

The F Word

Volume 10 | Issue 1

A letter from the editors

The F-Word is a space on campus for students to use their voices however they choose. It is a safe place for students to share what they've witnessed, what they're experiencing and what they're thinking. The "news" in this newsletter is determined not by journalists in the media, but by students alone, providing a genuine look at what is newsworthy in their eyes.

We resurrected The F-Word because we believe Lehigh students need a place to work through issues—both personal and social—relating to gender, sexuality and feminism. We saw them discussing the presidential

candidates' focus on "women's issues." We hear them alluding to gender inequality at frat parties and in the classroom. While a small group on campus identifies openly as feminists, others seem uninformed but curious about the whole idea. And we are overwhelmed and deeply troubled by the intelligent, ambitious women who believe they are empowered but who obsess tirelessly over their imperfections.

It's not easy trying to understand a system that has become so normalized it dominates our everyday lives without us even noticing. By sharing thoughts in this space, we can help open each other's eyes to what is hap-

pening and what we can do about it. The F-Word is a place for students to write about their thoughts and feelings in a way that feels liberating. We believe progress is inevitable when students are given a place to share their thoughts and think deeply about issues that matter to them.

We hope you enjoy participating in this honest, open conversation by reading and writing about what interests you. If you are interested in contributing to next semester's issue of The F-Word, please email editors Molly St. Denis (mes212), Jackie Peterson (jpp216), and Kylie Gray (kag414) or the Women's Center (inwnc@lehigh.edu). Enjoy!

A Feminist by any other name

Courtney Weintraub
Class of '13

Every time I wear my feminist t-shirt, a raggedy purple thing that reads *WOMEN RESISTING*, my friends give me shit. "Not that shirt again, Court," they sneer rolling their eyes, surprised that their past eyerolling has been insufficient in its aim to get me to stop wearing the shirt.

These friends don't identify with feminism, and when I wear the shirt I'm always emboldened to ask why. What is it exactly about feminism that they dislike?

Do they dislike women's liberation? No, they tell me. They're all for it. Do they dislike equality? *Obviously not.*

So what is it? They go to an acclaimed university where they study sociology/accounting/civil engineering, they voted in this month's election, and they already have jobs or are looking for jobs for next

year. By my measure, they're feminists. And at least one prominent writer agrees.

Caitlin Moran, a British columnist for *The Times* of London, upholds a broad definition of feminism. She believes women living in the First World are feminists by default. Neither ideological views nor self-identification with the feminist movement is of any consequence. If a woman lives in a feminist society that provides her with roughly equal opportunities for education, jobs, and the ability to choose how she wants to live her life, she is a feminist.

According to her worldview, we're all feminists. Even Ann Coulter and Phyllis Schlafly and my non-feminist-identifying friends. And yours.

Other scholars reject the all-encompassing definition of feminism supported by Moran, opting instead for a more pluralistic view. Rita Jones, PhD, direc-

tor of the Women's Center, believes that feminism cannot be contained in a single identity. "There are multiple feminisms," she said. That is, feminism can no longer be classified as a unified movement, but rather many separate movements, each with its own needs and vision for the future. In addition, she believes there are women who are resistant to feminism, women who benefit from the patriarchal structure and are afraid of it crumbling in step with the empowerment of women.

I'd like to think the latter constitutes only a small proportion of women. But what about the rest? Why do only 29 percent of American women describe themselves as feminists?

Therese Corcoran, a Lehigh junior, believes that the term itself has a negative connotation. She says we have been conditioned to believe that today's "femi-

Where is she now: Zoe Zachariades

Zoe Zachariades
Women's Center Alum

How did the Women's Center at Lehigh shapemycareer?Igiveitallthecredit,in fact.

Not that my two majors didn't play a role; they greatly shaped me too. My majors are English and French and I am a full time "Direct Service Advocate" for survivors of domestic and sexual violence so it's hard to see the connection. It was indeed in an English class that someone read aloud from "The Vagina Monologues." Instantly I was hooked on the provocative and body positive nature of the story. Within weeks I was signed up to be a part of the next performance on Lehigh's campus. This all took place at the Women's Center. From that moment and for the next two and half years of college, the Women's Center gave me the foundation to envision a world where equality and nonviolence save the day.



