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## Women's Center Newsletter (December 1987)

University of Maine Women's Center Staff

*University of Maine Women's Center*

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UNIVERSITY of MAINE

December,  
1987

# WOMEN'S CENTER

monthly periodical  
*"keeping abreast of women's concerns"*

## WOMEN'S ROCK CLIMBING

-Chris Trefethan

When I first suggested including an all-women's program in Maine Bound's course offerings, I received several different reactions ranging from strong support to questions such as "Why an all-women's course when we don't have an all-men's course?" My response is that we don't have to run courses for men only. Maine Bound is similar to many other outdoor education programs: the technical courses, like rock climbing, are staffed primarily by men and most participants are men.

So, why run a program for women only? We hoped to reach women of all ages and backgrounds; women who might not participate in a co-ed course or who would prefer to participate in a program designed for only women. The group dynamics with a group of women are very different from dynamics in a mixed-sex group. Many women feel there is less competition, more support, and a warmer atmosphere. Although technical skills are the primary focus for an experience such as rock climbing, interpersonal growth and personal development are major components. The bonding and sense of community which develop among a group of women who share a common experience is wonderful and empowering.

Maine Bound offered its first women's rock climbing course in May of last year, and the second program took place in October. Both courses were staffed only by female instructors. Some participants came to the course already familiar with women-centered experiences. Others came primarily to learn about the sport of technical rock climbing in a safe and supportive atmosphere. I believe that these women gained much more; they developed a new appreciation for women-centered experiences and a sense of sisterhood with women who had previously been strangers.

At present, the Maine Bound program is encouraging any women who are interested in experiential education, that is learning by doing, to become involved with our program. Maine Bound offers a leadership development program for anyone interested in developing skills for teaching outdoors. If you would like to share with others your love of outdoor activities, we invite you to drop by our office and talk to one of us about the leadership program.

And we came together  
In wonder  
In fear  
With faith mightier  
than the granite slabs  
With support stronger  
than any rope  
any knot  
any boot  
As the fear blew through  
us like the chilly  
Atlantic winds, we  
embraced, we  
smiled  
As only we can understand  
All in the communion  
of women.

Chris Bobel  
Women's Rock Climbing  
May 1987



# WOMEN'S CENTER

A gathering of women who share an interest in the full spectrum of women's issues. We function as a club whose focus covers the traditional concerns of women as students, and we create an information network for women's social services on campus and in the surrounding community.

MEETINGS EVERY FRIDAY, 2-4, 1912 ROOM, UNION

PLEASE PASS THIS ON !! WE CAN ONLY AFFORD TO PRINT 1,000 COPIES.



## WOMEN OF U.ME.: DON'T AGONIZE, ORGANIZE !"

by Ann M. Pooler

Our first W.C. newsletter had an editorial about the rather deplorable Status of Women at the U.Me. "boys' club." Reactions to this editorial have been very interesting, and quite consistent with larger patterns of this backlash, so-called "post-feminist" decade. The newsletter generated the most excitement not among students, but among women who work at the University. (It must be noted that we can only afford to print 1000 copies, so we can reach relatively few students.) It was both encouraging and sad to get so many comments and notes from women faculty, staff, and low-level administrators (we have no women high-level administrators). Almost all said, "Bravo! You said what we cannot, and it needed saying."

Well, it's heartening to see that there IS a lot of women's energy around. But it's sad to think that this energy is untapped. The lessons of these women's experiences are ignored by young students who think racism and sexism went out with the '60's. Sad to see how many women are experiencing the same frustrations, but are not connecting with each other to share ideas and work together for improvements.

So where do we go from here?

Well, a few things have transpired since that first newsletter; events which I think could propel us into a better future if we organize to create it. First, through an outrageously autocratic move, the Graduate Student Board seceded from Student Government, whereupon the latter passed resolutions barring graduate students from membership in student clubs. At present, U.Me.'s "Women's Center" is actually a women's club, funded in part by the Student Government. We are now told we must exclude graduate students in order to get a penny of the \$735 funding S.G. allotted us (we'd asked for \$2630). WE CHOOSE THE WOMEN. We will not be exclusionary. We'll have to raise money from other sources.

Meanwhile, our administrative "boys' club" is fantasizing unabated. The seven million dollar stadium is now to be domed and astroturfed. (Tell me there's talk of a five million dollar expansion of the Memorial Union.

It is TIME. It is time for women on this campus to stand together to demand what is only fair -- a place of our own. A multi-purpose gathering place where women can work on diverse issues, but most vitally, a space where women can connect with each other for sharing, support, networking. It is time we get a real Women's Center on this campus. It is patriarchal/sexist blinders which make such a modest idea seem ridiculous, superfluous; and a \$7 million stadium seem inevitable.

