



Gender Fever, Gender Health, Gender Wealth

Women's Media Watch has been in a whirlwind of activity since the start of the New Year. We hosted **Gender Fever 2006**, continued our essential work providing gender awareness training, and blitzed the media on issues ranging from **"Language of Love and Gender Stereotypes"** to **"Government policies on gender-based violence"**. Our Male Leaders joined their voices with those of WMW to enrich these gender discussions.

In January, *The Susan Show* on CVM TV, took up WMW's suggestion for a show exploring masculinity. **Carl Duncan** and **Darion Palmer** from our Gender Equity Male Training programme, were featured. They shared how **gender awareness has impacted their life and how they've incorporated this new awareness into their work in community development**. TV audiences were impressed and WMW was proud to have these colleagues represent the work WMW has been doing with Male Leaders.

Gender Fever was hot, HOT, **HOT** on a cool January night at Weekenz—an evening of poetry, motion and story telling,

all bringing fresh views on this gender 'business'. All artistes donated their talents to address topics of gender-based violence, power, sexuality, politics and liberation—and each had their own style, from humour to naked truths that made your mind boil. As the review in the Gleaner said, the



Staff at FAMPLAN in St. Ann's Bay smile for the camera with Zara Heron (back), WMW Male Trainer.

programme **"simmered nicely"**. WMW, the **Canadian Caribbean Gender Equality Fund** and **NEM Insurance**, were pleased with the event—it was fun, thoughtful and entertaining.

Our work with Male Leaders continued with a **Gender, Media and Patriarchy**

workshop. We embarked on the difficult path of unraveling the complexities of patriarchy, a system which benefits only a few and harms the many, both women and men. At the end of February, WMW wrapped up our **"Forging Partnerships with Male Leaders, Addressing Gender-based Violence"** project, sponsored by CCGEF with support from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and CUSO. Over forty male leaders received their certificates. **The men were adamant that this much-needed training must continue.**

WMW workshops on relationships and gender expectations with sixth formers at **St. Andrews High School**, exploded into fiery debates. During **HIV/AIDS week** we raised public awareness on the health risks associated with gender-based violence at the Health fair at Devon House and talked about media and sexuality with youth at **Haile Salassie School**.

It was great being afflicted by the heat of **Gender Fever** as it was another step towards **Gender Health**. And we give thanks for all our supportive colleagues who give us **Gender Wealth**.

WMW

What Next for WMW?

WMW celebrates **International Women's Day** and **VDAY** with a benefit performance of Eve Ensler's **"The Vagina Monologues"** on March 7th at the Philip Sherlock Creative Arts Centre, UWI. A big, big, big thank-you to **director/producer fabian Thomas** and the creative and committed team of artistes who are donating their talents. VDAY is an international campaign challenging gender-based violence.


The next two months will see WMW organizing local and regional workshops and fora on women's rights, challenging discrimination and sexual harassment.

Our popular pocket-sized booklet **"Gender Matters"**, hot off the press, is selling well. WMW hopes to distribute it far and wide. Contact the office to order. WMW



Poetry, music and movement at Gender Fever 2006.

WMW PROFILE



WMW would like to congratulate **Patricia Donald**, a multi-talented founding member of WMW, who recently graduated from the UWI CARIMAC Master's Programme in Communication for Social and

Behaviour Change. Pat, as she is fondly called, is a Communication Development Support Consultant currently working as the Administrative Coordinator of CARIMAC's graduate programmes. Trained as a theologian and Christian minister of religion, she was ordained as an Anglican Deaconess and practiced as a full time minister before moving on in her twenty odd -years career to being a college

guidance counselor and lecturer, non-government organization administrator, graphic arts company director, writer, illustrator, mediator, and workshop trainer/facilitator. Strong human relationship skills, creativity, gender sensitivity and respect for differences have allowed Pat to excel in all of these areas. Pat is committed to personal transformation and the transformation of Jamaica. She chooses daily to be happy and fulfilled. WMW is lucky Pat is in our corner!

We asked you ...

Statistics show that married women over 50 years of age are one of the groups most at risk for contracting HIV.

Why is this? Why do you think she wouldn't insist on using safe sex practices with her husband?

