

Voices

University of Connecticut Women's Center - 35th Anniversary

From the Director

Kathleen Holgerson

As we noted in the September/October 2007 issue of *Voices*, the plans are progressing for our 35th anniversary celebration. Our hope is to create an opportunity to bring those who were instrumental in creating our past, together with those who are working to build our future. Of course, that means there will be a chance for folks to share their memories of the role of the Women's Center in their lives, as well as a chance for us to break bread, socialize, and dance.

It has been so exciting to hear from alumni/ae who are responding to our annual appeal; who have joined our Facebook group; or who are getting back in touch after hearing about the plans for the anniversary celebration. We are appreciative of everyone's generosity. It has also been wonderful to find out where folks are and what paths their lives have taken. If we haven't heard from you, please send us an email. On a more personal note, this has been a reminder of exactly how long I've been at the Women's Center and how much I (continued on page 4)

The Clothesline Project: *It Does Happen Here*

Lindsay Blair

It's about making a difference at UConn, and October was a month of focus for the Violence Against Women Prevention Program. VAWPP is helping to break the silence on our campus and speaking out to end the violence against women. The week of October 1st -5th, the Clothesline Project was on display on (continued on page 2)



Love Your Body Day Meets Courtney Martin - Tess Bird

I meet Courtney Martin in the Women's Center entry way. She's a rather young looking women, approachable, with a little smile. There's a lot I'd love to ask her about, a never-ending slew of questions about her book, the writing process, publishing, what it's like to speak in front of students at universities across the country, having been a part of that world not too long ago... I only get a quarter of that in, and as it turns out, Martin had questions of her own about eating disorders on campus, the Women's Center, and SHAPE (Students Helping to Achieve Positive Esteem), a co-sponsor of the event.

Martin came to UConn to speak on her recent book: *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: the Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body*, a project, she says, that really began from her own frustration with the young women around her and the constant self-struggle to keep apart from the eating disorders that haunt young women today. (continued on page 5)

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It Does Happen Here

(continued from page 1)

Fairfield Way, drawing the attention of students, staff, and faculty as the start of events for Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

What is the Clothesline Project? The Clothesline Project is a traveling visual display of t-shirts that bears witness to the epidemic of sexual and domestic violence against women that faces our communities. Each shirt hung on the clothesline represents someone who has survived or has been affected by domestic or sexual violence.



The Clothesline is a dynamic display that keeps growing because it encourages people to come "hang their story" at every new showing. Specifically at UConn, people were encouraged to share their support by leaving messages on a support board or by making a t-shirt reflecting either personal survivor experiences, secondary survivor reflections, or their beliefs for supporting the cause that can be added to the line. In previous years, over 50 t-shirts have been made by UConn students, which the Women's Center has collected to create their own clothesline. This year, The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence provided t-shirts from around the state to support the effort, but these additional shirts were not the primary focus for the clothesline and few were being used at all by the end of the week.

Are these real? YES! This question was asked by a number of people passing by the display over the course of the week and the phenomenon was even reported in the *Daily Campus*. Staff writer Madeline Ward described how she witnessed a first-year-male student ask if he could buy one of the t-shirts. The student specifically wanted the t-shirt that said "no means no". It was shortly thereafter when one



of our volunteers informed the student that survivors and supporters had made the shirts, and yes, they are real. The student was surprised and stated, "I didn't know this happened here." For me personally, this example is why these types of events are so important to our campus community. The events are an

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opportunity for survivors and secondary survivors to speak out and be heard. And they are also for the campus community to realize that "it does happen here."

In addition to showing their support, the project had over 20 student volunteers working with the VAWPP and some volunteers from Women's Studies courses who helped make the program happen. This is UConn's chance to share their support and break the silence in our state, so thank you to all the volunteers for helping and all

those who participated for sharing your stories and support for others.

