

SARAH • LAWRENCE • COLLEGE

WOMEN'S HISTORY

NEWSLETTER

Letter from the Co-Director, Rona Holub

My first year as co-director has been an exciting one. I would like to acknowledge those who have generously helped me get through it relatively unscathed. As a graduate of the program and former guest faculty member, I had some knowledge of how things work around here, but this year has expanded my understanding of the inner workings of this program and enhanced my respect for those who have built and run it, especially Co-Director Priscilla Murolo. Over the past 12 years, Priscilla has implemented innovative changes, such as the addition of a joint program with Pace Law School. Always keeping what is best for the program and its students in mind, Priscilla has made administrative and academic changes that increased the quality and prestige of the program. As Priscilla moves toward divesting more of the program's administration to me, I know I have big shoes to fill and continue to appreciate her wisdom and knowledge in many areas.

Of course, the day-to-day operation of the Women's History Program could not succeed as well as it does without the competence, unflinching perseverance, and seemingly infinite knowledge of Associate Director Tara James. I could not have gotten

through the year without her help. Also, I wish to acknowledge the patience and generosity of spirit of Dean Susan Guma and the entire staff in the Office of Graduate Studies. I look forward to our continued association as we enter a new academic



year. And last, but certainly not least, to the teachers who worked with our students in classes and as thesis advisers, all of us thank you profusely for all that you do.

As usual, we hosted some excellent lectures that included diverse topics such as Thomas Jefferson and black thought, women in the electrical industry, and the experiences of one activist woman in the 1960s, among others. And, dynamic as ever, the annual Women's History Conference, once again miraculously and flawlessly put together by Tara James (we have not quite figured out how she does this year after year) successfully tackled the issue of body politics, a field of growing interest and activism that impacts all of our lives.

Our graduating class worked tirelessly (I know, I worked with a lot of them) to create a wide range of relevant theses. Topics

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Scholarship Awarded to Katrina Brown '12

Congratulations to Katrina Brown, winner of the 2011 Gerda Lerner Prize in Women's History

Why were you interested in women's history?

I am drawn to the discipline of history because storytelling lies at its heart, and women's stories have been sidelined for far too much of this world's history. I find the work of women's historians incredibly inspiring, with scholars giving voice to neglected and often forgotten narratives. Women's history gives me the chance to learn how to be an effective and smart storyteller, and (as an academic discipline) it pushes me to conceptualize different ways to fill in the gaps between the histories that have already been written.

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Photo: Dana Maxson

Alumni Update

Patria Alvelo '09 is working on her PsyD at the Widener University Institute of Graduate Clinical Psychology in Pennsylvania. Her practicum placements include Friends Hospital, Widener Counseling Center, and the Women's Therapy Center. Patria was awarded the Founders and Faculty Scholarship.

Diana Jiminez Barrantes '09 works as the operations associate for Homes for the Homeless, a nonprofit organization that provides educational training services to homeless families.

Christina Burton '10 is a sexual assault crisis volunteer at the Community Services Program.

Ashley Chaifetz '05 will move to Chapel Hill this fall to pursue a PhD in Public Policy at the University of North Carolina. She will focus on food and agricultural policy.

Anne Louise Cranwell '10 is head coach for middle school soccer and the assistant coach for varsity basketball at the Columbus School for Girls in Columbus, Ohio. Anne Louise is also an associate producer at ParkerLane Productions.

Lauren Creight Clark's '09 thesis, "No Man's Yoke on My Shoulders: The Politics of Death in the Plantation South," was chosen as a notable dissertation by *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*.

Alexis Taines Coe '09 curated the New York Public Library's current exhibition, "Celebrating 100 Years," at the library's landmark building on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. The exhibition is open until December 2011 and is free to the public.

Elizabeth DeBoer '95 recently became a parent to two children, Josh, 17, and Walter, 1. Currently living in Ithaca, New York, Lisa is a book indexer who works with publishers and authors on scholarly, trade, and text books.

Yie Foong '10 began work on her master's degree in social work at CUNY's Hunter College this spring while interning at New York's Civil Court. She also works on the wardrobe crew of the hit Broadway play *Mamma Mia*.

Tara Elise James '00 adopted beautiful baby Jeremiah in June.

