Welcome to the spring 2013 edition of Luminaria: The Gender and Sexuality Center Women’s Programming Newsletter! First off, let me introduce myself! I’m Danielle Zelisko, a second-year Masters in Social Work Student. I was hired as the Women’s Programming Graduate Assistant at the GSC in November and have had the honor of working with my peers on some wonderful events! In honor of International Women’s day, this newsletter is being released alongside the Feminist Action Project’s zine, Musings of a #lonelyfeminist. In celebrating the creative efforts of feminist leaders on this special day, FAP and the GSC have joined others all over the world to celebrate what women have to offer and to continue the pursuit of a safe and just-world for women. FAP meets at the Gender and Sexuality Center which is a feminist space. The GSC serves as the women’s resource center on campus, providing referrals to relevant on and off-campus organizations, club advising, a meeting space, and a library filled with feminist literature. Read on to learn more about how to become involved with Women’s Programming at the GSC!

-Danielle Zelisko, Editor

Upcoming Events

**Tuesday, 3/19:** Voices Against Violence Workshop: “Get Sexy, Get Consent” CLA 0.112

**Wednesday, 3/20:** Can Women Have It All? RecSports Center Games Room

**Thursday, 3/21–Saturday, 3/23:** The Vagina Monologues @ Burdine 106, 7PM

**Wednesday, 4/3:** Take Back the Night @ Main Mall, 6:30PM

**Saturday, 4/6:** Women’s Leadership Summit. Contact gsc@austin.utexas.edu for more info

**Wednesday, 5/15:** Lavender Graduation @ SAC Ballroom. 4-6 PM
Ritika Gopal reflects upon co-founding Out Against Abuse

This year I am finally a senior, and nearing the tail end of my college life with terrifying speed. At this time, I can’t help but think about the events that truly shaped me into the person I am today. And looking back on the last four years, one thing in particular comes to mind: being a part of Out Against Abuse, an organization that helped unearth in me the desire to become a citizen of the world... 

And looking back on the last four years, one thing in particular comes to mind: being a part of Out Against Abuse, helped unearth in me the desire to become a citizen of the world, helped me become a little less egocentric and more empathetic towards all types of people, from all walks of life. During my sophomore year, I was lucky enough to be a part of co-founding the Texas chapter of Out Against Abuse—a non-profit organization that provides interactive online resources to bring together activists, volunteers, survivors and members of the community to encourage the discussion and understanding of gender abuse. As co-founders, in order to raise awareness of dating and gender-based violence, it was our responsibility to conduct informative seminars, organize large-scale events, and creatively engage members and catalyze discussions about deep-cutting topics. During one of our seminars, we had the opportunity to listen to a very brave woman who told a room full of strangers a moving and personal story about how she was able to gradually find the strength within her and escape a very terrifying relationship. Her courage moved me profoundly. Similar to the delayed kick wasabi has on the taste buds, I didn’t realize at the time how much of an impact her courage would have on me. Her story eventually led me to take a semester off and work at the White House to extend my efforts towards this important cause. The organization as a whole gave me a perspective I could never have dreamed of cultivating on my own; and starting an organization helped me become a leader in an issue I feel passionate towards. By being a member of Out Against Abuse, I have been able to meet so many talented, genuine people and together envision constructive solutions to bring dating and gender-based violence to an end. The work of the organization and likewise of all activist organizations on campus striving towards this goal is extremely humbling and inspiring. I hope more people will actively join organizations that work towards social betterment after reading about the positive impact of OAA.

What we’ve been up to!

Women’s Programming at the GSC was bursting with great events during fall 2012! Creative Projects by La Chicana, a course taught by Professor Myrna Garcia, were presented at the GSC (left). These projects spread awareness about what it means to be a Chicana in Texas. A second notable event was the Women’s Leadership Social. Over 30 student leaders attended, filling up the entire space!
What projects are the Women’s Resource Agency (WRA) working on right now?

We’ve got 3 big projects we’re working on. One is a campus climate report around gender issues on and nearby the UT campus. Our belief is that we’ll be able to better understand and prioritize future projects to assist women on campus through this survey. Second is producing Eve Ensler’s ‘The Vagina Monologues’ featuring both UT and Austin community students. All proceeds from the event will go to VDay and the Voices Against Violence Survivor’s Fund. Finally, we’ve partnered up with Voices Against Violence and the Diversity & Equity Student Advisory & Action Committee on the Everybody Can Stop Rape campaign. Our goals are to model healthy relationships, make it clear that one’s appearance doesn’t dictate their willingness to have sex, and raise awareness around issues of interpersonal violence. This particular phase of the project is called “No One’s Asking For It,” to be launched April 1st.

How did you originally get involved with WRA, the GSC, and other organizations on campus?