Lehigh's women's center and all it encompassed: its vision, staff, homey atmosphere, safe space mentality and encouragement to give women an equal footing at Lehigh, was the right incubator for a passion I didn't know lay inside of me. What would I have been doing if I never heard that monologue, if the women's center didn't exist? I can't imagine being as fulfilled as I am now in a different career. I know that because this wonderful space existed, I found a voice and a space in the non-violence movement. I was a part of "The Vagina Monologues" for three years, found an internship at a domestic violence shelter post college and I've never looked back. This is my career – domestic and sexual violence advocacy- and so I see the Women's Center at Lehigh as not only being a wonderful piece in a larger movement but an absolutely pivotal piece in shaping what I hope will be my life's work.

Lehigh alum at She's Got Game

Allison Howard
Class of '15

Lehigh University's She's Got Game, a monthly discussion group for female athletes, was lucky enough to have expert and Lehigh alum Dr. Alex Milspaw present on the topic of pelvic pain on October 17.

According to Dr. Milspaw, pelvic pain is staggeringly prevalent in both present and former female student athletes and can lead to other problems. As athletes, many women in the group had questions about injuries in their lower back. She explained how other injuries or pain could be related to the pelvic area because of the complex inter-workings of the body. Unfortunately in today's medical system, doctors are not likely to recognize and correctly address the problems in the pelvic region as causes for back pain or other injuries. After her presentation, she gave the group helpful hints on how to talk to their doctors if they believe their pain may be related to the pelvic region. This was much needed information, as many members of the group had had previous concerns dismissed, or even laughed at, by doctors.

Dr. Milspaw went out of her way to help the group in every way she could. She even personally mailed me a CD on breathing relaxation techniques. She stayed an extra hour to answer other health related questions from the group. Some topics that came up included adequate amounts of sleep, caffeine, and digestive issues. Sophomore Elizabeth Sinclair shared her thoughts, saying, "I think the part that I found the most interesting-although all of it was really interesting- were the tips she gave on how to get deep enough sleep, because sleep sometimes takes the back burner for student athletes since we just have so much other stuff to do. But not getting enough sleep can actually have a serious effect on your performance."

Overall, this was a highly educational She's Got Game Discussion and I think everybody was able to learn something from Dr. Milspaw's presentation. In the words of sophomore Serena Polite, "She was very informative and I was genuinely surprised at how much what she said related to me personally."

Where is she now: Laura Ponchick

Laura Ponchick
Women's Center Alum

I am now back in Los Angeles after a year abroad teaching English in Santiago, Chile. I have returned to the Feminist Majority Foundation as one of their National Campus Organizers, creating alliances with Feminist organizations on over 400 college campuses. After so much time in the Feminist environment at the Lehigh Women's Center, especially in staff meetings and WAVES meetings, I found it impossible to stop my inner Feminist from coming out, especially in this election season! I knew that I wanted to work on the upcoming election, but thought that my efforts would be better channeled by working with college students on the comfort of their own campuses, instead of phone banking for a candidate or going door to door for donations.

We are working on our Get Out Her Vote Campaign, getting students registered, educated, and voting in the upcoming November election. Besides the obvious Presidential race, there are numerous states that have initiatives that directly affect women of all ages, especially in terms of reproductive rights. Sadly, most students may not know about these, either for lack of interest, or lack of time spent researching the issues. We are reaching out to teachers, students, clubs, and *especially* women's centers (without a doubt one of the greatest resources on more than just Lehigh's campus), on numerous campuses, hoping to educate them, and to have students stand up for their rights. Our hope is that students will truly understand just how important this election really is, and that we increase the percentage of youth votes.

Current women's issues worldwide

Jacqueline Peterson
Editor

Women's issues have been brought to the forefront of American politics recently because of this year's election. It has been near impossible to avoid the abortion debates, planned parenthood arguments, and many attempts to win over "the Women". Due to the fact that these issues were front and center in American newsrooms, many gender issues throughout the world have been neglected in U.S. media.