Christine Frieman Krieger '10 married Daniel Krieger in June 2010. She is a program coordinator for student engagement at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland.

Hana Kabashi '11 is a grants assistant administrator at the New York Institute of Technology. She continues her research on feminist and LGBT history of Eastern Europe.

Ryoko Kurihara '85 is a professor at Tokai University School of Letters. In 2010, Ryoko co-authored *Gender History in the United States* (Aoki Publishing) and co-translated *Through Women's Eyes* (Akashi Publishing) in 2009. Her books are in Japanese and can be read online.

Elizabeth McCall '97 was recently hired to work on special projects at The Morgan Library and Museum; she also works at the Bard Graduate Center Library cataloging special collections. Just one class shy of earning her master's degree in library and information science from Pratt Institute, Elizabeth says, "I've found my niche, and I've never been happier!"

Desiree Monet '06 works for the US Census Bureau. She also volunteers at the Habitat for Humanity in Trenton, New Jersey. Desiree recently received her certificate in English as a Second Language and Basic Literacy, and she is currently tutoring as well.

Margot Note '04 is the director of archives and information management at the World Monuments Fund. Margot received her post-master's certificate in archives and records administration in 2010 from Drexel University. She authored *Managing Image Collections: A Practical Guide* (Chandos/Neal-Schuman, 2011), and presented at conferences in the UK and New York. Margot also joined the editorial board of *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*.

Valerie Park (now Russell) '01 received her MA in anthropology at the University of Idaho in 2009; she now works as an archaeologist with the Naval Facilities Engineering Command Pacific. Valerie is currently in the process of becoming a mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Honolulu.

Jessie Ramey '02 received her PhD in history from Carnegie Mellon University in 2009 and is an ACLS New Faculty Fellow in women's studies and history at the University of Pittsburgh. Jessie presented at the Berkshire Conference in June 2011, and her article, "I Dream of Them Almost Every Night: Working Class Fathers and Orphanages in Pittsburgh, 1878-1929," will appear in the *Journal of Family History* later this year. Further, Jessie's book, *Childcare in Black and White: Working Parents and the History of Orphanages* (University of Illinois Press) will be published in spring 2012.

Mariana Romano '96 teaches English at Evanston Township High School in Illinois. She will serve on a panel titled "Toward a More Hopeful Vision of Writing, Teaching, and Assessment" at the National Council of Teachers of English in November. Mariana is married and the mother of Leah, 4, and Anna, 2.

Natalie Rose '04 is an instructor and teaching assistant at Michigan State University where she is also pursuing her PhD in history.

Kate Schaab '08 completed her MA in English at Northern Illinois University in May. Kate begins her PhD in American Culture Studies at Bowling Green State University, while teaching ethnic studies, this fall.

Mrittika Shahita '10, a 2008-2010 Fulbright Scholar, presented in October at the 39th Annual Conference on South Asia arranged by the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She earned her MA in history from the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh, where she serves as a lecturer.

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Alumni Spotlight

Akiko Iwase '04: Japan's New Normal

Japan continues to dominate headlines. In July, Japan's women's soccer team won the World Cup. However, the disasters that ravaged the country in March 2011 remain prominent. To date, 22,000 people have been reported dead or missing as a result of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis that occurred on Japan's coast. Akiko shares her perspective.

The buildings, ground, trees, and people (including me) kept swaying for such a long time on March 11, 2011. Although I grew up in Japan, and thus experienced earthquakes quite often, I had never experienced anything like this. Everybody knew that it was not an ordinary earthquake; yet, nobody realized that it would cause such a disaster, not just taking so many lives, but also causing such a mess with nuclear power plants and radiation.

Initially there was a shortage of water, food, toilet paper, batteries, etc., but the immediate impact of the disaster was resolved quickly in the Tokyo area. We experienced numerous aftershocks for a few weeks, but both the frequency and strength of the tremors decreased as time passed. Things seem to have gone back



to “normal,” though I personally feel that nothing will ever be the same. We cannot live in the same manner as before March 11; for example, as a mother of two young children, I live with a constant fear of radiation. The notion of “normal” or the “normal life” has completely changed for people in Japan.