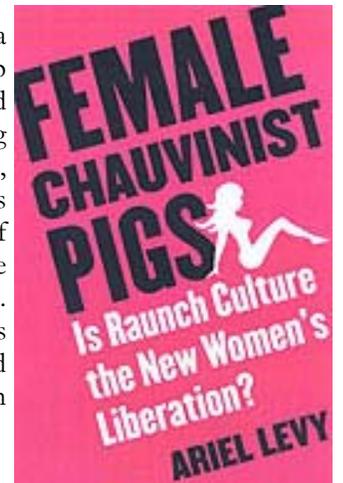
Lindsay Blair, interning with VAWPP, is a Graduate Student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs Program (HESA) and has a Graduate Assistantship in Residential Life.

Ariel Levy, Author of *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, To Speak in December

On December 4th Ariel Levy, author of *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, will be speaking in the Student Union Theatre at 7 pm.

"With the fresh voice of a young woman who grew up taking equal rights for granted while feminism was being perverted into a dirty word, Levy both shocks and sobers as she exposes the real cost of youth culture's 'Girls Gone Wild' form of status-seeking... A great choice for book clubs of either gender, it's a fast read and a surefire discussion sparker."

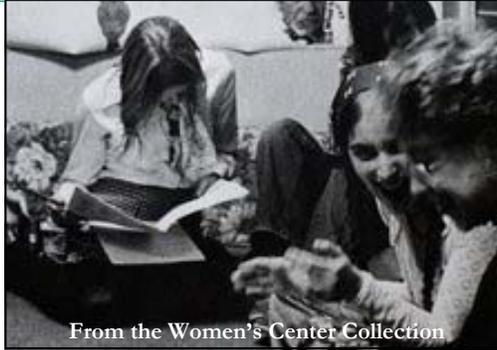
--*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*



Conversations Between Generations: *a narrative of connection*

Tess Bird – Newsletter Editor

I am accustomed to talking to women in their fifties. During a monthly *sauna* (pronounced “*saon-na*”) prepared in the home of a Finnish friend, my mother’s friends, a collection of women she has known since her youth, meet to cleanse; sweat; talk about marriage, children, art, growing older; and reminisce about their youth. They sit naked on these Saturday nights, face-cloths on their heads to protect



From the Women's Center Collection

their hair and damp sponges at hand in buckets of cold water to cool off their bodies. They leave the Sauna occasionally to take a break in the night air around the bonfire. Sometimes it is snowing and the stars are out, and the Sauna women stretch and dance and hoot. Their connection is beautiful to me despite quarrels, anxiety over life changes, and the tensions that sometimes arise. For them, Sauna represents a sense of belonging, of community and sisterhood. For me, these monthly meetings are my closest connection to women and to my self. It is in the dark wooden room of the old Sauna, right before a scoop of water is poured on the fire, that I am most aware of my experience as a feminist.

The conversations that pass between myself and this collection of “Aunties” are irreplaceable. Without them I would never know their personal stories of what it was like for them to be in their youth during the 1970s. I would not understand the pains and laughter of growing older. And I would not have the ability to look beyond my own bodily youth. I, in return, feed them stories of what the youth are saying these days. They listen eagerly, sometimes shocked and other times nodding because nothing’s changed. As a group of white, middle and working class women expressing their lives to a white student, I see that this connection is not universal. Attempting to always keep this in mind, I also know that this experience lead me to an understanding that has been woven into my work as a feminist student and writer: that conversations between generations, and across other boundaries, are vital for the transmission of the personal and collective herstories that shape women’s lives.

When I went to Scotland last spring to study abroad for six months I was left without this connection to an older generation. I sought it out through a class in oral history where I was required to conduct an interview. I chose to interview Matilda, a Scottish feminist who was active during the *second-wave* and who is

still active today. (The *second-wave* is a term used to refer to the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s.) Between my experience with Matilda and my connection to the Sauna women I began to question the process of *sisterhood*: what it meant for my mother’s generation, race, and class and what it can mean today.

