

# WOMEN'S VU

*A publication for and about women  
at Vanderbilt University*

December 1978

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## Vanderbilt Women's Studies Expands

Vanderbilt's Women's Studies program has undergone major changes this year, culminating in the establishment of a second course and in the appointment of a program coordinator and three one-year faculty members. These changes will enable Vanderbilt better to meet the needs of an increasing number of students interested in women's studies.

We have long hoped to be able to offer at least two courses: one based in the humanities and one based in the social sciences. This year finally sees the realization of that hope. Images of Women will be taught in the fall semester.

Offered for the first time this spring, Women and Public Policy will find a ready audience.

Not only will the spring course bring new material to Vanderbilt, but it will be taught by two very well-qualified new instructors: Sheila Tobias and Donna Wood. Sheila Tobias, Visiting Professor of Women's Studies, is a distinguished scholar of women's issues and has participated in women's studies programs since their inception. She has recently served as Associate Provost at Wesleyan University where she began a math clinic to tutor math anxious students. One result of that successful program is her book, *Overcoming Math Anxiety* (published by Norton in July), which seeks to explain, among other things, why so many women do not take high school and college math and which points out the serious career consequences of that choice for women as a group. In addition to her writing, teaching, and administering, Sheila Tobias is currently a member of the Board of Trust of Stephens College and was a member of the Carter-Mondale task force on education.

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## Director Named For Women's Center

Nancy Alderman Ransom of Nashville has been appointed director of the newly formed Women's Center at Vanderbilt University. President Emmett B. Fields announced the appointment October 25.

Ms. Ransom recently returned from a year of teaching sociology and conducting research at Leeds University in England. Her studies centered on the socialization to academic careers among British men and women university teachers.

On announcing the appointment, Fields said, "I am pleased that Ms. Ransom has accepted this new and important position at Vanderbilt. Her experience in working with women's issues in the community and helping to organize a course in sex roles at the University of Tennessee, Nashville, uniquely qualify her for this administrative responsibility."

Fields also expressed appreciation to the search committee, headed by Ingeborg Mauksch, Valere Potter Distinguished Professor of Nursing. The committee was composed of representative students, faculty and staff.

Ms. Ransom has been a volunteer counselor with Planned Parenthood Association of Nashville and taught sociology at UT-Nashville from 1971 to 1976, during which time she helped to organize the women's course on sex roles.

She earned the B.A. degree and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa at Vassar College, did graduate work in sociology at Columbia University and earned the M.A.T. degree in sociology at Vanderbilt.

The new director said, "I think a Women's Center is not only essential for the women of the campus but it also will benefit the whole university. I see a part of the center's function as helping to raise

the consciousness of the University community relative to the status of women."

The center, according to Ms. Ransom, will focus on the special needs and interests of women students, faculty and staff and will provide a variety of activities related to women's issues. It also will house literature about campus, local, national and international women's issues, and provide a place for women to gather.

Ms. Ransom will serve as primary adviser to Vanderbilt's chancellor and president on programs, problems and concerns of university women. She will be a liaison with campus offices and organizations, and will advise the Women's Studies program. She also will coordinate workshops and conferences on topics of interest to women. She will be assisted by an advisory board appointed by the president.

The center was proposed to President Fields by the Vanderbilt Women's Concerns Committee in 1978. It also was the primary recommendation of the Chancellor's Commission to Study the Status of Women at Vanderbilt in 1976.

Ms. Ransom is married and has three children.

## WOMEN'S WEEK

The third annual Women's Week at Vanderbilt will be March 17-24, 1979. The three coordinators are Pam Johnson, Emily Minor, and Linda Morgan, and the chief faculty adviser is Chaplain Mary-Lynn Ogletree.

The program is incomplete, but Emily Minor named some of the activities

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## Hearing On Women In Education

At press time, a public hearing on women in higher education institutions in Tennessee was scheduled to take place December 1 in the Legislative Plaza. Dean Sallie McFague of the Vanderbilt Divinity School was to be one of ten persons testifying. We will have a report on the hearing in the next issue.