- Power dynamics ... and trust issues.
- The perception is that it is young people who are becoming HIV+, therefore she might not think that she and or her partner are at risk.
- Insisting condom use in a long term partnership isn't only difficult for women, but for men as well. The essential issue is that of trust.
- She believes in the sanctity of marriage and the tenants that he should be faithful.
- Emotional and financial dependence; Fear of being accused of infidelity and the consequences of that.
- The man would assume that she is having an affair.
- Abusive partner, poor communication, strait-laced upbringing.
- The genuine belief that her relationship is monogamous.
- Women of that generation are less independent and cannot afford to antagonize the primary breadwinner.
- She should insist [on using a condom], but our need for companionship and love seems to override common sense. It's a dangerous trade-off.

WMW

'Naughty but Nice'? Media, Violence and HIV/AIDS

Many readers of the Observer All Woman Valentine feature were shocked and dismayed by the highly sexualized images of women—exposed breasts, a dildo, garters and intimate wear, a woman with legs spread wide. These were images we expect of an 'adult' publication, not a respected national family newspaper.

The article focused on how women can satisfy their male partners' sexual fantasies. It presented women as toys whose main purpose is to sexually gratify men; little women want—and deserve—to be satisfied sexually.

The article also reduced men to their penises, implying they are "like little boys". Touted as "romantic fun", it was demeaning to both genders, conveying a message that is potentially dangerous, particularly to young women and men.

Women have the right to be seen as a whole person and not as a sex object. Pornographic and commodified representations of female sexuality devalue and exploit women while they profit those who control the sex industry. Presented as risqué and 'naughty but nice', these images can end up as risky and deadly, especially when these portrayals of woman's sexuality make it easy for others to view her as a sexual commodity—to be used or abused, discarded or violated.

It is dangerous to portray sexuality in any way that encourages sexual exploitation or sexual violence. "Sex and violence sell" - we've all heard this before. And certainly sex and violence abound in

other media genres—from music videos and tabloids to pornography.

Does it matter? Yes. Research has shown that a constant diet of media sex and violence desensitizes us, making violence seem normal and inevitable, and an acceptable way of gaining power and status. The abuse of power in sexual violence is disguised as "macho" and "sexy". Media messages affect us: this is a well researched fact. It is why the multi-billion dollar advertising industry uses the media to influence our thoughts and actions.

These gender stereotypes encourage sexual practices that put young people at risk of HIV.

In a society where forced and coercive sex is putting girls and women at risk of HIV infection, we cannot afford to perpetuate sexism and violence in the media. Through the internet and computer games, youngsters are often exposed to explicit sexism and extreme violence—such as in Grand Theft Auto where players kill prostitutes for fun.

This is not the time for the media to typecast women as 'hoes' and men as roaming studs and thugs. These gender stereotypes encourage sexual practices that put young people at risk of HIV. Young persons deserve media messages which tell truthful and healthy messages about sex.

While WMW is a firm supporter of freedom of the press, we expect the media to use its power responsibly. WMW's objective is to encourage critical dialogue about the content and role of the media in order to make the most of the media's potential to be more pro-active as we grapple with the challenge of HIV/AIDS.

HER Experience

Dear Diary: My stepfather keeps touching me. I think Mummy knows, but she doesn't say anything... I feel dirty, sometimes I want to die... She still stays with him...He's paying the rent, my school fees...So, do I have to give it to him?

Research in Jamaica shows that for many young women their first sexual experience is forced, so they have no say in whether or not a condom is used. This puts them at risk of HIV/AIDS. The more a woman depends on a man for financial support, the less freedom she has over her sexuality.

Dear Diary: My 30 year old man makes me somebody. If I want to be Paul's number one girl I have to give it to him. Without Paul, I'm just an ordinary high school girl. A wicked car, nuff money... Sometimes he's very rough when we have sex, and I bleed. But I want him to be happy. He likes to be inside me without a condom, to really feel me and to be close to me. I think that's sweet.

Many girls are raised to believe that in order to have social status they must have a man, and to keep one, they must please him sexually, no matter what the cost. These pressures make young women accept dangerous, unhealthy sexual practices, including sex without a condom.

Dear Diary: Am I a mule? I want to have a baby for Paul, we've been having sex for a year, but I can't get pregnant. Is something wrong with me? I love Paul, I need him—he has money. A baby will make him stay. I have to have a baby before any of his other girls do.

