# OSU's Women's Center

MAY 24, 2005

SPRING TERM NEWS

#### Tayyibah Taylor, Founder of Azizah Magazine, Visits OSU

by Lindsay Duerksen & Haleh Bahrami

Tayyibah Taylor is the founding editor-in-chief and publisher of Azizah Magazine. Through Azizah, Tayyibah Taylor has realized her vision of providing a vehicle for the voice of Muslim women – a vehicle that portrays them accurately and shatters commonly held stereotypes. This work blends her passion for spirituality, dialogue and journalism. Before her involvement in pub-

lishing, Tayyibah Taylor worked as the administrator of the Islamic School of Seattle, an institution she helped found over

found over 20 years ago. For six years of her life, Tayyibah Taylor had si-

Tayyibah Taylor

multaneous legal claim to residency in five different countries. This unique experience provided her with the lens through which she views the universe.

As founder and top manager of *Azizah*, Taylor works to dispel stereotypes and inaccuracies about Muslim women through her magazine and in the lectures she has given on the national and international level, such

as at the
Society of
Professional Journalist Conference, the
Harvard
Divinity
School's
Islam in
America

Conference and the International Islamic University of Malaysia's Islam and Muslims in the 21st century Conference. In a recent interview, Tayyibah Taylor said, "We have been either defined by Muslim men, or by people of other faiths or other intellectual perspectives. And so, the Muslim woman needs to define herself and say, 'This is who I am, and this is what I'm about.' I think in doing that it's an inspiration to others, and it's also a sense of empowerment." Taylor added, "When you internalize negative images, it really limits your potential as a human being.

See "Tayyibah" pg. 5

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## A Numbers Game: Heterosexual Older Women Looking for Love by Liz Bayler Levaro

"We're goin' to Surf City, 'cause it's two to one You know we're goin' to Surf City, gonna have some fun Ya, we're goin' to Surf City, 'cause it's two to one Ya, we're goin' to Surf City, gonna have some fun, now

Two girls for every

Two girls for every boy"

I've got that old '60s hit by Jan and Dean running through my head. You know, the one that starts out, "We're goin' to Surf City, 'cause it's two to one, you know we're goin' to Surf City, gonna have some fun" and ends with the alluring testosterone-filled promise, "Two girls for every booooooy." (Are ya humming along yet?)

See "Numbers" pg. 6

The Women's
Center Advisory
Committee
needs
committed
student
members for
2005-06!

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#### **Courageous Cunt**

by Jayme Hauck

The Vagina Monologues explores women's sexuality and aligns itself

with feminist philosophy. The feminist movement empowers women by emphasizing the need to actively pursue their desires. The monologues affirm that women need sexual satisfaction. In order to gain sexual satisfaction, women must view their bodies in a positive manner. Feminism uses language to positively impact women's perceptions of their sexu-



A vagina purse at the WC Art Show

morously challenges women to involve themselves in their own sexu-

ality by increasing their awareness of self.

Language is a powerful tool. Words can reflect and affect social attitude. Dar-

ing words can incite public response. Sexual language never fails

to gain the public's attention. Titles are the most immediate information about a work. They exist to sum up content and help us decide whether the content is of interest. Recent and controversial endeavors, *The Vagina Monologues* and *Cunt*, elicit reactions before the curtain is drawn or a page is turned. These titles are successful, as they strive to affect public opinion. They provide apt descriptions of content and instantly engage the public's interest.

See "Courageous" pg. 4

#### Guerrilla Girls Go Bananas at OSU

by Chelsea Ruediger

ality. The Vagina Monologues hu-

Running down the aisles and tossing bananas at the audience, the Guerrilla Girls On Tour started their performance, "Feminists Are Funny", by riling up the viewers. The twenty-six women that make up the Guerrilla Girls On Tour combine activism, protest, theatre art, stickering campaigns, and "girl-cotting" to promote their message: We want equal representation for women and people of color in the performing arts world and beyond.