Lea Osborne '04: New York Public Library Archivist

Lea Osborne is head of archival processing in the Manuscripts and Archives Division at the New York Public Library (NYPL). She currently oversees 10 archivists who process collections belonging to the Manuscripts and Archives Division as well as the Library for Performing Arts. Lea is part of a team of senior staff members responsible for managing public and technical services. This position is unusual in that the processing of archival collections is accomplished at

one location: the Library Services Center located in Long Island City. Her goal is to attack and diminish the sizable backlog currently held by NYPL while training and inspiring younger archivists to grow within the profession.

Before working at NYPL, Lea was an archivist at the Rare Book and Manuscripts Library at Columbia University, a project archivist and intern supervisor at the Leo Baeck Institute, and an archivist at the Junior League. She earned a BM in vocal performance from Rutgers University, an MA from Sarah Lawrence, and an MS in information science from Long Island University. While working at Columbia, Lea was a member of the Web 2.0 Committee and the Widgets and Tools Working Group. She was chair of the Columbia Consortium of Library and Information Professionals, a group of more than 200 professional librarians, archivists, and other information scientists, 2009-2011. Additionally, Lea is a member of the Society of American Archivists, including membership in the Roundtable for Archivists of Color; she also serves on the outreach committee and is a member of the Mentorship Program for Archivists Roundtable of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

2011 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women

María Vallejo-Nguyễn, a member of the Sarah Lawrence community and a conference participant, shares some of her observations on the conference, which took place June 9–12 at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The focus of this year's conference was “GENERATIONS: Exploring Race, Sexuality, and Labor across Time and Space.”

Despite the cold and rainy weather, the conference provided significant opportunities to meet scholars in areas of interest. One of the key themes of the conference was the importance of saving oral histories, including our own, and making the information available to the public.

The conference started with a tribute to Vicki Ruiz (University of California, Irvine) who has done much to advance Latina studies, including making information public and improving the database of oral histories. Another opportunity to discover

hidden resources and issues to overcome came from the panel on “Where Is Africa in Gender Studies?” This panel served as a reminder that historians cannot be complacent, as misrepresentation or missing representation is still an issue. Most panels included an element of international and/or transnational history. Additionally, a new group appears to be emerging among historians: feminist historian economists, with a panel featured at the conference. The next conference takes place at the University of Toronto in 2014.



**Nydia Swaby '11 and Kate Wadkins '11
at the 2011 Berkshire Conference**

Thesis Excerpt by Quin Aaron Shakra

The act of definition—especially self-definition—is thus paramount to the work of social movements. To transform social relations, it becomes necessary to define them in a way that accurately reflects the positions and desires of the ground for which the transformation is to occur. The act of definition, then, requires the creation of a group itself—in other words, the creation of a new and meaningful identity. —Catriona Sandilands

Breaking Points: Women, Sexuality, Pornography, and the Vicissitudes of Feminist Group-Making Projects, 1970-1986

On October 20, 1979, more than 5,000 feminists, college students, and activists marched through New York City's Times Square district, protesting 42nd Street's lascivious sex shops, peep shows, and X-rated movie theatres, all named through the umbrella term "pornography." Protesters held signs reading, "Porn hurts women" and "Pornography is a feminist issue." They chanted phrases such as "Clean it up, shut it down, make New York a safer town" and "Two, four, six, eight, pornography is woman-hate." Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, and Susan Brownmiller, all prominent feminists who had been active from early on in the women's movement, fronted the march, holding a banner that succinctly summarized their anti-porn stance: "Women Against Pornography. Stop Violence Against Women." The three were also founding members of the New York City-based group Women Against Pornography (WAP), which was involved in organizing the protest. WAP had made the Times Square area its ground zero of organizing, leading weekly tours of the area and strategically locating its office on nearby Ninth Avenue.

The protest featured many tropes common to popular activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the size of the rally, its visibility, and ostensibly unified agenda. On the ground, feminists explained their oppositions to porn as women. For instance, one protestor claimed, "Pornography merchants have lied about all of us, libeled and defamed all of us and given us cause to fight them together." The categorical invocation of "us" and "all" by the protestor implied that women shared similar viewpoints concerning the role that predominately male-created, sexually explicit representation played in women's overall oppression in society. This assumption was a central feature of anti-pornography intellectual discourse from the mid-1970s and onward. These writings consistently claimed that all women, regardless of social location, were oppressed by the existence of pornography.

