Women's Journal to Gender Equality

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WOMEN'S JOURNEY TO GENDER EQUALITY

by

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WOMEN'S JOURNEY TO GENDER EQUALITY

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WHAT A FEMINIST JOURNALIST MUST DO

Looking back over the books read, the papers written, the piles of clippings, notes, scraps of paper accumulated during the past three years of study, one wonders what it all means, where it all leads. When I started reading feminist prose, I had never heard of Charlotte Perkins Gilman or Kate Chopin. A feminist writer to me was Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing or Betty Friedan. As a journalist, I know Woolf was right when she said a woman who wants to write must have a room of her own and money enough to live on. But what is a woman to write in the 1990s? Has it all been said? Do we have new stories to tell? Yes. But how will we tell them?

As we write we must work to change the male-gender-preferred English language. We need to catch ourselves and others using sexist language and sneaky words that are pejorative to females. When it was first pointed out to me by my undergraduate professor at Skidmore College, Sarah Goodwin, that “mankind” was biased, I replaced it with humanity, but now even that word does not sound right. As I clean up my writing and speech, others, too, seem to become aware of their language. They catch themselves and correct their dialogue. But what will we feminists write about? If it is fiction, most of the myths and dramas have been traditionally male based. Man conquers nature. Man rescues woman. Even male writers today are cashing in on rewriting fairy tales in politically correct language. They are fun to read but often leave the reader thinking, “See what these women have done. Things were better the way they were.” We have to remember that there are still wicked stepmothers, but there are also wicked stepfathers. We just have to tell the truth. Women aviators sacrificing their lives, women scaling Mount Everest, playing basketball, working as the
Prime Minister of Norway are just as interesting as when done by a man.

Before women can write effectively about the woman's experience, it is wise to have an understanding of how we got where we are and who put us there. That is where history, sociology and literature has broadened my understanding as I read about women's experiences as midwives, nurses, doctors in a course called Women and Medicine and black women's, Latino's, children's, abused women's experiences in Women and Sociology. In other courses, I considered how men and women adjust to lifespan changes, how women can learn to be leaders and communicators. As women struggle for economic security, they sometimes make sacrifices or compromise. Women have delayed or abandoned motherhood in order to have a successful career in an American economy still controlled by men. They have seen the problems women get into when they have no resources of their own, and they do not want to be at the mercy of a husband who doles out the money with the affection. Women today know they can "do it" if they try, but they need help. That is where the journalist comes in. We have the venue, we just need the ability to communicate ideas that will enlighten, empower and assist.

The biggest danger to the woman is the loss of self, which Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a writer, sociologist, lecturer, poet and teacher, almost experienced. After marriage and pregnancy, she suffered a severe depression and realized her confined life was going to be the end of her sanity. Forging out on her own with a small baby was courageous in the face of society's criticism in the nineteenth century. Almost 100 years later, unmarried women are having babies, working wives are raising children, divorced women are supporting children, women are going back to school, starting businesses, helping one another, but they are still having problems economically and psychologically. They are entering male-dominated professions, such as law enforcement, politics, medicine and truck driving, and these are the women I want to
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write about. As a columnist I have a free reign “to find people who are interesting. “ Nine times out of 10, they are women because they are breaking down stereotypes and barriers. In my weekly column “People to Watch” for The Palm Beach Post, I have a chance to show readers what women are doing. In the following pages I include profiles I have written on women police officers, county commissioners, a hospital administrator, a mountain climber, founders of a birthing center and a breast imaging center, directors of a university graduate program, a free medical clinic, a Red Cross disaster center and a public library system, as well as a man who served as sergeant-at-arms of the U.S. Senate and knows a sexist joke when he hears one and is not ashamed to say so. As a feature writer I can pitch stories to the features editor, such as “Two Writers Were Sisters Under the Skin.” I also have a section front column three times a week in The Post, in which I have an opportunity to write about people inspiring others and doing good things for the community, and quite often they are the women who spend many hours as volunteers in the schools, the hospitals and the centers for the elderly.