Matilda answered the door barefoot and was rather quiet as I set up the microphone. I was alone and abroad in the dark months of the Scottish February, missing the connections I have at home to a large network of older women. We both proceeded through the first half of the interview with caution as I asked basic questions about her life as a feminist: When were you first aware of feminism? When did you first get involved with the movement? As we eased into the interview I suspected she saw in me an aspect of the future of the feminist movement. In her I saw a familiarity: a hint of the hippie-freedom that governs the stories of my mother and her friends. It wasn’t until I turned off the recorder after an hour of interviewing that our *conversation* began and I found myself sharing some of my deepest concerns with feminism.

What if sisterhood was defined as a
vehicle for conversation across boundaries,
to enhance our knowledge and understanding
of individual women’s experiences?

Like *sisterhood*. It was a theme that I addressed rather awkwardly in the interview, knowing that there is a disconnect between the second and *third-wave* definitions of sisterhood (the *third-wave* defined as women who grew up after the changes that the second-wave brought for women). As I told Matilda, I am concerned that my peers don’t really talk about feminism and they don’t really bond together over issues that concern women. I see this particularly with my white friends. Is this because feminism is so a part of

our mainstream beliefs that we don’t need a movement? After experiencing a night out at UConn I would beg to differ, with sexist language bombarding you from the mouths of both men and women. I expressed my concern that young, white, middle-class women today have no sense of *sisterhood*.

I was nervous to explore the idea of sisterhood because it *(continued on page 4)*



Image: www.femarch.freemove.co.uk

Generational Connections *(continued from page 3)*

is often critiqued as second-wave essentialism. I don't disagree. In many ways the 1970s definition of sisterhood assumed a common bond between all women and often overlooked women's individual experiences. Acknowledging individual experiences as valid is certainly important for the feminist movement – but I fear that in over-critiquing we have harmed the value of connections between women and developed a gigantic disconnect between second and third-wave feminists. Rejecting the idea of sisterhood altogether does not allow space for the kind of connection my mother's friends have at *sauna*, and it certainly does not allow for the connection that I, a generation apart, feel with them. Besides, not healing the disconnect between the waves leaves feminism in an awkward limbo.

In a moment of clarity, the kind that is enhanced by the pure, northern Scottish light where the sun is never directly overhead, I thought of my conversation with Matilda after the microphone was off. I thought of how we compared and contrasted the 1970s with today. We may have gained the right to an abortion and contraception (although we still have to defend it today) but sexuality, we both agreed, had taken a turn for the worst. Matilda also voiced her concern that young women today, in the UK and US, just don't care about feminism. There I was conversing comfortably between generations when I was graced with an understanding of the disconnect: the inability for the women of today to fully grasp the women of their mother's generation and vice versa. I thought, am I one of the few young women who can talk through the gaps of age with ease?

I proposed then, as I do now, that conversations between generations and across other boundaries can challenge traditional herstories of the women's movement as well as create new perspectives. Through friendship and connection we can rewrite stereotypes, falsities, and redefine things like sisterhood. What if, for example, sisterhood was not defined as “a common bond” but as a vehicle for conversation across boundaries, to enhance our knowledge and understanding of individual women's experiences? Then

sisterhood would not always be about commonality, but would acknowledge the reality of the disconnects between women and create a way to allow for a release of the tensions that haunt the feminist movement today. With this definition we can even step beyond boundaries of age and confront those of race, class, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and location, forming friendships that not only find connections, but allow us to fully experience our differences and allow for personal and political growth. It is a difficult and momentous process – and we may have to confront prejudices along the way.

During *sauna*, conversations are not always delightful and often highlight the tensions of the word *feminism*. Once, when the women were critiquing the Hollywood trend to carry your dog around in your purse I decided to be facetious and tell them that women in ancient Hawaii used to eat their pet dogs. My mother's friend yelled out: “Is that another one of those feminist comments?” revealing a tension I did not know was there. I burst out laughing.

“So feminist are not just ‘baby killers’ but ‘dog eaters’ as well?” I asked.

She apologized later. The tension was out. At other times the women are eager to hear what I have to say about my generation of feminists or what life is like for young women today. Occasionally they even ask for my advice. As the women who owns the *sauna* once said: “We need the freshness of youth.”