## Women's Studies

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Donna Wood, Instructor (part-time) in Women's Studies, is pursuing a Ph.D. in sociology at Vanderbilt. Since her thesis deals with women's studies programs in the United States, she will bring important expertise to the course. Her training in sociology will also complement Sheila Tobias's own background in history.

The fall course was taught jointly by Elizabeth Langland, Assistant Professor of English, and Gay Welch, Instructor (part-time) in Women's Studies. Elizabeth Langland taught the course for the first time last year with two other colleagues. The addition of Gay Welch this year brings a new dimension to its subject matter. Ms. Welch, who expects to complete her Ph.D. in religion this year, explores with the students images of women in western religions. Gay Welch also serves as the first program coordinator for Women's Studies, responsible for developing special programs, centralizing teaching efforts in Women's Studies, and compiling bibliographies.

The Women's Studies program is directed by the Committee on Women's Studies. Elizabeth Langland is chairing the committee this year; other members include Christine Hasenmueller, Susan Wiltshire, Emily Davidson, Don Doyle, and Walter Gove. They would be happy to provide fuller information, to hear responses to current plans, and to receive suggestions for future developments of the programs.

—Elizabeth Langland

## WOMEN'S CLINIC ORGANIZED

On October 28, 1978, over thirty women came together to work on a common goal: the establishment of a clinic in Nashville that would be owned, controlled, staffed and used by women.

Carole Powell, an owner of Woman-kind Books, organized the meeting in response to the steadily growing number of women who had asked at the bookstore for recommendations and referrals for medical and legal service. These requests convinced Carole of the need for such services and that the time for turning the dream of a women's clinic into a reality was here.

As the first step in the organizational effort, she sent a letter to approximately 80 women inviting them to attend two brainstorming and planning sessions. The community support that she had anticipated materialized; those responding came from a diverse group — health professionals, lawyers, social service workers, organizers and students. Many who could not attend the meeting volunteered support for the future.

"From the requests that I have had," Carole said prior to the meeting, "I envision a clinic encompassing the physical aspects of medicine, midwifery, mental health and legal services. The greatest need in this community currently is for mental health services. There are only a few feminist therapists, no lesbian therapists, and a tremendous unmet need.

Despite her role in initiating this effort, Carole was firm in stating that the project would move beyond her personally and acquire a momentum and organizational structure of its own. The October 28 meeting vindicated her statement. The women who came were committed to seeing the project through and doing so in a collective manner. At the start of the meeting the participants introduced themselves and their expectations for the meeting along with assessing what skills they brought to the effort. The purpose of this exercise was to compile as complete a list of providers for referrals as possible. Following this, women divided into small groups for brainstorming on the organization and implementation of the clinic.

The energy and ideas generated at this initial meeting were to be followed up at a second meeting—a "brass tacks session"—on November 11.

## ... from the Women's Center Director

November 1 was my starting date as Director of the Vanderbilt Women's Center. In these first days on the job I have been listening to the many voices — those who are active on behalf of women on the campus. I have renewed my acquaintance with former associates and made new friends. Now I am pleased to take this opportunity to say hello to all the readers of this newsletter.

At present Vanderbilt does not have a Women's Center in the physical sense. We have an office for the Director of the Women's Center, which is located at E-2 West Side Row in the Opportunity Development Center. We share the Opportunity Development Center's conference room. With adequate notice, I can offer this space for meetings of no more than 15 persons. The Women's Concerns Committee, which held a meeting here on November 14, found the space too small for their purposes, and will find a larger room for subsequent meetings.

I hope to meet with the Women's Center Advisory Board before the end of this month. We will plan programs for next semester and will establish long-range goals. I have already met with representatives from the Counseling Center, Career Planning and Placement, Faculty Women's Organization, Women's Studies, Personnel, and several undergraduate and graduate groups, which are interested in establishing links with the Women's Center. My office will work closely with all campus organizations.