Women today still suffer from what used to be called, in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s day, “nervous prostration,” but now we know it as “depression.” Men also suffer from depression, and often they are the men who try to be everything to everyone, traditionally the woman’s role. They strive for perfectionism, sometimes exhausting themselves and forgetting that one cannot do everything right. Women seem to be in more danger of depression when their mothering days are over, and they are unsure of what to do next. Or perhaps, like Gilman, motherhood presents too many demands and the loss of an identity other than mother. Feminist writers needs to address women’s problems while showing them that they can be successful at home and in the public sphere, they can help raise boys and girls who are compassionate, productive people. They can bring their nurturing, cooperative skills to government,
industry, social service and the law, and as Gilman wrote in the closing of her ground-breaking book published at the end of the nineteenth century, *Women and Economics*, "Where now we strive and agonize after impossible virtues, we shall then grow naturally and easily into those very qualities . . . When the mother of the race is free, we shall have a better world" (*Economics*, 340).
WOMEN'S PROGRESS: IT'S ALL ABOUT RESOURCES

The position of women in American society differs according to class, race, culture and religion and as economic conditions change and affect these groups. To be a female in the United States today is not the same as it was to be a female in 1898 when Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote the revolutionary book *Women and Economics*, but economic conditions still influence how women are treated, what is expected of them and the opportunities they have to compete for the share of the world's wealth.

Over centuries, women's work has consistently been classified as secondary work, and, therefore, devalued. Traditionally women have been in the "support" roles: the healing, teaching, cleaning, comforting professions. Women have taken on these roles because they were the only ones accessible to them. In 1898 Gilman said "men produce and distribute wealth; and women receive it at their hands." She believed women would never be treated as equals until they were economically independent: "Where now we strive and agonize after impossible virtues . . . we shall then grow naturally . . . and we shall not even think of them as especially commendable. Where our progress hitherto has been warped and hindered . . . it will flow on smoothly and rapidly when both men and women stand equal in economic relation" (*Economics*, 340). Today women are making progress in all fields, even those that have been traditionally male bastions, as men abandon professions they no longer find attractive and as women gain equal access to education and training. Women are computer technicians and programmers, truck drivers, customer service representatives, editors and writers, insurance agents and adjustors, physicians, pharmacists, police officers and lawyers. Women of color still earn less than white women, but across the board,
women are gaining in economic clout and social status, which is what Gilman envisioned in her utopian society.

Gilman wrote a century before sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman taught that gender is distinguishable from sex, but she understood that “what we do, as well as what is done to us, makes us what we are” (Economics, 2). American society continues to construct what it means to be a female. There is biology (and even there the lines are blurry), and then there is “gender,” and it all has to do with “achieved status” (“Doing Gender” in Lorber and Farrell, editors, 13). From birth, gender roles separate boys and girls by putting a different value on male behavior and female behavior and encouraging a distinction in development. As Gilman notes, “One of the first things we force upon the child’s dawning consciousness is the fact that he is a boy or that she is a girl, and that, therefore, each must regard everything from a different point of view” (Economics, 54). One only needs to stand at the window of a hospital nursery and listen to the adjectives families use to describe the babies, who look pretty much alike. At one day old, they are already labeled “dainty,” “strong,” “feisty,” “sweet.” Little by little society glorifies maleness and degrades womanliness, according to its needs. We encourage females to use their energy and resources to achieve an ideal of beauty to attract males because traditionally that is how women have earned their way in the world. “When man began to feed and defend woman, she ceased proportionately to feed and defend herself,” Gilman wrote, and she considered this as trading sex for food (Economics, 61).

Gilman argued that women’s dependence on men was not good for her, or for the male. Women were left behind in human progress, living merely through sexual attractiveness. Because of the “sexuo-economic” condition, she wrote “Woman has been checked, starved, aborted in human growth; and the swelling forces of race-development have been driven back in each generation to work in her through sex-
functions alone” (Economics, 75). Men were, by the accident of sex, put in the position of power and what Gilman called “easy lordship,” which made them cruel, irresponsible, selfish and proud: “When man’s place was maintained by brute force, it made him more brutal . . . they are born and trained in the moral atmosphere of a primitive patriarchate” (Economics, 339).

In Western culture, it has been assumed that men and women will differ in their roles because of their reproductive functions. There is women’s work, primarily maternal, and there is men’s work. There is the public sphere, which has been predominantly male, and the private sphere, the home, which is considered female. As West and Zimmerman write, “Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the ‘essentialness’ of gender” ("Doing Gender" in Lorber and Farrell, 24). In advertising, film, literature, fables, myths, legends, art and music, women are still often portrayed and displayed as emotional, helpless, frail sexual objects. Men save them from harm, poverty, and themselves. Many contemporary movie-goers enjoy the film “Pretty Woman,” in which a beautiful, benevolent prostitute is glamorized, patronized and ultimately saved by the handsome, rich man (prince), but they give no thought to the degradation of this “rescue.” In Christianity, humanity is saved by the patriarchal God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Lord, the King of Kings, the Messiah. The language of Christianity, and of English in general, reflects the glorification of the male, which daily robs women of self-esteem and leaves men to expect to be in control.