The one international women's rights story that has gone viral recently is the Taliban's shooting of a 14-year-old girl who chose to protect girls' rights to education. The Taliban said that the reason they targeted Malala Yousufzai is that she promoted "Western thinking". They have said that if she continues to outwardly support women's rights to education, they will continue to target her until she is dead. On October 15, Malala was flown to an intensive care hospital in the United Kingdom, where she will need "intensive neuro rehabilitation," according to Pakistani doctors who has cared for her before her transfer to the UK.

After a woman was raped by two police officers in Tunisia, she was charged with indecency. In Egypt, a released copy of a newly written constitution would lower the marriage age for women and allow female circumcision, as well as limit women's rights for work and education. These, among other events violating women's rights in the Middle East, have sparked an "uprising of women in the Arab world", which is now a Facebook page with over 45,000 likes as of October 20.

However, good news for women comes in Botswana, where the High Court overturned a law that only allowed the youngest son of the family the right to inherit the family home. On October 12, it was decided that the law violated the Botswana Constitution and was repealed.

Saudi Arabia's Princess Ameerah Al-Taweel spoke out for women's rights in a recent interview with CNN's Christiana Amanpour. She said that women make up 57 percent of university graduates in Saudi Arabia, but only 15 percent of the workforce. They are 'educated, but not



organized'. Princess Ameerah hopes to counteract this by helping to create the first women leaders network in Saudi Arabia as the Vice Chair of the Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation. In addition, she hopes to empower Saudi women to rally for their civil rights, as no written civil rights for women citizens currently exist.

In Harare, Zimbabwe, a group of women confronted their unity government directly to ask that 50 percent of parliamentary, cabinet, and local seats be reserved for them in the 2013 election. "The voices of women in Zimbabwe must never, never be ignored again," said Zimbabwe Deputy Prime Minister

Thokozani Khupe, who led the meeting.

On October 18, an independent group of United Nations (UN) officials who make up the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice asked countries to eliminate all laws classifying adultery as punishable by law. The group stated that all countries whose laws allow punishments of fines, imprisonment, flogging, or death by stoning or hanging should repeal these laws and "ensure that all accused enjoy their rights to a fair trial."

Perhaps now that the presidential election has passed, more of these issues will slip into American mass media.

Society's standards for women: The forgotten concept of what is natural

Anonymous

Lehigh University Student

Today's society is one filled with women who have let expectations posed by the media govern their entire lives. It is actually really easy to do when the media portrays not only women who are not only dangerously underweight, but who are digitally reconstructed to portray no less than perfect. We are relentlessly bombarded with these pictures, and soon enough society comes to take these unrealistic standards and turn them into common expectations. Today's society seems so hell-bent on modifying and reconstructing every woman that natural is no longer beautiful. Images of women in the media today are comprised of ultra-thin, unbelievably flawless, striking people with glowing skin and perfect proportions. Photo-shopped or not, these images exist everywhere. And the unrelenting force-feed of impossible perfection creates an unreasonable standard for women to strive for. Because of this, the rates of cosmetic plastic surgery are steadily increasing, as well as the commonality of eating disorders.

Since 1997, there has been over 197% increase in the total number of cosmetic procedures for women. There were over 9 million cosmetic procedures performed in 2011, 1.6 million being surgical. Cosmetic surgery has become extremely common and entirely widespread. I had

planned to have my nose done ever since I can remember. It was my biggest insecurity and though no one ever pointed it out, it was the only thing I saw when I looked in the mirror. Mainstream media does not contain a single image of a girl with a bigger nose. Honestly, they don't, because I used to try to find these women as proof that even though I had a bigger nose, I could still look decent. The only verification I found of that fact was brief, and in the form of pop-singer Ashlee Simpson. She was cited in magazines as being happy with herself, completely confident, that her slightly larger nose gave her "character"... but then soon enough, she got a nose job too. In this society, there is no room for the imperfect. For women 19-34 years of age, rhinoplasty is the second most common procedure. And in 2011, 126,107 people found this surgery necessary, just as I did.