Aphra Ben and Fanny Bryce were the two women who performed at Oregon State University this April as a part of

the annual Conference On Gender and Culture put on by the Women's Center. They took the nearly full LaSells Stewart Center on a trip through history to

visit some of the hard working feminist women from our past. We also had a chance to hear about some of the techniques

Chelsea Ruediger & the Guerrilla Girls



and tactics of professional activists. The Guerrilla Girls On Tour are known world wide for their efforts to promote equity: they've had insiders stickering

for them at the Tony awards, set up an online list of theatres to "girl-cot", traveled and performed all over the globe, and designed posters that question the status of women and people of color in all areas of life, not just the performing arts.

See "Guerrilla" pg. 3

#### Yeas and Nays

by Women's Center Staff

<u>Yea</u> to Intercollegiate Athletics for hiring an African American woman, LaVonda Wagner, from Duke University as head women's basketball coach.

Nay to Playboy for recruiting for their "Girls of the Pac-10" from OSU. By the way, you have to be an adult to pose for pornography, not a "girl."

<u>Yea</u> to everyone who wore signs in protest against the presence of Playboy on our campus.

<u>Nay</u> to the folks in the ASOSU Undergraduate Senate who don't believe that Cultural Centers are essential to the OSU community.

<u>Yea</u> to Lauren from the BCC for planning and facilitating the public forum about the importance of Cultural Centers.

Nay to the Genocide Awareness Project for putting offensive and graphic pictures on the MU Quad. This is not about pro-choice or prolife, it's about a welcoming environment for everyone at OSU.

<u>Yea</u> to the Barometer for hiring two women for key editing positions for the 2005-2006 year.

Nay to the Barometer for printing Christy William's article "Fourteen things that piss me off". Her final paragraph suggests that for everything you like there are two more things to hate. How about we stop printing hate propaganda in the campus newspaper?

See "Yeas" pg. 8

OSU'S WOMEN'S CENTER PAGE 3

#### **Reflections on a Computer Science Success Story**

by Kami Vaniea

Editor's Note: Kami Vaniea is a senior in Computer Science. Last year she won Google's prestigious Anita Borg Scholarship, an award that honors women who worked the further women's education and careers in technological fields. Next year she will be attending Carnegie Mellon University.

I was raised in the high desert of North East Oregon, in the rural town of Starkey, a small ranching and logging community. My home was "off the grid." Electricity came from solar panels and water from our well. I was introduced to technology at a young age as I helped my family design and build our solar system and plumbing. My family always told me that nothing was beyond my reach if I just reached high enough. This experience gave me many practical skills I have used throughout my life, including the initiative to work hard and improve the world around me.

My sophomore year of high school, I took a computer technologies class and discovered that computers were my true passion. The class focused on constructing a computer and providing technical support to

"Guerrilla" ... continued from Pg. 2

Although it may seem like just a bad pun, the women wear gorilla masks for a reason. These women lead lives outside of the work they do for the Guerilla Girls On Tour, and their anonymity is vital to the workings of the group. Otherwise, how would one member have gotten an invite to the Tony's, or another land a job at the much girl-cotted Roundabout Theatre in New York? During the entirety of the workshop they put on for art and theatre students and their performance, their masks and wigs stayed on. And even though I was at their rehearsal and saw their real faces, I still don't

teachers. I was the only girl to complete the class the first term it was offered.

When I graduated high school, I knew I wanted to have a career working with computers, so I chose to get my Computer Science degree at Oregon State University since it is the best engineering university in Oregon. Despite my high school experience, I started college with very limited computer experience compared to my peers. I took the initiative to close that gap by joining clubs, working on individual projects and participating in programming contests. By the end of my freshmen year, Dr. Herlocker had hired me for his Collaborative Filtering research project.

My success in extracurricular activities led me to become president of the local Association for Computing Machinery chapter, which was on the verge of extinction. In less than a year, I changed it from the embarrassment of the department to a successful organization. ACM opened up a world of opportunity to me, and I began to get even more involved in contests, mentoring and tutoring. I was also hired as an Un-

dergraduate Research Assistant. Through my involvement on campus, I became increasingly aware of the issues involving females in computer science and engineering in general. When I got the chance to join the College of Engineering's new Women in Engineering student council, I leaped at the opportunity.

After my sophomore year, I began feeling the need to get out of Corvallis and try something new, so I signed up with the Distributed Mentor Project run by the Committee for the Status of Women in Research. The project is designed to place young women interested in Computer Science with a female professor for a summer of research. In my case I was matched with Professor Elizabeth Sklar at Columbia University in New York City.