In Western medicine, men controlled the resources, the jobs and the research for 300 years, the result being that science has been primarily concerned with men’s health problems, i.e. heart disease, colon and prostrate cancer rather than breast cancer and osteoporosis. In the Colonial times, most of the healthcare was done by
women. When the healing arts became scientific and the work became a profession, women were shut out of medicine (or worse, burned at the stake) and denied access to medical schools. Now as healthcare has become less lucrative and more of a bureaucratic headache, women are having success entering the profession.

On a daily basis human agency creates and recreates gender, and for each woman it is different. Culture influences the choices women have, and some women bargain to live well, or just to survive. At different times, they are active or passive, aggressive or submissive, according to the situation and the risk. These "patriarchal bargains," as sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti calls them, are choices that allow them to negotiate their positions in the home, the workplace or the community ("Bargaining with Patriarchy," in Lorber and Farrell, 104). Birth control and abortion rights are two ways women control their reproduction, but they may choose to give up these options and have as many children as possible with the hope of a secure, domestic life. In groups with little resources, women may be treated more equally because there are little resources for men to monopolize.

In some homes, women pay a terrible price for what they consider is economic security. Brutality, intimidation and violence are too common for women in American homes across all economic and ethnic groups. Beating up women has to do with power and control and is not the isolated action of men who have suddenly lost their minds because of stress. Brutality is a learned behavior, often the result of growing up in a home where women are dominated by controlling men. Women who try to break free are more frequently threatened and beaten, and often they are defeated by their own beliefs that they cannot make it on their own, that they have no worth and their children are better off with an abusive father figure in the home than without a father. Every day American newspapers are filled with stories of women threatened, stalked, raped and killed by men who say they love them. Not much has changed since
Gilman said women need to be protected from men not by men (Lane, xxiii). It is the male who has stifled the female, scolded her, raped her and beat her all the while professing her virtues, her beauty and her talent as she cooked, cleaned, sewed, raised children, tended the animals and the crops. Gilman said in her monthly magazine *The Forerunner* that “All pain is personal. It is between You and the Thing that Hurts. You may not be able to move the Thing -- but You are movable” (Lane, xxvi). Today organizations such as SafeSpace encourage women to escape from abusive relationships and helps them become independent.

Gilman escaped from an unfulfilling marriage, for which she was criticized, and she also encouraged women to get out of the kitchen, or get the kitchen out of the home. To her, communal kitchens were one way to free women from the daily drudgery of planning for meals, shopping for them, making them and cleaning up after them. Tied to the stove, she saw that women could not progress since all their days were spent feeding others. Today’s community dinners, take-out services and programs such as Meals on Wheels are moving the kitchen out of the home, but Gilman’s vision is still far from a reality.

In every movement to advance women, there is a backlash. Gilman experienced it in the early 1900s as women fought for the right to vote, which she considered just the beginning of the battle for equality. The fights for social reform in the late 1800s and early 1900s ebbed after women got the vote and decided they were more concerned with their personal freedom than the urge to move all women forward. In the 1960s feminism was a major sociological force, but in the 1970s there was another backlash, and the Equal Rights Amendment failed. Today the so-called breakdown of the family is blamed on the large numbers of women in the workplace, rather than in the traditional home.

Since people are socialized by what is done to them, we need to take better
care of how our children grow up. In his studies of cognitive development and moral order, psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg concluded that children try to fit themselves into patterns they observe, patterns established by their parents and other adults in their world. By the time they are 4 years old, they have a good idea of who does what and who does what to whom (Berger, 277). Children continually group themselves by sex and race, thereby participating in their own socialization (Barrie, p. 3). Most sociobiologists believe that the human species is genetically predisposed to the male of the species being more aggressive and promiscuous in order to maximize reproduction of their genes. This kind of thinking makes it easier to maintain the status quo and tells women “that’s the way it is, get used to it” (Bem, p. 18) However, children have agency and do not always act as parents expect. Gilman said she would obey her mother until she was grown up and then she would do exactly as she thought right. Likewise, some children get funneled into gender stereotypical behavior, but they may not be the passive victims of adults’ expectations and cross boundaries in play and school every day. When we encourage locking them into gender roles, we discourage mutual respect and support between the sexes. Gilman argued that men suffer, too, from gender expectation. The so-called male traits of assertiveness and display may have had a place in evolution, but now the world needs mothering, cooperation and nurturance, which will free men and as well as women. A humanist first, she encouraged a more egalitarian society in which the sexes support one another.

