

plot

Little things make all the difference

Feminist movement progress depends on complete equality, acceptance

Dr. Pamela Matthews, director of the Women's Studies program, tells a powerful story about her feminist awakening. She was a graduate student taking a class from a respected professor who read to the class a draft of an essay he was writing. Throughout, he referred to the poet Emily Dickinson as "Emily." When the professor asked for suggestions from his graduate students, Dr. Matthews finally raised her hand and asked if it was appropriate to refer to the author by her first name. "What do you expect me to call her? MS. Dickinson?" the professor sneered. Since then, two other professors in conversation with Matthews referred to Dickinson as "Emily," and both made exactly the same comment about "Ms. Dickinson, scoffing at the suggestion that they were doing anything offensive.

ELIZABETH PRESTON
Columnist



Many people will argue that the focus of the movement needs to be on "bigger" issues than "mere" naming. In reality this IS the issue. Women deserve to be recognized on every level, in every classroom and field, as equal to men. These professors wouldn't have dared to call Shakespeare "William" or Chaucer "Geoffrey," so why do they feel it permissible to refer to Dickinson as "Emily?" The idea that women are less deserving of respect than men is so pervasive in our society that most of us don't even notice or flinch at this obvious insult.

"This is my body. If I give it to you I want it back. My life is a non-negotiable demand."

— Marge Piercy

One of the reasons that this attitude is so rampant is religion. Various doctrines teach women from birth to facilitate and obey men's wishes. In the Baptist denomination, women are taught an interpretation of the Bible that says men are the spiritual head of the household. Catholics forbid birth control and women priests. The Church of Christ does not allow women to be elders or to lead the service of worship. Mormons believe that mothers should remain home to raise young children unless circumstances absolutely require them to work. Muslims' culture only allow women to lead prayers if there are no men present. Some factions of Judaism do not allow women to be rabbis. While each of these religions is deeper than these single aspects, the continued focus on men as providers and leaders of women encourages women to remain and even to see themselves as inferior.

Sexuality is another topic where men often dominate. Not

only do men generally control dating, marriage proposals and sex, they also encourage a double standard. I have heard that horribly offensive saying, "He is just sowing his wild oats," innumerable times, yet the idea that a woman might have some wildness to live out is almost unheard.

Women who date often and have an active sex life are still labeled "slut," "easy" or "whore." However, when someone refers to a man by these labels people stare and usually reply, "A man can't be a slut." I believe that no one is a slut; people just make different choices. But, if women are to be incorrectly labeled as such, I know that men should be also.

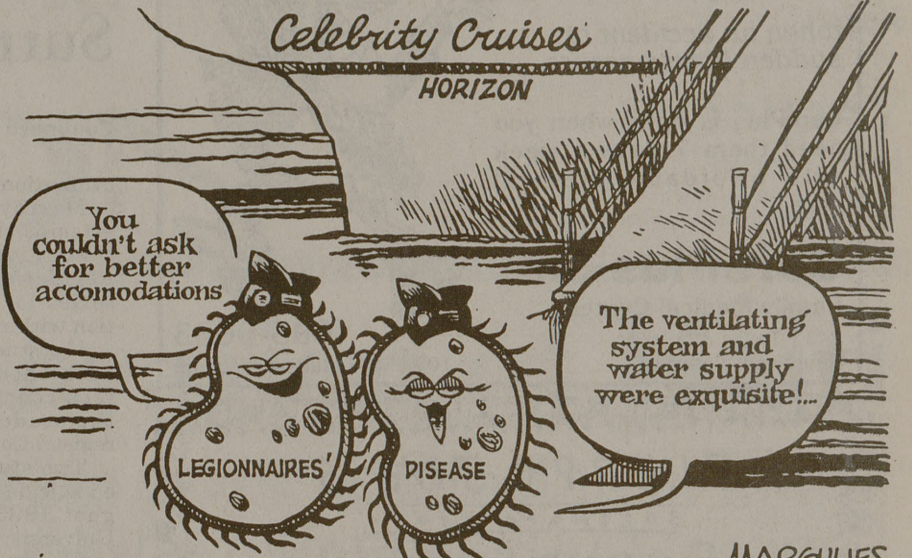
In "Backlash," Susan Faludi notes that when research studies emphasize the supposed negative effects of the women's rights movement are done, everyone is eager to print the news. Though often badly researched and full of logistical holes, these studies were rushed to print by a media eager to print bad news about the women's movement. When well-researched reports came out that contradicted the earlier findings, they were largely ignored by the same media.

