beautiful paintings and watercolors.

Now that the snow is falling heavily on nature, Mary’s depictions of elms, peonies, rhubarb leaves, trumpet vines, and sunflowers make us look forward to the return of the bountiful Vermont summer. These works from 2001 reveal Mary’s love for landscape and still life painting. They also show how much she was inspired by impressionist artists and Georgia O’Keeffe. They bear testament to how much Mary loved the Vermont landscape and cherished every living being in it.


A group of Middlebury students with State representative Betty Nuovo on the Washington Mall.

Students Michelle Albert and Brigitte Frett make their voices heard.

Sex Trafficking: Yields Higher Returns Than Illegal Drug Trade

From November 16 to 20, renowned experts spoke about the misery and violence caused by the trafficking of 20 million women and children worldwide.

The Situation:

Trafficking in human beings is now estimated to earn more money for criminal syndicates than the global narcotics trade. According to UNICEF, more than 30 million children have been traded over the last three decades in the Asia-Pacific region alone. Anti-trafficking groups report that desperately poor parents are selling their daughters into the sex trade in some countries. Taken away from their homes, across international borders, left with no other means of support, the victims of sex traffickers are kept as virtual prisoners and frequently physically abused.

Three Reasons Against the Legalization of Prostitution:

1. Legalization/decriminalization of prostitution is a gift to pimps, traffickers and the sex industry.

Some people believe that, in calling for legalization or decriminalization of prostitution, they dignify and professionalize the women in prostitution. But dignifying prostitution as work doesn’t dignify the women, it simply dignifies the sex industry. People often don’t realize that decriminalization means decriminalization of the whole sex industry, not just the women in it. And they haven’t thought through the consequences of legalizing pimps as legitimate sex entrepreneurs or third party businessmen, or the fact that men who buy women for sexual activity are now accepted as legitimate consumers of sex.

In countries where women are criminalized for prostitution activities, it is crucial to advocate for the decriminalization of the women in prostitution. No woman should be punished for her own exploitation. But states should never decriminalize pimps, buyers, procurers, brothels or other sex establishments.

2. Legalization/decriminalization of prostitution and the sex industry promotes sex trafficking.

Faced with a dwindling number of Dutch women who engage in prostitution activities and the expanding demand for more female bodies and more exotic women to service the prostitution market, the Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking has stated that in the future, a solution may be to “offer [to the market] prostitutes from non EU/EEA[European Union/European Economic Area] countries, who voluntarily choose to work in prostitution…” These women would be given “legal and controlled access to the Dutch market.” As prostitution has been transformed into “sex work,” and pimps into entrepreneurs, so this recommendation transforms trafficking into “voluntary migration for sex work.” Looking to the future, the Netherlands is targeting poor women for the international sex trade to remedy the inadequacies of the free market of “sexual services.” Prostitution is thus normalized as an “option for the poor.”

3. Legalization/decriminalization of prostitution increases clandestine, illegal and street prostitution.

One goal of legalized prostitution was to move prostituted women indoors into brothels and clubs where they would be allegedly less vulnerable than in street prostitution. However, many women are in street prostitution because they want to avoid being controlled and exploited by pimps. Other women do not want to register or submit to health checks, as required by law in some countries where prostitution is legalized. Thus, legalization may actually drive some women into street prostitution.

Organizations that need your support

Coalition Against Trafficking In Women International, www.catinternational.org
Apne Aap Women Worldwide www.apneaap.org: fights sex trafficking in South East Asia