Why did I need to go through a two-hour surgery, have a rough two-week recovery, and spend thousands of dollars of purely my own money to "fix myself?" The reason is because media has made perfect the norm. And big noses are not perfect. Therefore, media and society told me that I had to change.

All women that the media display today are beautiful- but they are not natural. Think of the most well known ideal that every girl grew up with- Barbie. If Barbie were a real woman, she would have to walk on all fours due to her proportions.

Today, the average model weighs 23% less than the average woman- but we would have no idea this is abnormal because the media only projects the women who are this thin. In fact, if a magazine were ever to portray an average looking woman, our immediate reaction would be that she looks overweight. Of course, this same perception carries over out of magazines and runways and onto daily life. Women are being brainwashed into believing that the only way to be beautiful is to be thin. In fact, as many as 10 million Americans are struggling with eating disorders at this very moment. With the increased number of people conforming to this view, the idealized media version becomes a dangerous reality that more and more people are sucked into. The diet industry is worth \$55 billion, with a 95% failure rate. However, because the only women who are shown in the media are size double zero and under 100 pounds, there has been a creation of a false norm- that every woman who can even be debatably beautiful must be this thin, and that they all look this way.

The scariest part of today's society being so wrapped up in these impossible standards is the fact that unless you take the time to actually think about them, they seem completely normal. With all of us conforming so eagerly to meet media's expectations we are losing something that is actually beautiful- the forgotten conception of what is natural.

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nists" are "really out there" in the wings, plotting to upend the patriarchy and install a bra-less, man-less new world order. We automatically associate today's "feminists" with their more radical foremothers, the first- and second-wavers who, in their time, *were* fighting a revolution over equality. Even then, the media took images out of context to make feminists appear more radical than they may have been. And it worked. By and large, we still equate feminism with an extreme movement that is united by hostility towards men.

Regardless of the definition of femi-

nism you subscribe to, it is evident that many Lehigh women, like many women nationwide, are reluctant to identify with the feminist movement. "Our campus has a lot of potential," said Corcoran, who believes that more Lehigh women are feminists than are willing to admit it. She notes that the responsibility tied to being a feminist may turn some women away. "People think being a feminist means being active," she said, "When really, people have different roles. Not everyone has to take an activist role."

Jordan Eyal, '13, blames a lack of a physical congregation space for Lehigh's

lack of outward feminism. She envisions a Student Union-type space, which we don't really have, outfitted with a student-run coffee shop and multipurpose rooms where students can meet to hang out and study. "I'd rather be a feminist while drinking a chai latte," she joked. This atmosphere, Eyal believes, would encourage the types of conversations needed to promote greater tolerance at Lehigh, which means more people willing to step forth and proclaim themselves as feminists or however they may identify and accept the identities of their peers, whatever they may be.

Social and psychological dynamics of co-ed interactions

Molly St. Denis

Editor

Amidst all the talk of gender equality, we finally have *evidence* that patriarchy still exists. “Women speak drastically less when they’re surrounded by dudes. And that’s bad,” said Lindy West in a Jezebel article.

“The time that women spoke [in collaborative group settings] was significantly less than their proportional representation—amounting to less than 75 percent of the time that men spoke,” found a new study published in *American Political Science Review*.

Women feel that their voice is not worthy of being heard in coed groups. In these settings, it is *real* that women feel, and consequently become, voiceless.

I’m well aware of my own inclination to keep my mouth shut when I’m around men—and to avoid groups dominated by men altogether (hence my dropping out of the CBE and majoring in English/minoring in Women’s Studies). Until this finding came out, I attributed my shyness around men to personal weakness; I felt like I had failed at feminism. While it is disconcerting to know that I have been duped into playing my “role” within the patriarchal system, it is comforting to know that I am not alone.

When I shared West’s article on my Facebook page, a senior frat boy at Lehigh commented, “I guess some women should just grow some balls...” His comment suggests that the problem would be solved if women acted more like men—loud, assertive, and dominant. While I appreciate the suggestion . . . NO.

If we humored this boy and decided to act more like men, we would all be talking over each other, one voice louder than the next. When women try to speak up, they often find themselves, as West said, waiting “for a pause in a room of interrupters.” Interactive conversation would cease to exist.