A building is not a cure-all. There are women (and a few men) who have been struggling for years to improve conditions for women here. But their battles have been too lonely, and their experiences, frustrations, and knowledge too little shared. We are diffuse, isolated; we are missing each other. A place of our own would help us connect with each other.

The possibilities are unlimited, IF enough women make their voices heard. Let's start networking, sharing our ideas and experiences in Women's Centers on other campuses. Write an article for this newsletter, or send us a note to share your opinion; maybe in January we can start meeting. It's time to stop agonizing and start organizing !

(This Ann Pooler is a senior with an Independent major in Women's Studies. The other Anne Pooler is Assistant Dean in the College of Education, who's been getting my obscene phone calls for years, let alone some funny feedback from my activities on campus.)

## ALTERNATIVE HEALTH CARE FOR WOMEN

The Mabel Wadsworth Women's Health Center was incorporated in 1984 to gather energy and resources toward the establishment of a center for women's health in the Bangor area. The group's intention is to empower all women, regardless of color, sexual preference, or economic status, to take control of the care of their sexual and reproductive lives from pre-pubescence through the menstrual years and beyond.

Their vision for women includes the following:

- Knowledge about our bodies and our sexuality...
- Resources and medical services offered in an environment of support and concern...
- A network that acknowledges our common experiences as women...
- A focal point for our energy in the enhancement and celebration of women's lives...
- A feminist organization in Maine for the enrichment of all people.

A growing organization, the Mabel Wadsworth Women's Health Center provides speakers to area groups, and clinic services on Fridays from 12 to 4.

To make an appointment for health care, call 947-5337. If you'd like to get involved in this most worthy women's group, call Sharon Barker at 945-6832. (Contributions are also welcome.)

Questions, comments and/or contributions for the Women's Center newsletter may be addressed to THE WOMEN'S CENTER, 3rd floor, Memorial Union.



## ON PARENTAL CONSENT AND STD TESTING

Two questions concerning the parental consent issue were addressed to the Q/A Forum this month. In response to Joan H. and Monique D., Penelope Pink responds:

The recently proposed parental consent and notification legislation is not what it appears. Although proponents of the bill will undoubtedly tell you that what they are advocating is improved communication between teenagers and their parents, what they are really after is anti-abortion legislation. They depict typical teenager/parent relationships in very one-sided and simplistic terms: conflicts occur because teenagers are irresponsible, antagonistic, and stubbornly non-communicative. Parental consent laws, they contend, would foster increased verbal interaction between young people and their parents.

But this is hardly an accurate portrait of the average teenager. Contrary to what those in favor of PC would have the public believe, most teenagers in this state already enjoy open communication with their parents. In Maine, 90% of all teenage women who seek abortions, for example, bring at least one of their parents with them. Maine does not need to enact laws to promote teenager/parent communication; it already exists. Furthermore, in my opinion, love cannot be legislated. Communication cannot suddenly be implemented by legal mandate; it is the result of respect and trust which has been cultivated ~~over~~ a period of many years.

In order to make an informed decision about PC, it is important to ask who the sponsors of the bill are and what their overall purpose is. One needs to know that PC legislation has not been proposed from any group actively concerned with helping teenagers and their special needs. In general, those who work most closely with teens -- counselors and therapists, health care professionals, educators, youth advocates, social workers -- have not sponsored the bill. In fact, the bill is primarily sponsored by members of the Maine Christian Civic League, the very same folks who also tried to legislate for public censorship. PC is their way of attempting to impose their value system on everyone else.

Needless to say, there are many other reasons for opposing any type of parental consent and notification law. If readers

so desire, I will be more than willing to discuss this issue in more depth. For more information, you can also write to the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation, 132 West 43rd Street, New York City, and request a booklet entitled "Parental Notice Laws."

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Another question from Paula G. asked about the ethicality of women being automatically tested for sexually transmitted diseases during a gynecological visit. Penelope Pink responds:

GYN exams are often stress-inducing for young women and, as a result, they may not always question the exam process. Women should know, however, that any testing for STD's is optional and should be presented as such. Health care professionals are in a position to suggest and perhaps even to advise, but never to dictate. A woman's body is her own. Competent health care professionals in the GYN field ask a woman about her sexual history before the exam. If a woman is in a particularly low-risk category -- a lesbian, a virgin, in a long-term monogamous relationship, married -- she may choose not to undergo STD testing, especially if it is at an additional cost. So-called 'routine' STD testing, anal examinations, or other procedures on women in low-risk categories without their prior consent, especially if it involves additional cost, is absolutely discriminatory. And, as your letter suggests, no health care professional should make the assumption that a woman requesting birth control pills has been sexually active in the past and is at risk for STD's.