The protestor's utterance of "us" and "all," referring to "all women," are examples of what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls a "performative discourse." For Bourdieu, an especially potent moment of social struggle is the "public act of naming" that occurs during demonstrations; for example,

"Pornography merchants have ... given us cause to fight them together," for this is when "the practical group—virtual, ignored, denied, or repressed—makes itself visible and manifest, for other groups and for itself, and attests to its existence as a group that is known and recognized."

Pornography is a feminist issue ...

Those involved in social struggle seek to impose "a new vision and a new division on the social world" that establishes "meaning and a consensus about meaning, and in particular about the identity and the unity of the group." The Times Square protest was precisely this form of group-making project: "women" constituting themselves as a group entity with shared interests against "pornography," the genre.

Bourdieu reminds us that the "effectiveness of ... performative discourse ... is

directly proportional to the authority of the person doing the asserting." Earlier in the year, WAP had begun to receive significant notice in the mainstream media, notably *The New York Times* and *TIME* Magazine. The latter publication had covered burgeoning anti-pornography activism earlier in the summer, describing the Times Square area as part-and-parcel to women's "all-out war against pornography." The October 1979 protest marked the group's largest and most highly visible anti-pornography organizing to date. Steinem, Abzug, and Brownmiller's literal fronting of the march with a banner was not only indicative of the ideological sway they held over the group of protestors, it is also a reminder that groups are created by the individuals who impose the "common principles of vision and division" upon them, principles that ultimately provide "a unique vision of [the group's] identity and an identical vision of its unity." The banner's abridged message became the unaltered anti-pornography feminist orthodoxy over the next decade.

However, cracks in the veneer of feminist unity were also evident during the event. For instance, the *Times* quoted a female anti-pornography protestor who said, "There are a lot of feminist issues I would not agree with—I am against abortion, for example—but this anti-pornography move I fully support." Another group of protestors representing an organization called the Morality Action Committee attempted to join the march, bearing signs that read, "Protect our children." While the group denied affiliation with anti-homosexual crusader Anita Bryant (with whom the phrase had been associated), anti-pornography feminism's ideological overlap with other conservative anti-pornography campaigns made such confrontations inevitable. For example, another protestor showed up at the protest holding an anti-abortion, anti-homosexual poster.

The feminists' Times Square struggle was also enmeshed in a politics of real estate being pushed forth by the New York City government. WAP's office was leased free of charge from the 42nd Street Redevelopment Corporation, a nonprofit that received funds from the Ford Foundation and sought urban renewal in the district. A *New York Times* article revealed that the office had previously been "a soul food restaurant and gathering place for transvestites and prostitutes." The piece also quoted Carl Weisbrod, a lawyer for the city's Midtown Enforcement Project: "Our means and ends may not be exactly the same ... [but] obviously, the issue of pornography is a matter of concern to both the city and the feminists ... [and] the city needed all the help it could get on this score." Despite this, feminists' role in "cleaning up" the area may have been more symbolic than actual; a newspaper article published a month after the October protest revealed a long-term decline in sex-related businesses over a five-year period, well before WAP had arrived there.

Group-Making Projects and Categories for Doing

This thesis interprets anti-pornography feminism and the ensuing conflicts over sexuality and pornography as the central elements of feminist group-making projects during the 1970s and 1980s. Feminists of the era projected specific ideologies onto the "woman" category, because they understood it was the key to broad scale social and political change. Yet as feminists took up this category for their group-making projects, they reached radically contradictory conclusions that culminated in significant antipathy between the sex radical and anti-pornography feminist camps. I argue this fundamentally impacted the feminist movement's notion of the female activist subject. I illustrate this argument with a wide range of source material, including newspaper articles, conference proceedings, feminist grassroots periodicals, academic journals, and visual imagery of the era, adopting an interdisciplinary analytical approach to interpret new meanings in these cultural texts.

The work of sociologist Rogers Brubaker is attendant to how scholars in both the social sciences and humanities use the term "group." He demonstrates how both scholars and activists construe groups as

"discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogenous ... unitary collective actors with common purposes ... substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed," a set of assumptions Brubaker calls "groupism." This critique gestures toward new directions for scholarship that account "for the ways in which—and conditions under which—this practice of reification and powerful crystallization of group feeling, can work." By focusing on the "relational, processural, dynamic, eventful ... variable and contingent" of group-making activities, historians and sociologists can avoid ossifying what is in flux.

