

More than an agenda

Women's studies is about rethinking traditional roles

Editor's note: Each Tuesday this semester, the Daily Nebraskan will print an opinion column from a guest columnist. Each works at the University of Nebraska or is involved with an issue that affects our campus or our students.

Tina Giambastiani, Angie BC DeVoss, Jill Matlock, Erin Hansbrough, Andrew Ascherl, Amanda Lighter, Keri Wayne, Kat Koscho and Gretchen Obrist are undergraduates in Women's Studies.

The Women's Studies Program. Feminism? Lesbianism? Of course! And a lot more. Women's Studies isn't just about "understanding gender differences and how they continue to affect different aspects of society," as Jessica Flanagan puts it.

It is about rewriting history to include women and rethinking traditional and contemporary man-centered theories and practices in all academic fields, including English, philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, family science and the study and application of the natural sciences and technology.

And it is political. It came out of a political movement.

There is an assumption that all fields other than the obvious ones, like Women's Studies, Chicana/o

Studies, Queer Studies and Ethnic Studies, etc., are apolitical.

However, the university itself, as a publicly funded institution, came out of a political movement. It is inherently political, as are all fields within it, including philosophy, English and journalism.

It is also assumed that the status quo is apolitical, objective and representative of everyone's experiences. In fact, the very presence of women in the university at all is a result of a political movement.

It is true that the Women's Studies Program ensures students the opportunity to examine "alternative lifestyles" when we define this phrase as one that allows the student to step outside of stereotypical boxes and labels. Examining "alternative lifestyles" includes studying lesbians' experiences as well as those of single mothers, welfare recipients, transgendered persons, sex workers or any other "lifestyle" that is typically ignored in the traditional androcentric discourses.

Women's Studies is about deconstructing the institution of gender and about women defining themselves for themselves. It is about women learning about their context and understanding that "gender differences" are socially constructed.

What actually continues to "affect different aspects of society" is the assigning of roles and proper characteristics to each sex according to the institution of gender and then sys-

tematically valuing one constructed "gender" schema over the Other.

The women's movement today and our Women's Studies Program are about making sure not only that we include women's experiences and knowledge and accomplishments in history, theory and activism, it is about including all women.

Class, age, race, able-bodiedness, sexual orientation and ethnicity, elements that shape the pervasiveness of racism, sexism, classism and homophobia in our culture make Women's Studies necessary and valuable.

Homophobia is part of the gendering process in acting as a tool to help control people. This pervasive attitude/norm of strict heterosexuality makes it unacceptable for people to live outside the roles set for them. Because of this, there is obviously a great deal of discussion about homophobia, heterosexism and sexual orientation in Women's Studies, including lesbianism and people's fear of it.

Women's Studies seeks to provide a space for women to bring themselves back to the center. Although our classes often include students who are simply there for the required credit, we are there to learn and to grow — a goal that is often hindered by resistance in the classroom when one point of view is privileged above the Others.

Women's Studies students read and listen and critically examine each other's work and ideas and the work and ideas of their teachers and of

other academics. We frequently respectfully disagree, and we challenge each other intellectually. We critique, and we learn, and we are proud of our work and of our diversity in perspective.

Although we don't share a single philosophy, we come to this field knowing that we will study and theorize about and work on issues not necessarily our own. We have an understanding that learning about and working on each other's struggles is an inherent part of our studies. The only "agenda" we have is to respect each other's viewpoints.

There is no "feminist agenda" agreed upon by all feminists. What we agree on is that women have been systematically and historically subject to the standards, norms, laws, politics, science, art, literature and interests of men, and they still are. We also agree on the compounding effects of factors of race, class, sexual orientation, age and ability that contribute to disadvantage for women.

There is no "black women's agenda" and there is no "lesbian agenda." Although these groups of women may have common concerns and issues in their lives, not all of these issues coincide, and women will not all agree on why they are faced with them, how to address them or how to solve the problems that issues pose.

The concerns of different women often intersect, and one woman often deals with race, sexual orientation

and class simultaneously. There is no list anywhere that could possibly sum up the complexity involved in these issues and narrow them down to an "agenda." The assumption that such agendas exist is absurdly narrow, given the diversity of women.