Faludi notes that one of the reasons for the anger towards the feminist movement is that the majority of men are very bitter towards it. She reported that in one seven-year study, Anthony Astrachan found that no more than five to 10 percent of the men surveyed genuinely supported women's efforts towards independence and equality.

In "Right to Life" Marge Piercy beautifully summarizes some of the rights that every woman deserves. "I will choose what enters me, what becomes flesh of my flesh... I am not your cornfield, / not your uranium mine, not your calf / for fattening, not your cow for milking, / You may not use me as your factory, / Priests and legislators do not hold / shares in my womb or my mind. / This is my body. If I give it to you / I want it back. My life / is a non-negotiable demand."

Child care. Abortion. Divorce. Rape. Sexually Transmitted Diseases. Weight. Age. Birth control. Sexual Harassment. Equal pay for equal work. Every woman in the world is affected by the issues raised in the fight for equality, and every woman needs to find her place in this incredibly important effort.

Elizabeth Preston is a junior English major



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NEW JERSEY

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EDITORIAL

SKEWED STATISTICS

Calculated 'facts' often obscure truth

Almost every argument is backed by statistics. Dependence on these numbers as evidence and unconditional acceptance of these "facts" often skews the truth and leads to false conclusions.

Unfortunately, statistics are easily manipulated and misinterpreted and can give a misguided view of the facts. Statistics are often exaggerated to support certain causes by making a problem seem worse.

The estimated number of homeless in the United States ranges from 223,000 to 7 million. Advocates for the homeless stress the larger figure. Opponents of government-funded shelter projects generally quote lower numbers.

Several years ago Sen. Paul Simon claimed that 50,000 children were abducted in the United States each year. Studies of federal crime data later determined that 5,000 was a more accurate number.

When O.J. Simpson's history of abusing his wife was revealed, women's advocacy groups jumped on whatever statistics they could find to make the problem of spousal abuse seem as bad as possible. Time magazine reported that 4 million women a year were assaulted by a "domestic part-

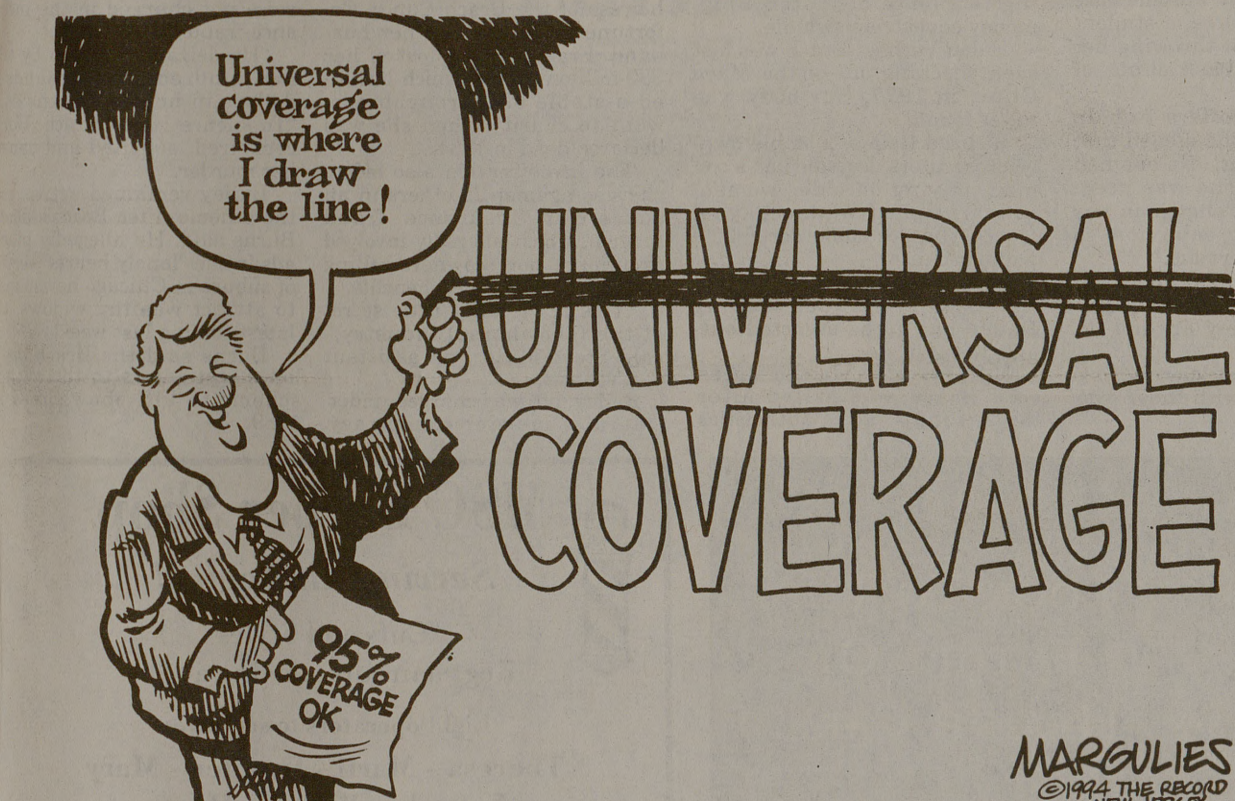
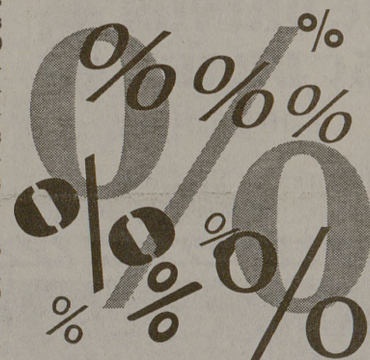
ner." Newsweek put the number of women beaten by "husbands, ex-husbands and boyfriends" at 2 million. Yet, research by the U.S. Department of Justice found that all crimes against women numbered just 2.5 million.