I am not alone when I feel scared to raise my hand in a male-dominated class, when I say nothing to groups of men who talk about women in degrading ways, when I don’t know what to say to men who claim that women aren’t half as funny or smart as men are. Our dilemma, as West put it, is the “old double standard—when men speak up to be



heard they are confident and assertive; when women do it we’re shrill and bitchy.”

The good news is that women are not alone when they feel like giving up on trying to be heard. The bad news is that changing this dynamic will not be an easy feat.

West captures this phenomenon perfectly: “you forfeit, because their lungs are bigger, they’re groomed for assertiveness since birth, and you’re groomed to assume that nobody will take you seriously anyway.”

In yoga, we are taught to focus only on what we can control—setting up for a pose, focusing your mind on the present moment and on your intention for the practice. Thinking about what you cannot control—how the pose manifests itself after you set it up, if you’re as “good” as your neighbor, that you are new to the practice—is simply discouraging and inhibits improvement.

We cannot control how we’ve been “groomed” to act in a patriarchal society, what we’ve been trained to believe about the worth of our words, how others act, or even what the consequences will be if we speak up. If women want to be more influential, we must focus on what we *can* control.

I know it’s unfair to ask women to fix a social dynamic that they didn’t ask for and are in many ways victims

to, but the only way women will ever feel comfortable speaking up in the company of men is if they act now, in unison, to challenge the status quo.

It’s not easy to find a moment to interject in the midst of assertive male-dominated conversation, to trust that you will be taken seriously, and to find strength by trusting your feminine inner wisdom—not by “grow[ing] some balls.”

I wish I had step-by-step instructions on how to trust our own voices. As in yoga, you will not always master the pose on your first try—it takes practice. It is important to bring your attention away from the factors you cannot control (Am I outnumbered by men? Do they think I’m a b*tch for standing up for myself? Are they laughing at me for speaking up?). If it doesn’t go as smoothly as you had hoped, remember that you’re just flexing a new muscle—and that we are all in this together.

Trial and error is an excellent way to build strength. It’s an ongoing challenge to speak up in groups of men and one that might never feel completely comfortable, but if we persist, we will bring “unique and helpful perspectives to the issue under discussion.” We will challenge men’s impressions of the worth of women’s words while simultaneously acting as role models to women who are just beginning their practice of “speaking up.”

Contextualizing Feminism and equality

Eric Weiss
Class of '14

Equality has been a hard fought battle for Americans. Racial equality, sexual equality, and social equality define the different types of people that make up American society. Equality is not black and white, man and woman, rich or poor, but rather a healthy mix of all sociopolitical factors. It is said that feminists strive to get women to achieve equality with men, but that is not how equality works. Equality is not given, it is achieved through cooperation and understanding. Also, saying that a woman's goal is to somehow "catch up" to men admits that women have less intrinsic natural rights, which is plainly untrue. It is a common misconception to understand equality as a ladder, with some rungs inevitably higher or lower than others. Equality does not work this way. Sorjerner Truth implores, "If women want [more] rights than they got...they [should] just take them, and not be talking about it." That is not to say that women have not been discriminated against, but if women are

truly looking for equality, there is only one way to get it.

Feminism is the movement of women standing for their intrinsic rights as people who deserve equality. Gloria Steinem describes a feminist as "anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men." The feminism movement gives women a place to stand amongst others in society to stand for personal freedom. Society includes types of people with different social, political, racial, and economic backgrounds. Feminism gives women a place to find equality among men and women of all backgrounds. Another commonly misconceived notion is that feminists are a group of women fighting against men who discriminate against them. It is clearly a much more complicated interaction agglomeration of many socio-political factors. It is not accurate to blame men as a gender for the discrimination many women are subject to in society, but men must take responsibility for the discrimination that is forced on many women in spreading awareness of all peoples natural rights.