We want to thank Ms. Flanagan for directing the attention of the readers to our Women's Studies Web site at

<http://www.unl.edu/womenssp/wshome.html>. If any readers looked at it, they would have found that the word "lesbian" is mentioned four times among 4,000-plus words, and it is clearly not the only theme addressed.

Even if it were accurate that one English class Ms. Flanagan took featured lesbian work "70 percent" of the time, three credit hours for one class is one semester of a four-plus year, 125-plus credit hour undergraduate degree seems to be very little. In fact, it would make up .0168 percent of a college degree.

It seems to us that Ms. Flanagan could take another couple of Women's Studies classes and still keep the amount of woman-centered curriculum in her education down to less than 51 percent.

Finally, if Ms. Flanagan thinks that the Women's Studies Program at UNL promotes a "Slanted Agenda" perhaps she should do some research and theorizing about the agenda of mainstream American education institutions. There are some staggering statistics there to ponder.

Going coed

With a new female roommate, lifestyle changes are bound to occur



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There's a bunny on my couch.

It's not a live bunny, mind you. It's stuffed, just like the Tigger doll resting its head on the bunny's lap.

No, I haven't gotten in touch with my feminine side. Both creatures belong to my new roommate.

Yes, that does mean I'm living with a girl, a chick, a female, a member of the opposite sex, a trim, a broad, a hot mommy, a senorita, ein fraulein.

Or, for our purposes, Jill.

No, she's not my girlfriend, she's my roommate. I'm Jack to her Janet. It's all innocent. We've never had anything and we never will.

See, it all started when my then-roommate Jeff met Vicki. Yes, the loneliest guy in the world is getting married. (Would someone call the National Weather Service and get me the weather forecast for Hell?)

Therefore, Jeff's moving out soon. Enter his sister, Jill. She needed a place to live, I needed a roommate.

Coincidence? Yeah, probably.

I'm pretty sure Jeff is a bit uncomfortable about all this. Of course, this whole arrangement was her folks' idea, so Jeff's been quiet about it.

But you can still tell he's a little stressed. Either that or he's developed lockjaw.

Aside from Jeff, the true magnitude of this arrangement didn't really hit me until I returned from class Friday. When I entered my apartment, my nose was assaulted with the aroma of pot-pourri, perfume and nail polish.

Not my apartment's usual smell.

The luxurious aroma was a dramatic change from the smell of whatever animal flesh was charred and consumed the night before.

(Mmm ... Charred animal flesh.)

So, needless to say, this is going to mean a few changes in my lifestyle.

For example, no more Nude Tuesdays. I tried to get Jill hip to the idea, but ... well, you know how women can get. (Or not get, as the case is.)

I'll also have to stop watching NASCAR all day Sunday in my skivvies.

I'll actually have to start taking my clothes with me into the shower. Sorry Jill, no freebies as I sprint to my room post-shower.

A guy's got to have some standards, you know.

However, I am mostly concerned about Jill's traits rubbing off on me.

You see, when Jeff and I roomed together we were described to people as Brian and Joe Hackett, America's favorite aviating brothers from "Wings."

All of our friends expected I would bring Jeff more toward the wild side and he would serve as a calming influence on me.

Hey, it was a good idea on paper.

However, both Jeff and I ended up moving further to the right. Please bear in mind Jeff is the guy with the framed portrait of him and Dan Quayle.

The only change I like to think I instituted in Jeff was his success with a woman.

In other words, Jeff wound up influencing me a lot more than I influenced him.

Could the same thing happen again?

Might the day come when I own and utilize a "Caboodle" as a tackle box because it's so much prettier? It's entirely possible.

So to you, my reader(s), I promise

to do my utmost not to change. But I'm gonna need more help than usual. I need all of you to keep an eye on me.

If I start referring to my feelings in a serious way in a column, write me.