On the local front, some people claim that the Bryan-College Station area has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. However, these statistics include "unemployed" college students who are not even seeking jobs and make up a large part of the city's population.

The wide variance and uncertainty of these statistics reveals a serious problem with our society. Issues of great importance to the public are argued with unverifiable evidence that is wild guesswork at best.

A tremendous lack of scrutiny appears in the analysis of many statistics. If a group or organization hears one statistic that supports its cause, no matter how unsubstantiated, it will adopt it and spread it as the truth.

Audiences should develop more skeptical views of the number crunching often presented as facts. The use of statistics also carries a responsibility to make sure those numbers are correct.



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NEW JERSEY

MAIL CALL

New 'name' symbolizes more than just identity

With all the vitally important political whining going on about whose lifestyle will kill the soul of America, I think we have overlooked a deep and powerful question. I'm talking about the startling and unconventional new, strange and probably dangerous practice of people substituting unpronounceable symbols for names.

All right, I only have one example, but I think it best to discuss it now while some of us still have real names with real phonetic components. The name is a circle with a vertical ray projecting down from the bottom and a horizontal swirly bar tangential to the circle. It resembles a bizarre combination of the symbol for female and the symbol for the Tristero in Thomas Pynchon's "The Crying of Lot 49." I saw it the other day while skimming an article in PC World on new CD-ROM titles. Immediately after the first printing of the symbol the author explained, "the performer previously known as Prince."

Prince? Prince who? That really doesn't help much, either. Was it just "Prince" or "Mr. Prince"? It is confusing enough to wonder what name appeared on this guy's checks and court documents when he was called Prince, but how do we designate the person now without purchasing a special font package called "Times New Roman featuring the performer previously known as Prince"? And is there supposed to be a pronunciation of the symbol? Is it read "Barb" or "Urkel" or just the euphemistic "performer previously known as Prince"?

"Performer previously known as Prince" sounds way too much like "Knights who until recently said 'Ni'" for me to take seriously. If I wanted to get the gentleman's attention at a party (not that I would have anything appropriate to wear) would I get mobbed if I just called out, "Hey, Prince!" or whistled and drew his new symbol in the air with my finger repeatedly? How does one address the performer who was until recently called Prince?

The idea of drawing a symbol in the air really isn't that hard to deal with if you happen to be in China, trying to communicate with persons from a different dialect region. In that situation (hopefully rendered obsolete when the new standardization is fully implemented) the Kanji are constant in meaning throughout China (and even in most of Japan), but pronunciation varies wildly with region. Could it be that the symbol for the performer until recently known as Prince is similar to a non-standardized Kanji? Some would pronounce the symbol "hey, you" or "Prince" or "weirdo," while others might call him "boss" or "hey you with the holes in the seat of your spandex pants" or "rich eccentric at the decline of his talent," but, by using the symbol, all of these verbal elements can be understood as the same person.