Women like Charlotte Perkins Gilman -- a novelist, journalist and social scientist -- and other progressive feminists have challenged men’s authority. Through speeches, columns, essays, novels, poems, letters, journals and short stories, Gilman said over and over again in every way she could, that women must become economically independent. There is no other way to equality.

Women now own one-quarter of the companies in the United States, which is a
dramatic change during the past 10 years (NBC, March 26, 1996). Between 1957 and 1986, men earned 50 percent more per hour than women did in full-time jobs, primarily because of the segregation of women and men into different types of work ("Bringing the Men Back In" in Lorber and Farrell, 141). Women now earn 76 cents on the dollar to what men earn in the same positions ("Ms." March/April, 1996, p. 36)

Women's wages are still not equal, but progress has been made.

If woman had the support and education given man over the centuries, i.e. peaceful homes, cooked meals, clean clothing, to say nothing of encouragement and advice, woman could have achieved as much as man. She, too would have discovered planets and drugs, built cities, invented automobiles, flown solo, explored wilderness and written books. Ironically, despite a lack of access to universities and business, some women, such as Maria Mitchell, Amelia Earhart, Betty Friedan, Sacagawea and Charlotte Perkins Gilman still managed to do those very things.
TALKING BACK

For hundreds of years brave women have been whispering, lecturing, writing, shouting that we are wrongly treated as “the weaker vessel,” that we are manipulated by images of ideal feminine beauty, that we are unpaid slaves in the home, that we spend our lives trying to please others and wind up feeling guilty and empty. Women have insisted that we do not need protection by men but from men, that God is not male. Women profess these ideas over and over again, but men continue to find ways systematically to oppress and suppress females. In the 1960s, Betty Friedan had to reconstruct what Charlotte Perkins Gilman had said in her journalism at the turn of the twentieth century, and Gilman had to reconstruct what Mary Wollstonecraft had written in A Vindication of the Rights of Women 100 years earlier. The problem of women’s lives is not that we are weaker, physically, emotionally or intellectually, but that time after time, sometimes only temporarily, we buy into these beliefs, out of fear or failure. As a group, the males have perpetuated those beliefs, and today at the close of the twentieth century, the notion that happiness will best be attained through motherhood and the home, not education and occupation, or both, is resurfacing. Women are tired. Many are exhausted from going to school, working in the office, shop, factory, or on the road, and taking care of the children. Some are saying, “I hate feminism,” “I want to stay home with my baby,” or “Just leave me alone.” In 1996, women are making gains in economic equality, but once again a group is trying to perpetuate the idea that society has been corrupted by the breakdown of the family because women have left the home. The fundamentalists say a return to the hearth, for our own good and the good of society, will make it right. Right for whom?
Through my studies these past three years, I have consolidated and reinforced my instincts and beliefs that women should be able to work outside the home, guilt-free, and still be able to be loving and competent mothers, wives, sisters, friends and partners. Because of other feminist writers, from Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who wrote a century ago about “the mother myth,” to Naomi Wolf writing in the 1990s about “the beauty myth,” I now, at 53, have a stronger, clearer philosophy that I hope will make me more useful to society. As Ann Lane writes in her essay “The Fictional World of Charlotte Perkins Gilman,” it is often the older, knowing woman in Gilman’s short stories who intercedes and helps the younger woman define herself. In the 1790s, Wollstonecraft wrote that inequality was bred when women were kept from becoming educated, made weak, dependent and convinced that they were not able to compete effectively with men. My father tried to keep me from attending college by refusing to pay for my education because he believed “I would just get married.” Fortunately I got started through a scholarship, which he has been bragging about ever since. My husband balked at my taking college courses, which reminded me of Virginia Woolf’s admonition that women must become deaf to male criticism, “that persistent voice, now grumbling, now patronising, now domineering, now grieved, now shocked, now angry, now avuncular, that voice which cannot let women alone, but must be at them, like some too conscientious governess, adjuring them . . . to be refined” (Woolf, 78). My husband said I was stubborn, inconsiderate and, at times, crazy, but then he bought me a computer.