Despite my input, in the heat of the *Sauna* or afterwards around the table I often just listen, collecting their stories and learning from their mistakes and successes, knowing that when I am fifty I'll have these experiences to look forward to. After all, in my own experience, it is in this room that the truth sits. It forms around my mothers like molds, sculpting their shapes and their words forever into my own body and memory.

Tess Bird is a seventh-semester Women's Studies major with a concentration in creative writing and the Newsletter Editor for the Women's Center. If you would like to contact Tess regarding her narrative, please email her at tess.bird@uconn.edu.

Letter from the Director *(continued from page 1)*

have grown through my interactions with the many students who have passed through our Center.

As for the folks who are helping us build our future, on October 10th we sponsored our 2nd annual New Women Faculty Luncheon. Our Faculty Host Committee helped get the word out to the new faculty and provided “words of wisdom” to those in attendance on the day of the event. President Hogan also joined us and talked about the importance of networks in supporting the success of faculty, particularly women and people of color. Many of the women in attendance indicated how pleased they were to have the chance to interact with female faculty from across the disciplines.

(continued on next page)



Letter *(continued)*

Finally, I wanted to update you about the status of our priority initiatives, as mentioned in my previous letter.

Collaboration with the Vice President for Student Affairs for a comprehensive plan for addressing issues of violence against women - We met with the Student Affairs Management Team and engaged them in a discussion about policies and practices for working with survivors of violence against women and addressing sexist behavior. We have had at least one request for Sexual Harassment Prevention Education as a result.

Collaboration with Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Instruction to explore how gender impacts student engagement and student success - We are working with Vice Provost Veronica Makowsky to establish a working group to address the issues raised by previous pilot conversations and to review relevant data.

Collaboration with the Provost's Commission on the Status of Women to implement programs to support leadership development opportunities for women - We are working with Campus Women Lead (CWL), a program of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, to sponsor a two-day, on-campus workshop for the members of the Commission and other key stakeholders. The workshop will focus on building multi-cultural alliances and establishing a strategic plan for enhancing the climate relative to women's leadership on campus. In early October, I had the unique opportunity to "shadow" Provost Nicholls for a week, as a pilot for exploring more formalized programs to support the development of women leaders. We will be meeting with the members of the Commission's Leadership sub-committee to report on our experiences.

We are fortunate to have such committed allies in our work towards achieving gender equity – from the students who work at the Center everyday to the administrators who support our priority initiatives. As always, we'll keep you updated on the progress of our advocacy efforts in future newsletters.



Courtney Martin speaking in the Konover Auditorium

Courtney Martin *(continued from page 1)*

Standing at the podium in the Dodd Center, a photographer eager to catch a pose from the side-lines, Martin reads from her book, describing the *Perfect Girl* and the *Starving Daughter*, two elements of the Self that many of the women of this country struggle with today, eating disorder or not. "We are daughters of feminists," she reads from her book, "who said 'You can be anything' and we heard 'you have to be everything'" telling us that today, women are not pressured to be "good" but pressured to be "good at" *everything*.

Martin attended the Gallatin School at New York University, receiving an M.A. in writing and social change, previously having received her B.A. from Barnard College in Political Science and Sociology. "I interweave personal essay, sociological research, and journalism" she says of her book. She is not a scientist, she notes, but she is not unfamiliar to the culture of young women today who are full of body-hatred. Martin was able to conduct interviews with nearly 100 women that she then interlaced into her narrative, revealing a complex book of the real world of eating disorders, not just the textbook definitions.

Martin, who is only 27, remembers in the midst of her undergraduate education telling her mother a difficult truth: that without careful self-reflection, she might develop an eating disorder. "If I said it out loud I knew I'd be accountable," she says, making clear the importance of self-acknowledgement in prevention and even recovery. "The media otherizes eating disorders," she says, because women and girls can constantly say, *well I'm not as bad as her*. "The rest of us have settled for lives of quiet desperation."