I am inspired. Perhaps I should change my name to that little biohazard symbol and then give people dirty looks whenever they try to address me. And in case any of you are getting the same idea, just remember: I got dibs on the biohazard symbol. You can call me Mujaad.

Kenneth Wayne Elwell
Bryan

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Cry and the world laughs at you

Trend toward crude, insensitive humor begs questions about modern society

Q: What is O. J. Simpson's wife dressing up as for Halloween this year?
A: A Pez dispenser.

After I dried my eyes from laughing hysterically at this latest O. J. Simpson joke, I realized what a sick person I am. It's not just me, though. It's most of the people I know.

Gone are the days when our society's sense of humor was satisfied with the stupidity of Barney Fife, Lucille Ball's off-the-wall stunts or simple knock-knock jokes. We have become a society that searches for humor in almost every tragedy and misfortune.

One example of this warped sense of humor that amuses most of us is the popularity of MTV's "Beavis and Butthead" show. For over two years, these two cartoon morons have been more popular than a canoe in Haiti. Their clever dialogue, such as "Huh, huhuhuh, huhuh, huh," and "He said, 'dum,' continues to captivate audiences of our generation. Why are these two imbeciles so funny? They are underachievers and bums, and between them have as much sense as a piece of toast. Their agenda each day is to disrupt class, break a few laws, and find some domestic animal to torture or mutilate.

It is really interesting to observe how members of older generations respond to this type of humor. Neither my parents, nor my grandparents even crack a smile during a "Beavis and Butthead" episode. Yet many of my friends attentively watch every scene while repeating the gibberish dialogue they just heard.

Another indication of this sick humor that our society possesses is the blitzkrieg-like fashion that jokes are developed and spread at times of tragedy

J. STERLING HAYMAN

Guest Columnist



or misfortune. I had friends call from across the country to be the first to tell me jokes about O. J., Michael Jackson, Lorena Bobbitt, Jeffrey Dahmer and especially David Koresh and the Branch Davidian congregation. It is kind of sad that it took me only minutes for a friend from Arizona to relay a punchline about Somalians, yet days for me to notice that hundreds of thousands of people are dying in Rwanda.

One proof of our warped humor is the popularity of "Beavis and Butthead". For two years, these cartoon morons have been more popular than a canoe in Haiti.

When the space shuttle Challenger exploded, killing 7 astronauts, there wasn't a dry eye in my school. Most weren't crying; they were gasping for air to recover from their laughter. It seemed that the "Honey, you feed the dogs, I'll feed the fish," punchline was a bit more emotional than the saddened voice of Dan Rather on the news.

One increasingly popular topic for humor is sex. I guess that this topic steadily has become more fair game as society's attitudes toward sex have changed. Most of today's sitcoms are filled with sexual innuendos concerning masturbation, homosexuality or promiscuity. This humor seems to be the basis for many of the most popular

characters on television. After all, what would "Cheers" be without Sam, the sexual conqueror; or Dan on "Night Court"; or even Kelly on "Married, With Children."

Most of the funniest jokes these days are in the poorest taste. Humor relating to death, disparity and the downfalls of society. This is probably because it is easier to poke fun at those who aren't able to defend themselves... the dead, children and those with physical deformities.

Humor is, and always will be, in an evolving state. Just as our humor has become more warped, it has also changed for the good. Previous generations laughed at jokes and humor that many people don't find the least bit funny today.

Racial and ethnic jokes are beginning to decline. This is a good sign that our society is becoming more and more intolerant to racial prejudice. Although there is still a very large problem concerning racism, it is steadily decreasing, and it's an excellent sign when derogatory statements that evoked laughter from our ancestors are greeted with looks of scorn and disapproval from many members of our generation.

It will be interesting to see what sort of things we think are funny when we are no longer the younger generation. When we are in our seventies and eighties, will we still cackle when we see colorful characters on MTV beating the hell out of a frog and moaning pedestrians? Or will we assimilate to our grandchildren's style of humor?

As for most of my friends, myself included, the warped, sick and twisted sense of humor will still be alive. We'll probably continue to make fun of the dead, the famous, the weird and most of all... Republicans.

J. Sterling Hayman is a junior political science major