My initial involvement was in Texas StandOut. Before I knew anything else, I knew I wanted to advocate for my (then) new-found LGBTQ community. Through StandOut I found the GSC. I checked it out and found my home away from home. I grew very attached to the staff, students, and politics of the space, and eventually defended the space from the TX legislature that forced me to gain a much fuller understanding of political systems and navigating them. WRA came last, and on accident! A friend convinced me to try to get selected for the SG Advocacy Policy Director, but when I went in there, all the new projects I could think of had to do with women’s issues. So instead I was elected to be the WRA Director based on my interview and political experience. I don’t regret it for a second.

What has made you successful as a student activist?

When I ask someone what leadership means, I am looking for one answer in particular: service. Remembering the foundation of my work always keeps me grounded, and I’d advise anyone to think about why they want to do the work that advocacy requires. For me, it’s about love for my communities, family, and self, and serving those people. The more solid the foundation, the better the results. I think dedication is a big piece of it too. I wouldn’t have any finished projects if I wasn’t passionate about this work and willing to put in the time it requires to make progress. Research is an undervalued piece of it too—every single project I’ve done has started with research. By the time I start a project I know who has done something similar and how, and how my communities will benefit from it. Last, I’d encourage every emerging leader to take care of themselves. This work is rewarding and exhausting; there will be days that are best spent walking in parks, watching movies, or taking yourself out for lunch. It’s also completely okay to reach out to friends when you’re stressed or feeling down. We’ve all got to take care of each other and ourselves. Leading doesn’t place you “above” the community you serve, it places you within it. It’s okay to ask for support.

Will this knowledge be useful to you when working toward your post-college goals after you graduate this year?

Definitely. Feminist activism has required fine-tuning my communication skills and learning to unite people in a decentralized community. My future revolves around social justice, so having the skills to create bridges will serve me well; plenty of communities out there are decentralized and trying to figure out how to organize together. I think feminist activism is hugely educational as well, in that it teaches you how to navigate emotions in one’s work. Much of what I’ve worked on for the LGBTQ community has centered on freedoms that will benefit my future self; the majority of feminist issues affect me right now. It’s been challenging and rewarding to learn how to navigate such strong emotions within my work—so as I get older and more and more issues affect me, I’ll know how to handle them.
Members of feminist and women’s organizations at UT gather at the GSC for the Women’s Leadership Social!

Andra Steele tells the world that she needs feminism because… “ain’t nobody got time fo’ sexism!”

Gender Inclusive Housing

Our names are Connie Tao and Ryan Upchurch. While you may know our campaign for the Student Government Presidency and Vice Presidency because of the funny tweets and videos, we are very serious about our support of Gender Inclusive Housing.

GIH is a low-cost, highly effective way of ensuring that every student on the 40 Acres has a home that they feel comfortable in. Feeling unwelcome or uncomfortable in your own room is a sure-fire way to feel unwelcome at UT, so whether a student is a member of the LGBTQ(IAA) community or not, GIH provides a crucial service that really can make all the difference.

When students make a commitment to come to UT, they are making a promise to bring their whole and best self with them to campus. At a school as proudly diverse as ours, GIH would show students how much we honor that commitment, and the university’s commitment to honor the perspectives, needs, and ideas of all Longhorns. So this one’s for every senior that is pushing for GIH because they want to make UT better for some future student they’ll never meet. For the GSC, the administrators that get it, and the HPRC. This one’s for you!

- Connie Tao and Ryan Upchurch
A Review of “Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity” by Julia Serano

By: Cora Noel Garcia-Cook

I first came across this book many, many years ago, back when I was a college-youngling just starting out, and exploring my own trans* identity and the whole concept of social justice. I enjoyed the book back then, and now I can appreciate even more deeply the information and experiences offered in the text.

Let me be clear, this book is not for everyone, no book is for everyone. However, I do believe that a number of peoples can benefit from reading it. Trans* people and especially trans*women can benefit from reading this book as it articulates not only different oppressions faced by trans* peoples, but is also a good reader on trans* feminism. Alternatively, I think that feminists and queer peoples should read the text as part of any attempt at educating oneself on the struggles and experiences and opinions of another community.

My one qualm with this book is that the text is not an intersectionalistic piece. While race, class, ability, sexuality etc...are mentioned in various sections they are not discussed in length separately, nor are they particularly discussed in tandem as intersections. The book focuses exclusively on trans* experiences, ideas, and perceptions, on gender theories and feminism. In fact, the book privileges the transsexual-woman’s experience as this is the identity of the author.

The book does deal with gender theories and perceptions, so terms are used throughout and defined, by the author, so don’t be afraid to read it. It is not Judith Butler. In fact Julia Serano takes issue with some aspects of both essentialist gender theory and performative gender theory. But Serano does not write this book as a dissertation, or presentation of theory/research, she means this book to be read by non-academics as well as those versed in the subtleties of gender theories.