Noting that dieting is a \$30 billion a year industry and doesn't work 95% of the time, Martin urges the audience to acknowledge the problem, both individually and in society. She urges people to surround themselves with supporting men and women who are not constantly aware of dieting. The most radical thing you can do, she says, is actually *commit* to loving your body.

The Dodd center is full of over 150 people. On my way out I overhear a young woman stop Courtney and say "thank you." I look back and there are tears in the young woman's eyes. She is touched, and I hope others are too. When I ask Victoria Flagg, a first-year student staff member at the Women's Center and a Women's Studies Major, what she thought of the presentation, she says with great enthusiasm: "I think it was extraordinarily interesting that she was able to voice something in our society that is overlooked."

We can only hope this enthusiasm spread to the rest of the audience that gathered to listen to Courtney Martin's wise words.

Feminist Groups on Campus

UConn NOW: *National Organization for Women*

The National Organization for Women is a political activism group concerned with women's rights.
Info: alison.berk@uconn.edu

VOX *Voices for Planned Parenthood*

Vox, the Latin word for *voice*, is a nationwide program to energize and mobilize the new generation of Pro-choice Americans.
Info: UconnVox@yahoo.com or tonya.reid@uconn.edu.

UConn Triota: *Where Every Woman's Step Counts*

Iota Iota Iota is a National Women's Studies Honors Society dedicated to promoting scholarship and excellence in Women's Studies. To join you need a 3.0 GPA or higher and 6 or more credits in Women's Studies.
Info: tess.bird@uconn.edu

UConn Support Staff Event

As a follow-up to suggestions made by support staff to network and participate in campus events,

A TRIP TO THE
WILLIAM BENTON MUSEUM OF ART IS

Coming Soon

We will view the current exhibition of *Rodin: A Magnificent Obsession and Rodin's Contemporaries*.

Please join us to enjoy the exhibit, coffee/tea and conversation. This event will take place in early December from noon to 1 pm.

Contact Carol Millette (carol.millette@uconn.edu) for more information.

Groups at the Women's Center

Between Women

A discussion group for women who love women... or think they might. Come and discuss fun topics, movies and more with women who share your feelings and experiences. Every Wednesday, 8 pm, at the Women's Center.

Graduate Women's Group

Are you a female graduate student? Join the Graduate Women's Group at the UConn Women's Center.
For more information contact Erin Sullivan at ees04003@gmail.com.

Stronger

A support and discussion group for UConn Women

"What is a healthy relationship?"
"How do I 'get strong' after an abusive relationship?"
"How do I heal from sexual assault or abuse?"

For more information and to register, contact Betsy Cracco at the Women's Center at 486-4738 or elizabeth.cracco@uconn.edu.

The South Asian Tree (TSAT)

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. Do you identify with one of the countries listed above either through self or family? If so, come join in on dialogues of balancing South Asian heritage with North American ideologies and the implications it has on day to day experiences including life at UConn. Facilitated by Bandana Purkayastha, Bidya Ranjeet, and Shanthi Rao. For more information contact Bidya Ranjeet at 6-4040.

University of Connecticut

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Tess Bird
Newsletter Editor

Women's Center Events

November 2007

For more information on events and co-sponsors, please visit the Women's Center website: www.womenscenter.uconn.edu



www.femarch.freeserve.co.uk

1st Legislative Advocacy Training - Thursday, 7 pm, Women's Center

Join Michelle Noehren and Jillian Spies from the PCSW Young Women's Leadership Program for a training that will walk young women through the CT legislative process.

2nd Transnational Women's Movement Colloquium

Friday, 2:30 – 5:00 pm, Women's Center

- Manisha Desai, Director of Women's Studies, University of Connecticut - *Introduction: Notes on A Transnational Perspective.*
 - Amanda Gouws, Professor of Political Science, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. - *Changing Opportunity Structures: The Women's Movement in South Africa.*
 - Zakia Salime, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Michigan State University - *The Subjects of Democracy: Women's Perspectives on War and Reform in The Middle East*
- Reception Following the Colloquium. More info: Kate Hurley, Women's Studies Program, 486-3970

6th One Year From Now... How will you make a difference in the 2008 election?