See "Computer" pg. 7

know their real names and never will. Each Guerrilla Girl On Tour chooses the name of a dead woman artist and performs solely under their name. In no way is being a Guerrilla Girl On Tour an attempt for these women to boost up their resume; they volunteer most of the time that they spend designing posters and protesting, and only receive a small stipend when they travel with the troupe.

This is a group of women truly committed to a cause and it shows in their energy and humor during the performance. We were honored to have them here at OSU this year and were glad to see that so many people took advantage of the opportunity to catch this free show.

The Women's Center would like to thank everyone who donated funds to make this experience possible: The Art Department, Speech Communications, Convocations and Lectures, Jackie Balzer, Larry Roper, Women's Studies, The Philosophy Department, Student Affairs, LGBT Services, The Pride Center, and ASOSU.

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#### "Courageous" ... continued from pg. 2

Cunt attempts to make changes in society through controversial sexual language. Like The Vagina Monologues, the goal of Cunt is to teach women to love and respect their bodies. It reclaims "cunt" as a word honoring women, and provides an agenda to bring more power and respect to women. This agenda includes "seizing a vocabulary," "actively teaching others to perceive cunts in a manner generating understanding and empathy," and "taking this knowledge out into the community" (Muscio, 1998, p. 9).

The word "cunt," also promoted by The Vagina Monologues as a welcome alternate term for the vagina, is frowned upon by society. It is challenging to find an entry for "cunt" in even the most complete dictionaries. The few dictionaries that supplied a definition of the word described "cunt" as offensive and coarse (2 entries for cunt, 2005). However, the roots of the word honor women. Is it ignorance or preexisting connotations that give this word such negative power? And how did a word with past positive associations become a vulgarity? I speculate that the word "cunt" frightens people, due to its aggressive qualities.

The multiple roots of the word "cunt" assert the importance of women, connecting them with power and positive attributes. Found in many ancient writings, "cunt" literally meant woman. "Cunt" is a derivative of Cunti or Kunda, an Oriental goddess of the universe. Cunina, a Roman goddess that protects cradled children, was inspired by the word "cunt." Words sharing the root of "cunt" glorify women's virtues and abilities. "Kind" and "kin" stem from "cunt," as do "cunning," "kent," and "ken." These words are equivalent to "knowledge, learning, insight, remembrance, and wisdom." "Cunctipotent" is derived from what is known as powerful cunt-magic (Walker, 1983, p. 197). The powers associated with women and the word "cunt" were possibly threatening. Reducing this word to an insult takes away the immense force of "cunt" and helps keep women meek and subservient.

The word "vagina" is far less frightening and aggressive than the word "cunt." Rather, its meaning is passive and objectifies women. The Latin word "vagina" means a sheath (Webster's, 1979, p. 2016). This relegates the entire purpose of the vagina to holding something else, devaluing it into a tool.

The Vagina Monologues complaint that "vagina" is an unsexy word perhaps relates to the feminist disapproval of passivity. The passivity that is associated with women's sex roles is unbeneficial to women. If a woman doesn't demand what she wants in sex, she's unlikely to get it. In monologues where women are treated as passive sexual objects, experiences and their aftereffects are hurtful. In Hair, a woman who shaves her vagina to please her husband has painful intercourse as a result. Her efforts do not get her what she wants. He leaves her nonetheless. The rapes in My Vagina Was My Village and The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could damage the women's bodies, destroy their sense of security, and repress their sexuality.

Conversely, The Vagina Monologues depicts women who get what they want sexually as aggressive and demanding. In My Angry Vagina, the woman insists that her vagina be treated respectfully. The Women Who Loved To Make Vaginas Happy is dressed to dominate, showing up in leather and spikes. In *The* Little Coochie Snorcher That Could, the woman who sleeps with the orator is described in terms of awe. She later knows exactly how to please her vagina and asks the orator to have sex with her. In Reclaiming Cunt, the woman convinces the audience how much sexier "cunt" is than "vagina." She describes the word "cunt" as a list of things that she wants sexually.