Brubaker understands group-making as a "social, cultural, and political project, aimed at transforming categories into groups." Feminism's core category has long been women as subjects and political agents; yet, because there will always be more women

The asymmetry between feminists' reliance upon categories and the diverse interests of actual women revealed deeply contradictory activist agendas.

than feminists (and more than women are feminists), this category has been unable to represent the needs and interests of all those it purports to. Brubaker suggests we can demonstrate this asymmetry between groups and categories by focusing on "how people—and organizations—do things with categories," especially the ones (such as women and sex) that have been so historically conditioned on levels of both structure and agency.

Fractures in feminism appear when the "woman" category is exposed as partial rather than universally representational, and this is precisely what occurred during the sex and pornography debates. The asymmetry between feminists' reliance upon categories and the diverse interests of actual women revealed deeply contradictory activist agendas. Their highly polarized views about meaning and moral significance of sex and pornography remained cloaked in considerably generic and interchangeable terms such as feminism, women, and men.

■
To read this excerpt with citations, go to <http://goo.gl/ZGGr2>

Lerner Scholarship *from page 1*

Why did you choose this program in particular?

I knew about SLC from the movie *Ten Things I Hate About You*, and when I was looking at graduate schools, I found myself imagining what it would be like to attend. I harbored a desire to foreground feminist and queer theory and to tell queer stories in my work more than I had before, and knew Sarah Lawrence would give me that chance. The thought of spending a few years tucked away on a small campus focusing on gender and sexuality while gaining confidence in my writing sounded like heaven to me.

What do you hope to write your thesis about?

I have too many hopes for this, I think. I still have a year of course work before I begin my thesis, so all my thoughts are still extremely dreamy and hardly cogent! I have spent much of my academic life studying China, Chinese, Chinese texts about women, and lesbians in China. I really hope my thesis will be an exercise in piecing together what I love most: China and queerness! I honestly don't have a clue what that will look like, but I trust this next year will provide me with some concrete project ideas

What do you hope to do with your degree? Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?

I have a hunch I'll still be in school in five years, as my current plan is to pursue a PhD after my time at Sarah Lawrence. My ultimate hope is to be in a position where I am giving my primary energy, intellect, and focus to educating and raising awareness about a multitude of issues and ideas about culture (particularly the relationship between the United States and China), history, queerness, and feminism. I can't imagine a more fulfilling life for myself than that of an academic activist.

RE/VISIONIST

The following article was written by Kate Angell, a reference librarian at the College. Kate dedicated this paper to the memory of her wonderful grandma, Evie Angell, who participated in the pilot study. Kate notes: "The paper is a synopsis of my college thesis, written over a seven-month period from 2005 to 2006. Some of the material from this study has the potential to be outdated. My immediate rationalization was to update the study. However, I decided against this option, and chose to submit it as a historical document reflecting inhabitants of a very specific temporal and social location—New England senior women of the mid-2000s."

Self-Perceptions of Older Women in the Age of the Waif

by Kate Angell

Over the past couple of decades, numerous psychological studies have been conducted to examine whether the exposure of girls and young women to images of thin, glamorized women in popular media, such as *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines, results in disordered eating and/or poor self-regard. Some researchers maintain that this particular relationship does not lead young women to internalize these socially imposed norms. However, other studies have concluded the opposite, positing that exposure to such photographs can cause an increase in body dissatisfaction, depression, and low self-esteem.

The majority of these studies, however, have focused on girls and young women. Senior females (65+) are rarely found in such literature, despite the fact that they inhabit the same youth-and-beauty obsessed society as younger women. This is not entirely surprising, as seniors are often placed on the fringes of society and suffer from a number of socially constructed stereotypes, including the depiction of old age as "a period beset with psychological, social, financial, and physical problems." Seniors are "frequently characterized as isolated, withdrawn, lacking energy and initiative ..." In the context of this particular paper, a few researchers found that although many women retain some level of body image dissatisfaction across their lifetimes, their manner of dealing with appearance-related anxiety becomes healthier as they age. They are less likely to engage in negative thoughts and behaviors, such as self-objectification, habitual body monitoring, appearance anxiety, and disordered eating symptoms.