One third (34%) of young women are unemployed. Many hope that having a baby for a man will secure an income. Women's unemployment rate is twice as high as men's, and many women work in low paid jobs. Their poor economic situation leaves them powerless and vulnerable to sexual exploitation—and at further risk of HIV.

Dear Diary: Paul never loved me. I gave him a son, but he won't leave his wife. He doesn't help me with the baby. Now, I'm having sex with anyone who wants me because I need money to feed my baby. I hate myself.

Transactional sex derives from economic need and other social pressures. The sex industry appears to be a more attractive source of income for some women, as it offers more than the meagre minimum wage.

Dear Diary: I've met a man who wants to take care of me. All I have to do is give him sex the way he wants - anal sex, sex with two girls, rough sex ... He says he loves me, but I'm not so sure ... All I know is he provides for me and my baby. I guess I love him for that.

Violent, coerced sex can increase a woman's vulnerability to HIV because of damage to membranes in the genital area.

Dear Diary: I'm thirty... and I won't ever see my son grow up. I'm dying. I have AIDS.

Facts

• In a Jamaican study, nearly 50% of girls and young women said their sexual partner was 5-10 years older. In Trinidad and Tobago, 30% of teenage girls said they had sex with older men.

• As a result, adolescent girls have three (3) times higher the risk of HIV infection than boys of the same age. In Trinidad and Tobago, the rate is five (5) times higher for girls than boys aged 15-19.

• Women having sex in exchange for goods or money find it hard to negotiate safe sex. They may be at greater risk of violence; stigma makes it difficult for them to access health services.

HIS Experience

When I was ten I forced my cousin to have sex with me. I don't know why — I guess because the other boys said I was a battyman. I knew I wasn't—but I had to prove it, right?

Homophobia often results in boys having to prove their heterosexuality very early they have sex in unplanned, risky ways.

I'm married and I love my wife. She's so perfect I don't want to spoil her. She's the mother of my children, and she needs to act that way. She's not supposed to be into sex. But I'm a man, and man has needs. That's why I have so many girls. Freaky girls who'll do whatever I tell them. But I only have one wife.

Some people believe that men have a right to sexual gratification, but women don't. There is a myth that men's sexual urges are uncontrollable. Some men feel that an essential element of masculinity is controlling women's sexual lives.

This one girl! Woi! I can get her to do anything... And a condom? No, man—she's just too damn sexy.

Men are raised to believe that having many sexual partners proves manhood. They expect to be in charge of the how, when, where of sex - including whether a condom is to be worn or not. Condoms are often thought to reduce male pleasure.

I just found out I'm HIV positive. How can I tell my wife?

HER Experience

As a Christian, I never had sex until Paul and I got married. I love him, even though he cheats ...

I know about HIV/AIDS. At times I wonder if Paul is careful when he ... It scares me, but how can I ask him to wear a condom after having sex "bare-back" for 20 years? That would be like saying I know he cheats - and we NEVER talk about that. Or worse, he'll think I am cheating on him!

Life is ok the way it is. I take care of our children, the house and him—he takes care of me. Whatever he does on the road is his business. What I don't know won't harm me, can it...?

A monogamous wife who is used to having sex without a condom, may find it hard to view her marital sex life as unprotected and risky. It is even harder for her to demand that a condom be used—this upsets the notion of trust, fidelity and 'silence'. She may fear his reaction to her request to use a condom: research has shown that some men respond violently.

Facts

• A woman is less likely to discuss HIV risk reduction with her intimate partner when she is afraid of violent retaliation.

• 50% of women worldwide report being physically abused by an intimate partner (Fact sheet: UNAIDS—HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence.)

• Research shows that in up to 80% of cases where women in long-term stable relationships are HIV-positive, they acquired the virus from their partners.

(http://www.un.org/qa/aids/unqassfactsheets/html/fsgender_en.htm)

A Gender Focus

• **Gender inequalities** are a driving force behind the AIDS epidemic. The different attributes and roles which societies assign to males and females profoundly affect their ability to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS.

• We must recognize that gender norms pressure women and men to resort to unsafe behaviour in their search for financial and social autonomy. Societies must allow these gender norms to change.

• Reversing the spread of HIV demands that women's rights are realized and that women are empowered financially, socially and sexually. Men, especially young boys, are vulnerable too.