The word "clitoris" represents hidden physical and metaphorical sexuality. The word "clitoris" has roots in the Greek word *kleiein*, which means to close or hide (Webster's, 1979, p. 340). As the clitoris is the only part of the body designed expressly for pleasure, it is interesting that a monologue is devoted to the inability to locate the clitoris. The orator cannot find what is closed and hidden to her; her body, her

sexuality and her pleasure. The woman's inability to find her clitoris parallels women's restricted sexuality.

Sound associations perhaps explain *The* Vagina Monologues promotion of the word "cunt" to replace "vagina." The sound of the word "cunt" is better suited to feminist philosophy. Direct and assertive behaviors have traditionally been associated with masculinity. Men are encouraged to have aggressive sexual desires and agendas. The word "cunt" lends women these presupposed masculine qualities. Words that rhyme with "cunt" are generally active verbs with aggressive connotations. Some examples are "affront," "blunt," "bunt," "confront," "forefront," "grunt," "hunt," "punt," "shunt," and "stunt" (Mitchell, 1996, p. 58).

A popular baby name book, Beyond Jennifer and Jason, categorizes girl's names into degrees of perceived femininity. Most interestingly, girl's names commonly identified as sounding less feminine are described as "blunt." These names are described as being "straightforward" and "down to earth," qualities traditionally associated with masculinity. Like men's names and the word "cunt," they are generally one syllable ending with a consonant (Rosenkrantz and Satran, 1994, p. 165). Conversely, names that are described as highly feminine often have three or more syllables. Out of the eighty-seven examples of ultra-feminine names, fifty names finish with an "a" sound (Rosenkrantz and Satran, 1994, p.157-160). "Vagina" clearly fits into the ultra-feminine niche.

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#### "Tayyibah" ... continued from Pg. 1

You're not allowed to expand your potential. You're not allowed to exist at your highest capacity. It's very limiting..... We are so much more than a stereotypical image. And sometimes people will say, 'Well, you know, this is only a movie, or this is only a book. What's wrong with that? It's art.'

.... Well, what's wrong with that is it's the only image of Muslims, or the only image of Arabs. So Azizah provides another image which I think will be very effective in helping to undo some of those stereotypes, both in the minds of Muslims women, and in the greater society."

Taylor spoke on the topic of women, power and leadership to a supportive audience of fifty people Wednesday April 20<sup>th</sup> at Oregon State University's week-long Conference on Gender and Culture.

Because women are often defined solely by the function of their bodies, Taylor said they are less likely to be taken seriously as leaders. "Since women are the only ones who can bear children, many people limit women's roles to just that," Taylor said.

She says this is due in part to an androcentric view of power, which promotes winning at all costs and places the most value on money and material items. Instead, Taylor suggests that obtaining these goals may not be as important as the method used to get them. "The process is significant, not just the result," she emphasized.

As an example, Taylor told the story of a girls' camp that had an unending game of marbles. The goal of the game was not to win, but to play with the other girls. No one girl was the winner, but because the game emphasized building relationships instead of competition, Taylor said that every girl became a winner.

The way women are portrayed in mass media is another reason why women may have less power than men, Taylor said. The audience nodded in agreement as Taylor described how shows such as "Desperate Housewives" and "The Apprentice" lessen women's power. Although Taylor admitted never having seen "Desperate Housewives," she noted that for two straight seasons of "The Apprentice," the sole woman of color on the show was consistently portrayed as bad-tempered and as a troublemaker.

By being media-literate, Taylor says that women will be able to recognize when the media is manipulating them, and can then begin to see the power that is within them. "These are images and messages that we are all internalizing," she said. Men also have a role in recognizing and rejecting negative images of women. "Men of quality are not intimidated by women of equality," she said as the audience murmured in agreement.

Taylor added that women can increase their power and become effective leaders only if society reevaluates what those terms mean. "Men have defined what it means to be a leader," Taylor said. "It is time to expand that definition to encompass aspects of women's lives." This definition should include having integrity, seeing the nuances in a situation, and being tolerant instead of threatened by other's opinions, she said.

The reaction from the audience was positive. "I really enjoyed this," said Isabel Sanchez, a student graduate student of College Student Services Administration. "It was empowering," she said.