The Women's Center from a male perspective

Jorge Estrella
Class of '14

As a senior at Lehigh, I look back at all the things I have done on campus and ponder if I have done all that I wanted to do when I first came and tried new and adventurous things. I can honestly say that working at the Women's Center has been something new and adventurous. I started working here early in the semester in order to help make the women's center appealing to more men on campus. This is as daunting as it sounds. Men on campus, including myself at one point, think that the center serves only the female population on campus. Some think that it is a "Women's Only" club and that no men can enter here. The more I work here, the more I realize that this is not the case. It is a place where equality and tolerance are

promoted.

I hope to promote more events on campus that can bring both sexes together. I, along with Eddie Brack, am promoting our new group "Man 2 Man." The goal of the group is to bring together men who are interested in making the center feel more welcoming to men on campus. As hard as this may seem, I feel that it is attainable. I recently conducted a survey for the center which asked men around campus about their attitudes toward the Women's Center. A lot of them stated that they would love to come to programs geared more towards men who have done positive things for the female population. There is an interest to learn more about what we do here at the Women Center; we just have to work at finding more commonalities. I hope I am able to do this!

A Bird's Eye View of the Women's Center

Traci Mindler
Office Coordinator

Nestled in the center of the UC you will find the Women's Center. At any given time, it is possible to find a variety of students and, occasionally, staff adorning the brightly colored furniture in the space.

The main goal of the Center is to promote gender equity across the Lehigh Campus and the surrounding community. We sponsor many programs on education and prevention of gender violence. It is an uncomfortable topic, but a necessary issue that needs to be addressed in order to reduce the statistics that haunt our communities.

The Women's Center struggles to be viewed by the campus as a friendly and welcoming space because of the nature of our work. We will continue to search for programs that address the issues of gender violence without alienating our fellow community members. It is often perceived that we are a place solely for victims or "men haters", but nothing could be further from the truth. Our space is warm and invites all who wish to engage in nondiscriminatory, open dialogue. The topics of discussion will sometimes push your limits of comfort, but ultimately, produce a feeling of satisfaction because you have crossed a personal barrier.

The space is open to students most days to serve as a chill zone or to escape from the daily hustle of campus life. Some students considerate it their hub and will make several stops during a normal day.

The staff consists of our Director, Rita Jones, PhD., Assistant Director, Brooke DeSipio, M.Ed, Coordinator, Traci Mindler and approximately 25 student staff members. Together, they create and execute the mission of The Women's Center.

It is definitely worth checking out. The only requirement is an open mind!

Experiencing the Women's Center: What Does It Do?



Molly St. Denis

Editor

Kelsey Leck

Class of '16

The mood is cheerful and humorous as Rita Jones, director of the Women's Center, tells us to crowd around the computer screen; we are about to begin our weekly meeting discussion—35 minutes a week I know I'll laugh, relax and be entertained. Giggles and shocked expressions fill the room as we watch Stephen Colbert's spoof commercial of the Summer's Eve talking vagina hand puppets. Knowing what we're about to see, Rita, Traci and Brooke, Women's Center staff members, break into laughter. Colbert raises his pointer finger as a penis and we join them in hysterics. Men shouldn't feel left out, Colbert says. Their genitals are just as inadequate as women's!

The showing of this clip morphs into an easeful discussion between staff and students on the racial and gender implications of the "talking vagina." We share our own observations about how genital hair is perceived in our culture and what it means that products like "My



New Pink Button," a pink genital dye, are advertised in the mainstream media.

While this is an inside look at the fun the Women's Center has on a regular basis, most students first encounter the Women's Center through "SATISFY" (Sexual Assault Information Session for First-Years) during orientation. In this program, Break the Silence, a Women's Center organization that addresses the issue of gender violence on campus, explains the realities of sexual assault. Later in the year, Break the Silence raises awareness for domestic and intimate partner violence by putting up purple lights, hanging silhouettes adorned with statistics around campus, and making a "These Hands are not for Hurting" banner, in which students trace their hands and write how they can be used for good.

Most notably, Break the Silence runs Take Back The Night, an annual march against sexual violence. In preparation for the event this year, the Women's Center co-sponsored a lecture by Katie Koestner, founder of Take Back The Night. Koestner, a date rape survivor her freshman year of college, raised



questions about the psychological components of assertiveness and coercion in acquaintance rape.