Let me encourage each of you to make suggestions and tell me what concerns you have as an individual and as a member of one of the constituencies of women at Vanderbilt. Stop by my office, drop me a note or telephone at extension 4843. What services or programs would you like to see the Women's Center develop? At what time — day or evening — would you be most likely to attend an activity of interest to you? Remember that programs sponsored by the Women's Center will be open to men as well as women; men will sit on the Advisory Board and are welcome to participate in all our activities.

We can make the Vanderbilt Women's Center what we want it to be. This is your Women's Center, however, and I am here to serve you. Make yourselves heard.

—Nancy A. Ransom

# READING ON WOMEN

*Words and Women: New Language in New Times* by Casey Miller and Kate Swift. 177 pp. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday. \$2.50.

Studies of a language undergoing change as new social perceptions emerge are apt to be soon out of date. The faster the movement that inspires the work, the shorter its timeliness. Yet, a work that is true for its times is timeless, as is all good literature, and *Words and Women*, published in 1977, is such a work. It will have a place on bibliographies for as long as it takes the American language to become neutral regarding gender, thus dissolving the issues that keep books on sexism in language alive.

Casey Miller and Kate Swift decided to write a book on sexism in language following a freelance editing assignment they undertook for a junior high school sex education course for church-related youth groups. In the course of their task, they say, "something had happened to us; for . . . we found ourselves thinking about the sexist nature of accepted English usage." Having glimpsed insights into the traps standard English sets for writers wanting to avoid assigning priority to males, the authors found "everything we read, heard on the radio and television, or worked on professionally confirmed our new awareness that the way English is used to make the simplest points can either acknowledge women's full humanity or relegate the female half of humanity to secondary status."

Chapter one, "Beginning with Names," emphasizes the importance people attach to their own names. "Yet it is one of the things a little girl grows up knowing she will be expected to lose if she marries," say Miller and Swift. This loss, even willingly undergone, destroys the woman to the extent that she had felt that her name was part of herself; and a sense of loss can be evaded only by anticipating it from an early age and growing up without a strong sense of being an individual with personal, legal, and social autonomy.

Miller and Swift discuss the distortion of reality in the Western definition of families by surnames, the "fading out" of female ancestral lines, and the consequence for children growing up without the means of identifying with female as

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## National Identification Program

The Office of Women in Higher Education of the American Council on Education has begun a National Identification Program for the Advancement of Women in Higher Education Administration. This project will be the central effort during the next three years by which the Office of Women will address its primary goal of advancing women who have shown promise for major positions in academic administration.

In Tennessee, the program is coordinated by Dr. Alicia Tilley, Dean of the Graduate School, Memphis State University. Dr. Barbara Varchol, Dean of Student Affairs, Vanderbilt University, has been selected to serve on the State Planning Committee. One of her responsibilities will be to act as liaison for the State Committee and the private colleges and universities in Tennessee. Please feel free to contact her for additional information about the program.

Because of the relatively few women at policy-making levels of administration, the higher education community suffers a loss of intellectual talent, a loss of potential leadership, and a loss of female role models for students and other professionals. Since higher education faces critical problems, there is a need for competent women administrators who are more than minimally involved in policy determination.

Implementation of the National Identification Program is intended to result in the establishment of a personalized system of identification, recommendation, and advancement of women administrators and, therefore, in an increased number of women prominent in higher education. The program involves a carefully-constructed state- or regionally-based system for providing a national network of women and men interested in developing a firm system of equality of opportunity.

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"Women's liberation will thus inevitably bring with it, as a comitant, men's liberation. Men, no less than women, are imprisoned by the heavy carapace of their sexual stereotype."