"We need to stop being spectators to our own destiny," Taylor said. "We need to help create the next generation of women who know their power and use it for the greater good."

# Let's See Some Activism! Women Protesting Events On Campus



Molly Gray and friend protest Genocide Awareness Project



WC staff member, Sophie Scott, during the Playboy protest PAGE 6 MAY 24, 2005

#### "Numbers" ... continued from pg. 1

Now buzz forward a few years—well, okay, a few decades—and let's revisit the scene. Jan Berry is dead, and Dean Torrence is 65-plus. If he decided to come out with an updated version of their '60s song today, he'd be goin' to "Senior City," and the ratio of girls to boys there would be closer to *five* to one! That's what life on the "senior" side of the age divide looks like in our culture.

Whether a person's later years are shared with a spouse/partner or spent alone is pretty much determined by gender. The combination of two facts, one biological and one sociological, creates the reality of the demographics of later life: Women live an average of seven years longer than men, and it is more socially acceptable for men to date and marry younger women (and vice versa, obviously). The resulting gender imbalance means that most older men live with their wives, and most older heterosexual women are widows and live alone.

Sociologists tell us that widowhood is the normative transition of later life, and demographers duly chart the numbers: Among adults 65 and older today, 77% of men are married compared to just 43% of women. Almost half of all older women in 1999 were widows, and there were over four times as many widows as widowers. Women don't require statisticians' reports, however, to enlighten them about the dearth of available men. The gender imbalance is painfully obvious to older single women, and it profoundly affects many aspects of their lives. To quote another "oldie" hit, one is, indeed, the "loneliest number."

How do older heterosexual single women handle this? Healthier and better-adjusted women are able to construct a life for themselves with friends, family, and activities and find other outlets for their emotional needs. But the yearning for a partner or companion or lover, whether for a former husband or a possible

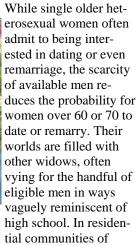
future friend, seems to be a constant. Having another person to care about and for, and receiving that affection in return brings a dimension into one's life that is difficult or impossible to replicate with any other relationships.

For many years (and for many people), the idea that older adults might be interested in

a romantic or even sexual relationship was viewed, at best, as material for stand-up comics and at worst as slightly disgusting. But based on a growing number of both popular books and research studies about late-life romance, people are increasingly accepting of the fact that love and sexuality are not just for the young and wrinkle-free. (If you are a typical student, you may still have some trouble imagining your parents "doing it"; now try to picture your grandmother, and you are likely to find yourself bumping up against your own ageist stereotypes!) Romantic, sexual impulses and desires last to the end of life, and the need for tender touch, intimate words, and sensuous caresses remains to the last breath.

The perversity of modern times is that we have talked openly about the possibility and desirability of romance and sex for so long that we have essentially sold the market-place on a product that is in short supply. It is not a question, really, about whether romantic intentions and sexual desire and ability continue into the later decades of life or even whether society is ready to accept the fact that older adults are interested in intimate relationships.

The real question for heterosexual older women is, who is there to be with sexually?



older adults, single men, especially the ones who can still drive (and maybe even dance), are hot commodities. My recently widowed 90year-old father-in-law is being pursued by three women, the oldest of whom is 105!

Not all older women are interested in romance. Many create a full and active life without a love partner and surround themselves with friends and family. Others live in lonely isolation. Some women end up dating older or younger men; some report having affairs with married men; and some who self identify as heterosexual, turn to other women for sexual and intimacy needs. At least one scholar has even suggested that women might resort to share-a-man arrangements. With the Baby Boomer generation rapidly approaching the cusp of age with its trademark tour de force, we can likely expect some interesting new twists of inventiveness in the next few decades when it comes to gero-romance.

Liz Bayler Levaro is a doctoral student in the department of Human Development and Family Sciences with an emphasis in gerontology.



Liz Bayler Levaro

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#### "Computer" ... continued from Pg. 3

Professor Sklar specialized in Educational Robotics. As part of her research I went out into the communities on Manhattan Island and taught kids how to program Lego robots. While teaching in New York, I began to notice the differences in how boys and girls reacted to technology and just how much small differences in teaching style could make or break their interest. When I returned to Oregon State, I began working with the department to help redesign the Computer Science program to make it more open to women. I mentored freshmen girls and held workshops. When the Engineering Department chose to form the Women and Minorities in Engineering Ambassadors, I was on the front lines.