Another study, however, suggests that the internalization of cultural beauty norms is hard to avoid, no matter a women's age. Hurd (2000) interviewed 22 senior women and discovered that 15 used derogatory terms such as "ugly" and "awful" to describe the bodies of seniors. These same participants also vocalized that the greatest body-related challenge aging people face is loss of health. One 72-year-old participant in Hurd's study sums it up nicely, stating, "Keeping well is the thing you worry about when you're 70. Not so much how it looks as how well it is functioning."

In 2005, this senior thesis project commenced in order to investigate whether, like their younger peers, older women's psychological well-being is significantly altered by current portrayals of the female body in popular media. Twenty-four women ages 60+ were recruited, with a mean age of 80. Thirty-minute appointments were arranged for women who signed up to participate in the study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three

experimental conditions: advertisements featuring spry, attractive senior women; advertisements from *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines featuring young models; and advertisements for cars and cleaning products. Each participant was then given the inventories of depression, self-esteem, body-esteem, and body image.

Statistical analyses were conducted to determine whether self-esteem, body esteem, and depression levels would be negatively affected in older women if shown photographs of either the young or senior models. Because the majority of previous research done with younger women on the same topic suggests that such advertisements do have a pejorative influence, it was hypothesized that the present study would yield similar results. However, the statistical analyses revealed insufficient evidence to support this hypothesis, as there was no positive relationship between viewing photographs of either group of women and increases in depression, decreases in body esteem, and decreases in self-esteem.

This study suggests that as women age, they are less likely to allow media representations of the female body to negatively affect their physical and mental health. Several possible explanations can be extrapolated from the results of this study. To begin with, senior women have the wisdom of age on their side. In other words, although older women may not be delighted with their bodies, their ways of negotiating discomfort are generally healthier. Older women have had ample time to live in and make peace with their

bodies, as well as develop greater awareness that cultural standards of beauty are unattainable for most women and unessential to their overall contentment. Illustrating this idea, one 75-year-old woman in this thesis study explained, "For my age [my body] is fine ... I'm 75; I'd have to work out for three hours a day to be in tone!" This participant is one of many to exemplify that at her age, physical attractiveness is eclipsed by physical ability. While younger women often have the luxury of taking their physical health for granted, seniors understand its precious value from first-hand experience, as functionality diminishes with age. Poignantly cementing this thought, one 87-year-old woman stated, "Physically I am not as strong as I was. It makes me feel very sad—my mind is willing to do things, but physically I can't. I want to go rake leaves, but I get so tired."

Despite this evident appreciation of physical health, over half of the participants nonetheless claimed that they either need to or would like to lose weight. However, further inquiry into this apparent desire to slim down revealed that although many participants wished to lose weight, when queried about exercise habits only one claimed she kept fit solely to enhance her appearance. Over two-thirds of the other participants reported that they exercised for various combinations of health, appearance, and doctor-ordered reasons. From this data it can again be inferred that

cosmetic concerns are greatly superseded by remaining healthy and active in senior populations.

When queried about their feelings regarding the treatment of women's bodies by the media, almost all of the participants agreed that there is now an obsession with thinness that was not present during their young adulthood.

In terms of socially imposed body norms, 75-80 percent of participants reported that the opinions of friends/family or the media do not factor greatly into their physical appearance and eating habits. This is validated by the fact that only one person out of the 24 participants claimed that watching television or reading magazines made her feel badly about her body. When queried about their feelings regarding the treatment of women's bodies by the media, almost all of the participants agreed that there is now an obsession with thinness that was not present during their young adulthood. Twenty-two people agreed that the "ideal" female body shape has changed over the years. Most remarked that women

of the 1930s and 1940s desired a curvy "Coca-Cola" body shape. One 70-year-old participant recalled, "We wanted more of an average body ... not extreme in any sense. I don't remember as heavy an emphasis on being thin. ... Anorexia wasn't really known about."