I would like to add, however, that any woman who is sexually active, especially if she has changed partners since her last exam, ~~should~~ voluntarily submit to STD testing. Certain STD's have no noticeable symptoms. As one nurse I spoke to said, "Future reproductive functioning may be compromised because of the silence of the disease." Chlamydia, in particular, has reached epidemic proportions on many college campuses. Women need to educate themselves by procuring information from Cutler Health Center, Residential Life staff, or the Peer Educators.



## DATE VIOLENCE

Mary Kay Kasper

On November 15, the staff of East Campus attended a staff development program on date violence. Date violence is becoming more and more of an issue on this campus. Just this semester there have been ten reported assaults and many that often go unreported.

Because women are often in subordinate positions in relationships with men, when violence does occur, they are afraid to get out. Reasons for this fear include the loss of a "boyfriend" which is extremely important, the loss of friends who may not understand and thus blame the woman, and, most importantly the fear of further harassment from the boyfriend.

In order to stop date violence, we must empower women to believe in themselves enough to get out of violent relationships. We need to encourage and support women who are in these situations to speak out and take care of themselves.

Violence is wrong and violence in relationships must end. Boyfriends are not worth a blackeye, the humiliation of verbal abuse, or worse yet, a serious injury which may include the loss of your life. Date violence must end now.

## WHY WOMEN'S STUDIES ?

The following are quotations from women students on the value of women-centered courses.

"I'd been studying the man's world all these years and never even knew it. I always felt something was missing but thought it was just me. Now I know there's a whole story left out, and Women's Studies gave me the words to express it." (T.T.)

"Women's Studies fosters critical thought and passionate learning. It's empowering. It speaks to my roots, my life." (S.J.)

"For the first time, I could link what I was learning with my own experience. I'm finally learning things that are very relevant to my life." (D.B.)

"Women-centered courses changed my whole worldview. No longer do I hold a naive belief in authorities and experts and 'objectivity'. I have new analytical skills which expose the ideological assumptions hidden behind all theories." (B.T.)

"Women's Studies taught me to be a more suspicious learner, a more critical learner. It's exciting, because now, no matter what course I'm in, I'm getting double the education. I learn the material itself, and I also analyze its historical, sociopolitical, and ideological bases." (A.P.)

"People think women haven't done anything, or don't have anything to contribute; that's not because it's true, but because our story hasn't been told. Our history has been buried and our perspectives denied. Women-centered courses are just the start of telling the whole story, not just male views."

## SPRUCE RUN NEEDS WIMMIN!!

For many of us, the first awakenings of feminist awareness of the realities of women's lives can be a scary and lonely realization. Where can we go with this new knowledge? How can we use our energies to help women, to learn more, and to participate in a network of women working for social change?

Well, one way is to get involved in a most successful feminist endeavor in the Bangor area -- Spruce Run. Spruce Run was organized about ten years ago to confront the problem of domestic violence against women. About 5 years ago, money was raised to buy a building in Bangor, which now serves as a shelter for battered women and their children. It's almost always full. Recently, a branch office was opened in Ellsworth to serve Hancock county.

Spruce Run helps battered women and their kids, and also works for social change through public education, and through counselling of parents and children to break the cycle of violence.

Volunteers are crucial to Spruce Run, and more are needed. With a few hours each month, you could get involved in some of the following ways:

- \*\* Staffing the hotline (from your home or in their office. Involves 40 hours of training in crisis intervention.
- \*\* Fundraising (raffles, bakesales, yardsales, etc.)
- \*\* Development of programs for shelter residents.
- \*\* Office work (mailings, typing, etc.)
- \*\* Kids' services (activities, play groups, field trips, etc.)
- \*\* Community education (public speaking, public service announcements, etc.)

To apply to volunteer, call 945-5102.

For crisis intervention in instances of domestic violence, call their 24-hour hot-line at 947-0496.

## BECAUSE... (from a leaflet of the Nat'l Union of Students' Women's Campaign, London)

Because woman's work is never done and is underpaid or unpaid or boring or repetitious and we're the first to get the sack and what we look like is more important than what we do and if we get raped it's our fault and if we get bashed we must have provoked it and if we raise our voices we're nagging bitches and if we enjoy sex we're nymphos and if we don't we're frigid and if we love women it's because we can't get a "real" man and if we ask our doctor too many questions we're neurotic and/or pushy and if we expect community care for children we're selfish and if we stand up for our rights we're aggressive and "unfeminine" and if we don't we're typical weak females and if we want to get married we're out to trap a man and if we don't we're unnatural and because we still can't get an adequate safe contraceptive but men can walk on the moon and if we can't cope or don't want a pregnancy we're made to feel guilty about abortion and...

for lots and lots of other reasons  
we are part of the feminist movement.