With graduation looming in my near future, I felt I needed to get out and see the world while I still could, so I joined an exchange program to Denmark's Danish Technical University(DTU). While in Denmark, I experienced not only Danish society but made friends with other international students from around the world. Going abroad is an experience I would recommend to any and

all students. Your own country takes on a completely different view when seen from abroad.

Today, I am working to improve the experience of all future women entering the engineering majors at Oregon State University. I am working directly with the Women and Minorities in Engineering director to design new curriculum for entry-level classes that will make classes more welcoming for all students.

Of course, the last part of this story is common to all those who face graduation. The infamous question, "Oh drat, what now?" looms in front of us all. Thankfully, all that hard work for the last several years has paid off, and I am flooded with an excess of options as opposed to too few. Just a short while ago, I was accepted into the PhD program at Carnegie Mellon University and plan on following up on my education there.

Winning the Anita Borg Scholarship meant a great deal to me. However, I would like to think that the money was the least I gained from the experience. I gained more self-confidence and respect for myself and my fellow female engineers in one weekend at Google than I have in my entire college career. There are some amazing women out there, and I feel privileged and honored to be counted among them. I came back from my experience at Google with a renewed enthusiasm for Computer Science and a desire to share that enthusiasm with those around me. There are so many great things out there that need doing and only one of me but I now feel like I can make a difference if only a small one. Every young man or woman who wants to be an engineer should have an equal chance, regardless of his or her background or prior experience. I plan on doing my best to see that that happens.

## "Courageous" ... continued from Pg. 4

Words perhaps have the most impact out loud. Information conveyed through speech is immediate and accessible. The Vagina Monologues accomplishes its agenda effectively by directly addressing its audience. The monologues also benefit from its use of a social setting. While one can easily close a book that makes them uncomfortable, it is more difficult to sneak from a crowded theater. The Vagina Monologues draws a large audience of women, creating an understanding and supportive environment. Rather than delivering the message through impassioned speech or lecture, The Vagina Monologues uses humor to appeal

to its audience. The comic delivery of *The Vagina Monologues* draws in viewers that would otherwise be reluctant to engage in such a personal and emotional subject. The laughter makes the experience joyous and positive. And laughter is the best medicine.

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### "Yeas" ... continued from pg. 2

Yea to all the wonderful women who were honored in this year's "Women of Achievement" awards, including the Women's Center staff member Mehra Shirazi.

<u>Nay</u> to "The Liberty" for accusing the Women's Center of spending student fees on pro-abortion rallies and activities. Our budget is public information, they should do some research before they make accusations.

<u>Yea</u> to Printing and Mailing for switching over to partially recycled paper for all their print jobs.

<u>Nay</u> to under-funding graduate assistantship positions in female dominated colleges.

Yea to Tayyibah Taylor and the Guerrilla Girls On Tour for traveling to Oregon to be a part of the Conference on Gender and Culture.

Nay to unequal pay for women even now, 42 years after the "Equal Pay Act" was put in place.

Yea to the IFC and Panhellenic for supporting Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Take Back the Night.

Nay to #7 on Christy Willliams list of things to hate published in the Barometer. When are the women of the world going to realize that feminists are their friends? There is no dress code that marks someone as a feminist, this would be remarkably

clear if Christy visited the Women's Center and saw the diverse group of women and men who proudly call themselves feminists.

Yea to the CCCC for organizing an entire week to celebrate Cesar Chavez and everything he did for laborers and Latinos

Nay to the Undergraduate Student Senate for a near majority opposition of the Queer Affairs Task Force and Women's Affairs Task Force positions in ASOSU. How many more times can they make it clear that they don't believe in diversity?

# Take a look at what the OSU Women's Center has been doing ...



The Women of Achievement of 2005, Michelle Bothwell; Joanne Apter; Nancy O'Mara; our own WC staff member, Mehra,Shirazi; and



Mehra's daughter, Maysa, during her own Tsunami bake sale



OSU's Sexual Assault & Violence Educator, Jenny Mei, marching during Take Back the Night