Although this study suggests that older women are generally less affected by the portrayal of the ideal female body in the media, there are a number of limiting factors, including time constraints and budgetary concerns, which could have influenced the results. The small number of study participants contained only two women of color and was not large enough (24 in total) to explore in depth other factors such as class and sexual orientation. Despite these limitations, it is not impossible to suggest that healthier methods of dealing with body dissatisfaction that come with life experience—and physical problems that downplay appearance anxieties—contribute to the conclusion that older women seem to be less affected by the media's portrayal of the female body. However, other parts of this study show that advanced age does not function as a complete protective factor against negative feeling in this regard. Although senior females may have the strength and wisdom of age, they are still residents in a patriarchal society where dominant media equate youth and thinness with beauty. ■

To read this article with citations, go to <http://goo.gl/x3J8q>. Re/Visionist is an online publication created by our graduate students in the Women's History Program. To read the blog, go to <http://revisionistslc.com/>

Faculty News

Mary Dillard delivered a Women's History Month lecture for nursing students at the Des Moines Area Community College in March. The lecture was titled "Stony the Road We Trod: A History of Black Women in Nursing."



Priscilla Murolo was elected to the national board of the Labor and Working Class History Association in March. Priscilla's article, "Wars of Civilization: The US Army Contemplates Wounded Knee, the Pullman Strike, and the Philippine Insurrection," will be published this fall in the journal *International Labor and Working-Class History*.

Women's History Lecture Series

Brigid O'Farrell

Tuesday, October 11, 2011, 6 p.m.

Heimbold 202

Author of *She Was One of Us: Eleanor Roosevelt and the American Worker*; *Rocking the Boat: Union Women's Voices, 1915-1975*; and *Beyond Gender: The New Politics of Work and Family*, co-authored with Betty Friedan. As an independent scholar, O'Farrell researches and writes on employment equity among women in non-traditional jobs.

Yvonne Thornton

Thursday, February 9, 2012 at 6:30 p.m.

Slonim Living Room

An outspoken women's health care advocate, Dr. Thornton was the first American woman to be accepted into the OB/GYN residency program at The Roosevelt Hospital in New York City and the first black woman in the United States to be board-certified in high-risk obstetrics. Thornton co-authored *The Ditchdigger's Daughters*.

Virginia Sánchez Korrol

Thursday, April 12, 2012 at 5:30 p.m.

Slonim Living Room

Author of *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*, co-author of *Women in Latin America and the Caribbean*, and co-editor of *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*. Korrol studies Latinas in America and New York Latinas in the Antillean independence movement.

For more information, visit our Web site:
www.slc.edu/womens-history

Alumni News from page 2

Shirley Stewart '10 presented her thesis, "The World of Stephanie St. Clair," at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History Convention. She also participated in a panel at the National Council for Black Studies Conference to discuss the negative impact of casino gambling in poor communities. Shirley tutors adults in basic literacy and contributes to a news blog.

Nydia Swaby '11 helped process the African Methodist Episcopal Church Collection at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. She also lectured on women in the Garvey movement to a summer school class at New York University. Nydia will present her thesis at the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora Conference this November.

Kate Wadkins '11 curated "Presents: Three Months of Mail Art for Hyperallergic HQ" in Williamsburg. She writes about the arts for *Hyperallergic*, a New York art blogazine. In August, she co-curated "BIG MOUTH: Feminist Voices in Art + Illustration," a group show. Kate also contributed to *Hoax* zine (Issue 5) on feminisms and community, and will present at "I Read It in a Fanzine" in September.

Jessie Wilkerson '06 is working with the Long Civil Rights Movement Initiative to create an oral history archive on the women's movement in the South. In April, Jessie presented at the Southern Labor Studies Association Conference, and in June she presented at the Berkshire Conference, where she won the Gender and History Graduate Student Paper Prize. Jessie has a forthcoming chapter in *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times* (University of Georgia Press) and in *Southern Cultures* (Fall 2011). Jessie is working on her PhD in history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Alumni news to share?

Contact Tara James:
tjames@sarahlawrence.edu

Congratulations to the Class of 2011!