Gilman was past 40 when she wrote much of her fiction, and as Lane points out, she was especially concerned about the middle-aged or older woman who had done her service to the family and wanted something more from her life (Lane, xxii). Gilman believed strongly that women need “education, sophistication, world experience, adventure -- tools for their own protection . . . and that protection must
come from the self” (Lane, xxiii).

Men also need to be free from the responsibility of caring for dependent women, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters and aunts. On March 27 of this year my mother-in-law, Florence Butler, died, and I realized that my husband had been advising her, shopping for her, moving her, taking care of her in one way or another since her husband William died 18 years ago. Before that, William took care of her needs since she had never been employed outside the home, in paid or unpaid work, and was often dissatisfied with herself and everyone else. She spent hours cleaning a stove, isolated in her kitchen, but found it difficult to cooperate with others. She had created a shaky pedestal on which she stood, which left her lonely in her final years, wondering where everyone had gone.

Most women, however, have worked inside and outside of the home. As Anita Shreve writes, they have been working for centuries growing crops, gathering firewood, tending farm animals, building houses, making cloth, fashioning utensils, trading goods, selling produce, all the while taking care of the home and the children (Shreve, 12). For some women, their work in the home gives them satisfaction and confidence, but for others, it is unfulfilling, unpaid drudgery. With wit, Gilman wrote in her monthly magazine, Forerunner (1909-1916), and in other journals, about women's unpaid labor. In “Motherhood and the Modern Woman,” she writes that many believe motherhood is incompatible with wage-earning: “One, that a mother is incapable of performing any labor except that involved in the bearing and rearing of children, and the other, that a mother is capable of performing any amount of labor so long as it is done at home and not paid for.” Early in American history, men expropriated the surplus goods women produced, which Gilman believed led to their dehumanization and loss of self (Lane, xiii).

My mother, Gudrun Olsen, worked as a hairdresser in our home, and two days a
week as a manicurist in a beauty shop in Manhattan. Those subway and bus trips (she never learned to drive a car) gave her independence and her jobs a small income, which my father, a sometimes unemployed carpenter, resented. When he belittled the amount she made, she began recording in a notebook what she spent her earnings on. Pages and pages of small expenditures are noted, mostly the “extra” things our family could not otherwise have afforded. This made my father feel even more frustrated and insecure, and he picked on my mother even harder. In her defiance, she continued to note:

June 2, 1951: In pay $9. Shoes for Gudrun $4, Radio City (Music Hall) $3.70. Had (hair-cutting) scissors fixed, 75 cents.


June 8, 1953: $0. Got sick and had to go home.

When my family moved from Brooklyn, New York to a small town in New Jersey, which was my mother’s dream, she wrote in her worn notebook that she paid the moving van $75.

Gudrun’s work, her gifts, her spiral brown notebooks, validated her self. She had learned this from her mother, Ragna Augusta Hansen Maland. Ragna had three small children when her husband Einar’s furniture factory went bankrupt in Skudesnas, Norway. Einar set the family up in a house in Haugesund nearby and moved to the United States to earn money to pay off his debts. For 10 years, Ragna managed the household, and after each overseas visit from Einar, another child was born. By the time my mother was 16, there were five children, and two had died at childbirth. Einar was a dignified, kind, but stoic, man, and it was Ragna on her own
who managed the finances, cooked, cleaned, tended the sick, educated, encouraged, disciplined and watched over the family until they emigrated to America in 1928, a role which she continued. As a grandchild in a truly matriarchal home, I felt the power of my grandmother who took a backseat to no one.

As a journalist, I work in a profession that has traditionally talked back to the establishment while trying to lead, enlighten, tell the truth and show readers how men and women live. Gilman was one of the first women journalists to encourage women seriously to consider their lives. In a 1904 magazine article, “The Office of the Mother,” she asks “How can a mother lead her children when she is not going anywhere?” She wrote that motherhood should not destroy the mother, that there is no substitute for intellect when raising children, and that all the children of the world need mothering, not just one’s own. From Dorothy Dix, the first advice-to-women columnist in America at the start of the twentieth century, to Erma Bombeck, who wrote for four decades at the end of the century, to Anna Quindlen, Gloria Steinem, Molly Ivins and thousands of other women journalists, I feel a part of one giant voice for women’s rights that will not be silenced.