Tuesday, 7 pm, Women's Center

Join us this election night for a nonpartisan panel discussion with students speaking out about the issues that affect them and what that means in the upcoming Presidential Election.



6th & 7th Tunnel of Oppression - Tuesday from 1 – 6 pm & Wednesday from 10 am - 2 pm, Student Union 304

This program is a series of rooms designed to advance and disseminate knowledge about issues of oppression and encourage participants to reflect upon the questions raised by hatred and ignorance. Participants are led through rooms focusing on eight different issues: Disordered Eating, Racism, Homophobia/Transphobia, Depression/Suicide, Everyday Violence Against Women, Broken Systems, Substance Abuse, and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. Then individuals participate in our "Room of Hope" with a professional staff member. Pre-registration highly encouraged; contact Missy Korduner at missy.korduner@uconn.edu / 860-486-3832.

7th "By Invitation Only" Film viewing and discussion with Rebecca Snedeker, Producer/Director

Wednesday, 8 pm, Class of '47 Room in the Library

Inclusion in New Orleans' old line Carnival society remains "by invitation only." Questioning its racial exclusivity, filmmaker Rebecca Snedeker follows a young

woman's ascension to her throne as a Mardi Gras queen. As Hurricane Katrina laid the cultural and racial complexities of the Crescent City bare, this film offers a probing and highly personal view into one of its oldest and most controversial traditions.

More info: <http://www.byinvitationonlythefilm.com/>

13th Auditions for the 2007-2008 production of *The Vagina Monologues* - 7 to 10 pm, Women's Center. Times vary. Please see our November calendar on our website for more information. For all questions or inquiries, please contact us at: uconn_vday@yahoo.com.

14th Absolutely SAFE - Screening and discussion with Carol Ciancutti-Leyva - Wednesday, 7 pm, Konover Auditorium, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center

This film explores one of America's most popular surgical procedures. Through the lives of five women with breast implants, *ABSOLUTELY SAFE* explores the minds and bodies of girls and women facing one of the most controversial medical and cultural debates of our times. Although nearly 40 million women have had the surgery, there is no definitive evidence these implants are safe.

15th International Film Series - *The Shape of Water* Thursday, 4 - 7 pm, Women's Center

Hosted by Dr. Manisha Desai, Director of the Women's Studies Program and part of International Education Week, *The Shape of Water* is a feature documentary that tells the stories of powerful, imaginative and visionary women confronting the destructive development of the Third World with new cultures and a passion for change. *The Shape of Water* offers fresh and nuanced insights into the lives of women in the Third World. For more information contact: 860-486-6854 or visit www.oia.uconn.edu/intlweek.html

29th Thursday Night at the Movies - *God Sleeps In Rwanda* - Thursday, 7 pm, Women's Center

Uncovering amazing stories of hope in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, Academy Award-Nominee *God Sleeps In Rwanda* captures the spirit of five courageous women as they rebuild their lives, redefine women's roles in Rwandan society and bring hope to a wounded nation. Working with two cameras and no crew except for their translator - a genocide survivor herself - the filmmakers uncover incredible stories.

Women's Center Pledge Form



The University of Connecticut
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2390 Alumni Drive Unit 3206
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City _____ State _____ Zip _____

PLEASE COMPLETE ALL INFORMATION THAT APPLIES TO YOUR GIFT

I / WE CHOOSE TO DESIGNATE OUR GIFT TO:

- Women's Center (#20447)
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This gift is in memory/honor of: _____

I wish for my/our gift to remain anonymous.

PLEASE HELP US UPDATE OUR RECORDS:

Are you a UConn alumnus/a? YES NO

Is your spouse/partner a UConn alumnus/a? YES NO

Class year: _____

Class year: _____

School/College: _____

School/College: _____

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Send me information about Planned Giving opportunities. I will consider including UConn in my will or trust.

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