Looking toward future Women's Center events, this year's V-Day production, "A Memory, A Rant and A Prayer," will expose how violence against women and girls impacts every one of us on Feb. 8 and 9. Additionally, at this year's Real Beauty Fashion Show on Feb. 28, models from campus will strut their stuff to promote healthy body image.

Interested in talking about feminism-related issues? The Lehigh University Feminist Alliance (LUFA) meets every Monday to discuss gender equality and "hot topic" feminist issues from 4-5 pm in Linderman 404. If Mondays don't work for you, come by the Women's Center (UC C207) any Friday from 2-3 pm and celebrate the end of the week with snacks, beverages and a stimulating conversation on feminism.

We invite you to check out more upcoming Women's Center events at the Event Calendar on our website; trust me, you don't want to miss out on the events we have planned!

Becoming a "Lehigh Girl"

Kylie Gray

Editor

In the fall of my senior year in high school, my mother and I took the time during a whirlwind of college visits to see Lehigh for the second time. I remember the imposing presence of the Alumni Building as we drove down Summit Street, my classification of Dravo as a "Harry Potter" dorm and trekking up the stairs to Rathbone to be gratified by the breathtaking view. As our tour guide launched into what seemed to be the complicated dining plan system, my mother leaned toward me and whispered,

"Were going to have to get you a pair of boots."

I smiled and nodded, instantly understanding what she was talking about. Tons of girls around campus, including our tour guide, scaled the hills in fashionable pairs of boots. There was some variation, but not much; the boots were brown or black, heeled or flat, silky suede or shiny leather. They were so common that in the coming months, as I finished up my applications and decided on Lehigh, my mother and I continued to joke about it.

The next time I was at Lehigh, I had

with me a van full of dorm essentials, the majority of my wardrobe and a pair of fuzzy black boots. No matter how much I may have tried to deny it, I wanted what every freshman wants—to fit in, find friends and figure out how to make it through lunch in Court without looking like I didn't belong there. I wanted to look like a Lehigh girl: put-together, confident and successful.

As the months passed, my desire to look and dress like my peers only increased. I made sure to get up a little early before class, choose my outfits carefully, maybe

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Becoming a "Lehigh Girl": Continued from page 7

apply some makeup even though I usually only did for special occasions. When I went home for breaks, I happily shrugged back into my old sweats, swearing to my mother that I would never walk around campus like that unless I was off to sports practice. We agreed that Lehigh girls were classier than that, that they took the time to care about their appearance. I did, too.

I still love those boots, and wear them often. In the two and a half years since that time, however, I have thought more about what it means to look like a "Lehigh girl," or a Lehigh student for that matter. If someone were to ask me what

a Lehigh student dresses like, I feel that I could tell them specifically, and that's troublesome to me. Of course it would require overgeneralization, but perhaps it shouldn't be as easy as it is.

I wonder how many of my peers feel as I did, and sometimes still do, that regulating my appearance will influence my success here. There is some truth in that; paying attention to the way that I present myself makes me feel more confident and will help me when I enter the professional world in the next few years. Observing the way that others do that is a great way to get ideas, but I

have to remember that I'm dressing for myself, and not for anyone else. Many of us want the same things; we want to be liked, admired and presentable—but that shouldn't come at the expense of our self-esteem or expression.

Every once in a while, I'll make a point of wearing something I normally wouldn't, just to try something different. Whenever I receive compliments on these outfits, it reminds me that being unique is beautiful. Am I still going to wear my boots? Of course! But I'll do that with the awareness that I don't need to look like a "Lehigh girl" in order to be one.

Upcoming Women's Center Events

Hasani Pettiford Speaks
February 7
7:00-8:00pm

VDAY Performance
February 8,9
7:00-9:00pm
Packard 101

Real Beauty Fashion Show
February 28
7:00-9:00pm
Lamberton Hall

April is National Sexual Assault Awareness Month.
Don't forget to support!

Women's Center Brown Bag Discussions
Time TBA
At the Women's Center

Nominate recipients for the annual Women's Center Awards!
Email abc123@lehigh.edu

Women's Center Contact Information

Want to contribute to The F Word?

Come to the Women's Center or email one of these staff members:

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