In the 1890s, at a time when women were trying to get the right to vote, columnist Dix and novelist Kate Chopin wrote about “the woman question,” which was on everyone’s minds. In the New Orleans newspaper The Daily Picayune, Dix woke up women up to the absurdities of their domestic lives: “She must put up with drunkenness, and ill-temper, and abuse, and not a murmur must cross her lips,” she wrote in 1897. In 1996 the abuse continues, and we are still writing about it. Every day in The Palm Beach Post (daily circulation 170,000, Sundays, 225,000), there are numerous stories of women beaten, raped and murdered by men. Last month, Stephanie Welsh, a 22-year-old photographer who works for The Post, won a Pulitzer Prize for photographs of a female circumcision in Kenya, which Alice Walker, in
Possessing the Secret of Joy, aptly called a ritual of "genital mutilation." Recently my department at The Post, the features department, published Walsh's photographs, which dared to show readers (who complain about an affront to the dignity of a cat but are desensitized to stories of women beaten by angry husbands) what is being done to women in the world.

Newspapers and all media share the responsibility for glorifying male prowess while perpetuating stereotypes of endangered females, sensuous women, vacuous beauties who are pencil-thin and 16 years old. Writers angered by the distorted representation of women continue to try to change these stereotypes but are having little success. Until more newspapers are managed by educated women, it is unlikely this will change. Within the parameters of my lifestyle columns for The Post, I attempt to profile women in many spheres: politics, education, medicine, art, theater, law enforcement, commerce, landscaping, religion, library science, fund-raising and volunteerism. I poke fun at sexism, where I can. I write about people struggling with AIDS and those helping to prevent violence against women. I look for men and women and children who are making a difference in other people's lives, creative people with positive attitudes who affirm life. Recently I walked through the neighborhood where Zora Neale Hurston lived in Fort Pierce. A chance encounter gave me an entrance to her world, a visit to her grave and an opportunity to write about this brilliant black writer, who died in obscurity in our backyard.

Newspapers traditionally target lifestyle sections to women readers. Three years ago, while working for The Stuart News, a small, daily newspaper (circulation 30,000), I suggested we publish a weekly lifestyle section called the "Treasure Coast Woman," in which women's issues about fashion, health, sex, home management, job opportunities and child-rearing could be openly, not subliminally, discussed. The idea was dismissed, and I now think it was for the best. Gilman was right when she wrote in
1904 in *The Woman's Journal*: “Humanity is above sex. When women are as human as men there need be no women’s papers, women’s pages, women’s departments; both, as human creatures, will read with equal interest of the progress and the needs of their world” (Gilman in “The World’s Mother”). I had hoped for articles on how women manage difficult employees, how to “talk back” to a male-dominated society, and what women should say to achieve what they want, but I see now that that would have become just another newspaper section for men to throw aside as women often do with the sports section. As features editor, I worked in a department that was primarily female, as are most features departments at newspapers. Often considered the “lighter” news, these sections usually include arts and entertainment, fashion, food, health and medicine, travel, homes and books. Comics, horoscopes, gossip columns and puzzles are usually packaged with them (there’s a clue). The sections, however, are well read, and next to the obituaries, probably have the most loyal following. But until both men’s lives and women’s lives are reflected in these sections, they will continue to be called “the women’s pages,” and until more women are featured in the sports sections, they will be “the men’s section.”

A feminist writer today may still not get a room of her own, as Virginia Woolf advocated. If she is a newspaper journalist, she will probably have to share a newsroom with many other writers or find a quiet corner where she can produce at home. But what feminists really need now, besides money to live on, as Woolf knew well, is sisterhood. She has to have somewhere she can discuss her thoughts without seeming to be crazy. In the 1700s runaway wives were imprisoned. In the 1800s, if women expressed views that angered husbands or brothers, like Phebe Davis did, they were branded insane and institutionalized, as she was from 1850 to 1853 in the New York Lunatic Asylum in Utica. Davis writes, “It is now twenty-one years since people found out that I was crazy, and all because I could not fall in with every vulgar
belief that was fashionable. I never could be led by everything and everybody” (Geller and Harris, 47). In an intellectual setting on a college campus, or in a big city newsroom, feminism sounds very reasonable, although even in those bastions there is still, no doubt, a “two-tiered world,” as Quindlen calls journalism. But for those of us who live and write in smaller communities still dominated by some men and women who are afraid of the word “feminism,” achieving gender equality is even more challenging. If we are too strident, we lose our audience. If we show anger and frustration, we risk being labeled “difficult.” The best I can do as a feminist and a writer is to keep a sense of humor while continuing to tweak and confront the controlling establishment, to expose my readers to the outspoken, unconventional and brave people in the community who are challenging a male dominated society, to support my sisters and not to lose heart.
May 1, 1996