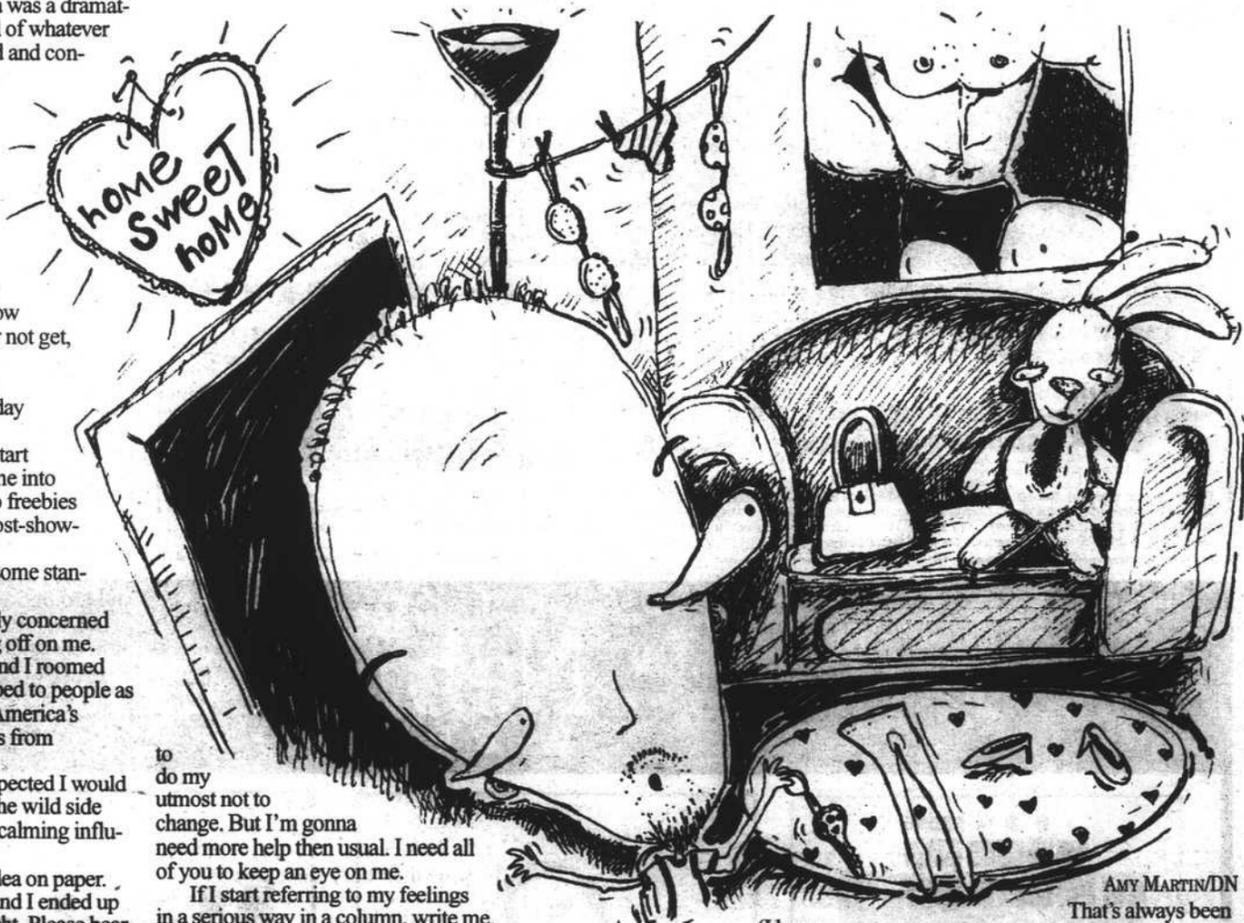
If I ever use the phrase, "I care about ..." e-mail me.

If I talk about finding a great deal on a pair of shoes, screw calling or writing — find me and smack me.

I can usually be found around Avery Hall, like any other frenetic, crazed, half-babbling unable-to-graduate student.

It's where all the journalism classes are held.

So, while I hate to harp on the subject, I really don't want to turn into a woman.



AMY MARTIN/DN

That's always been

my greatest weakness.

Women are complex, high-maintenance, mysterious creatures. Dear God I love 'em, I just don't want to be one.

So Jill, consider this your warning. If I ever act really crude, rude and crass, forgive me. It's nothing personal.

Most likely I was just feeling a bit insecure in my manhood and was overcompensating.

Which brings me back to the bunny. I almost forgot. Poker game, my house, Saturday night.

No women allowed. Unless you pay half the rent, of course.

(I know that's impossible without surgery, but I'm talking on a metaphysical level here.)

I don't want to pay more than \$2 for a pair of underwear.

I don't want to crave chocolate.

I don't even want to know what a "scrunchie" is.

And I sure as hell don't want to get that "not-so-fresh feeling."

Ever.

Honest, I have nothing against women. In fact, I'm smitten with them.