Betty Roszak, "The Human Continuum"

## Staff Women's Association Elects Officers

The Staff Women's Association met November 21 and elected officers to serve through September 1979. Elected were Carole Jennette and Jane Tinsley, Co-Convenors; Kathie McCreery, Secretary and Verley Archer, Treasurer. Leah Deckner is SWA representative to the Women's Concerns Committee, having been chosen at an earlier meeting of that group.

New members may join the Staff Women's Association simply by signifying that they want to be notified of its meetings, attend when they can, and become involved in issues concerning women as employees of the University. Dues paying members are eligible to vote in elections and on formal actions. Dues are \$2.00 a year. Meetings are open to everyone, and notices appear in the *Vanderbilt Calendar*. New members may join at any meeting or by contacting Verley Archer, 408 Kirkland Hall, extension 4987.

The new officers are planning to turn last year's initiatives into a vigorous and enduring organization of and for the women employees of Vanderbilt.



## WOMEN'S WEEK

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already lined up: The Nursing Council will do a workshop and health related programs. Women law students will be sponsoring a speaker on legal issues. The Panhellenic Council, in conjunction with the Career Placement Center (specifically Katherine Smith) is going to sponsor a career workshop.

As in past years, the coordinators are seeking women artists and entertainers to participate in the week-long event. Anyone wanting to take part or submit ideas may send them to Emily Minor, Box 5488, Station B.

## Reading On Women

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well as male roots. (On this topic, the historic research seems less complete than that for other topics the authors cover. They do not go into the origins of the surname as used in European-based cultures, a subject worthy of at least recognition here.) They also explore the implications of bondage, however easy for a woman in a gadget-filled home, and compare the marital experience of women with the lot of slaves bearing their masters' names. The freeing effect for an American black of taking an African name is used to illustrate the importance psychologically of being unencumbered with a symbol of bondage as part of one's name. Finally, under the chapter on names, the authors examine the use of the same nouns and pronouns to symbolize both the species and the male of the species. "In English," they say, "the once truly generic word man has come to mean male, so that males are seen as representing the species in a way females are not. Humanity, divided against itself, becomes the norm and the deviation, the namer and the named."

The other eight chapters delve into the evolution of the English language and the accompanying changes in assumptions of English speakers with regard to the sexes. The reader learns that *man* originally meant a human being of either sex *wif* and *wer* were the words for an adult female and male respectively.

Miller and Swift find no "Great Male Plot" to account for sexism in standard

English. They find that in its 1500-year history English has been molded and modified by a few individuals who made it their special province, nudging it toward change here and holding it intact there. It would be incorrect, the authors say, to suggest that these votaries of the language were womanhaters. Rather, they perceived reality in relationship to *themselves*, and they were male. But the result of their manipulations was the same as if there had been a plot.

In researching for their book, the authors learned that they were not pioneers. They found writings dating back at least four decades expressing views on sexism in standard English. These works tended to be in language that was more lucid than standard English. References to males were not to be confused with references to humanity. The authors seemed to let the meaning choose the word, resulting in accuracy rather than stereotypes. They avoided the careless use of such terms as "The man in the street," "the weaker sex," and "The fair sex," and instead specified precisely what they meant.

Miller and Swift think the language of liberation should follow the example of those authors. Sexist language, they say, is more often lazy than deliberate. Instead of resulting in a "graceless language," as many people fear, they anticipate that the language of liberation, when generally adopted, will be superior in that it will not depend on abstractions and will permit users to express more accurately their sensitivities and insights. As these authors put it, "Significant gains

have been made in many areas, but the transformation of English in response to the movement for human liberation has scarcely begun."

—Verley Archer



This is the Equal Rights Amendment:

Section I:

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

Section II:

"The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article."

Section III:

"This amendment shall take effect two years after date of ratification."



"Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the rare and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle."

Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own"

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*The issue was edited by Verley Archer with contributions from staff, faculty, and students. The next issue will be published on February 9. Deadline for articles for the February issue is January 26. Send news, views and letters to Women's VU, Box 1513, Station B.*