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Nurse helps AIDS patients, and is one, too

As a nurse, she took care of people with AIDS. Now as an AIDS patient, she still uses all the energy she can muster to help others with the disease.

When she's not on the phone checking to see how people are feeling, or giving advice and playing "Dr. Luscher," as she calls herself, she's thinking of ways to educate people about the disease.

"I never thought this would happen," said Jeannie Luscher, who at 45 still looks athletic despite a 15-pound weight loss during the last three months.

"I've always been strong," she said as she sat in a recliner in her pretty mobile home in Stuart. Nearby sits Otis, her affectionate blond Labrador.

I've known Jeannie for a year and have watched her softly permed strawberry-colored hair thin out and her energy flag.

Despite a recent serious bout of thrush, a fungus infection in her throat, she manages to take her mother Evelyn grocery shopping and bring a friend to his doctor's office.

In November, Jeannie organized a benefit at the Lyric Theatre for the Community AIDS Advocate Project. In December, she spoke about her illness at the Martin County Public Library in conjunction with World AIDS Day. In March, she participated in the Treasure Coast Life Walk.

Jeannie worked as a nurse in Southern California for 16 years.
**WHEN IS A MARriage NOT A MARRIAGE?**

In the eyes of the state — and most religious leaders — it’s when the partners are of the same sex. But for many gays, no benefits, no blessings add up to marriage ‘lite.’

By STEVE GUSHEE
Palm Beach Post Religion Writer

In their hearts, Steve Oliver and Ken Provencal are married to each other.

The two men exchanged wedding vows in an independent Catholic ceremony in West Palm Beach. They promised to care for one another for life. They were married on May 7, 1994: “If I got that wrong I would be in serious trouble when I got home. See, there’s not that much difference,” Oliver said.

Kelly Cassidy agrees. The 27-year-old woman was married to Alexandra Silets, 26, last June in a traditional Jewish ceremony led by a rabbi in Chicago. “Marriage is a commitment to act in partnership, be responsible for each other and intended to be lifelong,” Cassidy said.

In San Francisco last month, more than 150 same-sex couples were united as “domestic partners” in a ceremony at a temporary city hall. But none of those unions was recognized as marriages in any ciscos or other cities. The partners were denied any social benefits to such partnerships. Many gay couples are trying to be marriage “lite.”

They want civil and religious recognition of their relationships and marriage because, for them, “domestic partnership is not the way,” Oliver added.

Some clergy will bless same-sex unions, but few call them marriages by any name.

**Male ‘pill’ puts sperm down for good**

By REBECCA FOWLER
The New York Times

LONDON — The male contraceptive “pill” has proved to be 99 percent successful, a team of international scientists has announced.

In the course of two-year trials at 15 centers around the world, the contraceptive was tested on more than 400 men and it has been shown to be as effective as the pill for women, and safer than using a condom.

The British doctor on the research team, Dr. Fred Wu, a senior lecturer at Manchester University, described it as a “breakthrough” for the male contraceptive.

For the men testing the contraceptive the only drawback is the form it comes in, a painful injection administered in the buttck each week.

Further trials are already underway for longer-term injections combined with a pill and skin patches, which are expected to take eight years to complete.

The contraceptive works by secreting the male hormone testosterone into the body to reduce its sperm count to a negligible amount.

It fools the man’s body into believing it has already produced adequate levels, because there is so much of the hormone in his system.

In previous tests the researchers had already discovered that sperm count in men can drop by 93 percent in as little as three weeks after the first injection.

**Story, Page 5D**
Ahoy! Pirates are coming to River Dayz

For those who like to go with the wind but either can’t afford a sailboat or want to leave the navigating to someone else, now there’s a day schooner on the St. Lucie River.

Amanda, a 58-foot pinky schooner built in Boston in 1965, sails twice a day, at 10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. from the Stuart Cay Marina in Stuart ($35 per person).

You can catch a glimpse of Amanda at the River Dayz Festival, Saturday and Sunday in downtown Stuart. Her captain, Bob Schultz, will be at the Maritime & Yachting Museum booth on Saturday, and it’s rumored Amanda will be boarded by pirates on Sunday morning near City Hall.

The River Dayz Festival is 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday; adults $5 at the gate; children 6-12, $3.

JERI BUTLER

Courageous role model for women

For such a tiny woman, she had a big heart. On Nov. 7, the Treasure Coast lost one of its most energetic and compassionate citizens. Helen Fine, 72, died of cancer at her home in Palm City.

For 10 years this warm, funny, sophisticated lady with an impish smile worked hard for the arts, the hospitals, the elderly.

Big project or small, she attacked it with gusto, and she encouraged everyone to do the same. “You have a lot to contribute,” she would say in her melodious Yugoslavian accent.

A courageous role model for women, Helen let nothing stop her from reaching a goal.

Fine

Born in Belgrade, Helen’s family left their home before the Germans occupied the city during World War II. Her father, an industrialist, anticipated the devastation to come and took the family to Bombay and eventually to New York. Helen was 17 and spoke little English.

She graduated from New York University, married, had two sons named Gregory and Nicholas and established a mailing list business.

When she retired to Port St. Lucie in 1985, she began a second career making life richer for others. She raised lots of money for organizations, but one of her kindnesses was delivering Meals on Wheels with her husband, Jack, on Christmas Day. And best of all, she brought people together.

By STEVE GUSHEE
Palm Beach Post Religion Writer

It was 1971 in Miami, and Jacqueline Rhoades wanted to be a pastor’s assistant. A black pastor’s assistant.

Churches are our most racially divided institutions.

What does it mean for society when black and white worship apart?

The most segregate

Center for Theological Studie
tural, multiracial seminary in Florida.
Born in Belgrade, Helen's family left their home before the Germans occupied the city during World War II. Her father, an industrialist, anticipated the devastation to come and took the family to Bombay and eventually to New York. Helen was 17 and spoke little English. She graduated from New York University, married, had two sons named Gregory and Nicholas and established a mailing list business.

When she retired to Port St. Lucie in 1985, she began a second career making life richer for others. She raised lots of money for organizations, but one of her kindnesses was delivering Meals on Wheels with her husband, Jack, on Christmas Day. And best of all, she brought people together.

"I tend to get chummy with people fast," she once said. Everyone who knew Helen met many others because of her. I met Helen 20 years ago in San Francisco and she became my mentor, my mother, my sister, my friend.

A memorial service will be held for Helen at noon Sunday at the Cummings Library, 2551 S.W. Matheson Ave. in Palm City.

To share your news about people or events in the Treasure Coast, call Jeri at 223-3552 or write her at The Palm Beach Post, 969 S. U.S. 1, Mayfair Plaza, Stuart, Fla. 34994. Please include any photos.

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The president won't play with the Republicans. The budget's stuck in limbo, and the government's shut down. That translates into lots of federal workers sitting at home watching Jerry Springer.

All of which gives rise to some nagging questions: Am I an essential employee? Or a non-essential employee?

If you work for Uncle Sam, you already know. But for the rest of us, the answer may not come so easily.

For those of you wondering which category you fit into, here's a test:

**You know you're a non-essential employee if...**

- You fall asleep in a meeting, and you're awakened by the night janitor.
- Your title contains the words "assistant," "administrative," "deputy" and "vice president."
- You get your aerobic workout for the day by walking from your assigned parking space.
- Your primary duty is buying filters for the coffee machine.
- You have enough time at work to build favors for your Christmas party out of old toilet paper rolls.
- Your boss not only doesn't complain about your two-hour lunches, but she comes to your desk and covers you with a blanket when you nap afterward.
- You come back from vacation and people say, "Oh, were you gone?"
- Behind your back, other people refer to you as "Mr. Layoff Insurance."
- Your co-workers fall asleep and begin to snore during your much-anticipated project presentation.
- You always wear a tie to work.
- You return from six months' maternity leave and you have no voice-mail messages. Not one.
- Your boss of 20 years stops you in the hall to ask if you have a visitor's pass.
- You're the journalist who is asked by an editor to write about non-essential employees.