Rosamund Hunter

The Source of Hip: Race, Politics, and Masculinity in Cold War America

Hana Kabashi

Women's Work: Experience, Progress, and Change in Kosovo, 1989-2001

Alexandria Linn

"Do You Want a Man or Not?": Sexuality, Deviance, and Proper Womanhood in Relationship Self-Help Books from 1980 to 2010

Alexandria Lust

Understanding the Depth of '90s Women: TLC's Political, Musical, and Artistic Complexities of Hip-Hop Feminist Thought, 1991-2002

Sheelagh Lynch

Easter Lilies: Hidden Heroes of the Irish Revolution

Lisa Merolle

"... And Do Righteous Deeds": Women, Islam, and Grassroots Organizing in the United States

Thea Michailides

Performing Panethnicity: South Asian Women's Community Leadership in Jackson Heights

Chandeen Santos

Rebels in Paradise: An Oral History of the Goa Expatriates

Steven Sharper

Radical Perspectives on Sex, Rape, and Race

Elsa Sjunneson-Norman

Legal Morality, Stripped Down: Obscenity Law, Burlesque, and Gender Conflict in America

Monica Stancu

Discovering Roma Women's Voices: Roma Women's Activist Movement in Post-Communist Romania



Elsa Sjunneson-Norman '11 addressed participants at the Women's History Conference in March 2011.

Nydia Swaby

"Woman Radical, Woman Intellectual, Woman Activist": The Political Life of Pan-African Feminist Amy Ashwood Garvey

Katherine Wadkins

"Freakin' Out": Remaking Masculinity through Punk Rock in the 1970s

Letter from the Co-Director from page 1

included: women, Islam, and grass roots organizing; hip-hop feminism; relationship self-help literature; the place of Roma women in Romania; Irish revolutionary women; "queer" reading of the musical *Rent*; Albanian women in Kosovo; and the expat community in Goa, to name just a few.

I have been impressed with the dedication and diversity of interests of the class that entered the program in the fall of 2010. They have worked hard and begun to hone interests that range from fashion to film to sugar (yes, sugar) and even Whoopi Goldberg (yes, Whoopi Goldberg).

Our incoming class comes from all over the country and includes people of all ages with a wide range of experiences. I look forward to an enriching year with all of them. I am also very excited to report that a new course on women and film will be taught this year by Kathryn Hearst, a Columbia University graduate who has worked in television and documentary development. We welcome Kate and our entering class, and look forward to another dynamic and productive year filled with intellectual challenges and excitement.

Women's History Conference Review

By Greta Minsky '12

"Puritanism: The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy."

Judge the state of a woman's character by examining the state of her body: that's an antique notion that still touches our lives. The equation used to be "virginity equals virtue"; in many cultures, chastity defined a woman's honor. Men have been known to reserve more active types of moral excellence, such as courage, for themselves. In our current industrialized world, the kind of body appraisal has changed, but the formula has persisted: a woman's honor is located in her body. There are good, that is, virtuous bodies, distinguished by thinness (which equates to discipline and self-denial) and there are bad, that is, sinful bodies, marked by fatness (which means laziness and greed).

At the 2011 SLC Women's History Conference, "Breaking Boundaries: Body Politics and the Dynamics of Difference," several speakers analyzed a division between good and bad bodies. The conference participants most often used neoliberalism as an explanatory framework. A look at the Puritan tradition in the United States, however, might offer an additional way to help us understand our culture's attitude toward women's bodies. While neoliberalism proposes that the responsible citizen disciplines her/himself as a duty to the state, a type of Puritanism suggests that the individual denies oneself pleasure in order to please God. Although Puritans may not have counted calories, they did identify virtue with self-denial. And an aura of the religious crusade does attach to the fervor of public health campaigns and medical establishment pronouncements about weight: we fight a holy war against fat.

The Puritan emphasis on a life of visible purity resonates with our quest for a visibly slender body as a testament to virtue. In her essay "Neoliberalism and the Constitution of Contemporary Bodies," Julie Guthman suggests another meaning for thinness; for neoliberalism, thinness is the visible sign of self-discipline as it relates to the duty to seek health. "The neoliberal critique of too much intervention returns improvement to the individual who is expected to ... become responsible for his or her risks. In that way neoliberalism also produces a hyper-vigilism about control and self-discipline. The pursuit of an often

unexamined social value of 'health' is, in that way, the sine qua non of neoliberal responsabilization. ... Thinness, albeit a poor proxy for health, is thus viewed as a reflection of self-control ... regardless of whether it is even consciously pursued." Guthman also notes that neoliberalism stigmatizes the visibly fat as a way to exert control over the "normal" population; making fat people into outcasts is a way for society to terrify the rest of the citizenry into trying to conform.

Moral posturing often accompanies the war on fat. Marilyn Wann, a fat acceptance

activist and the keynote conference speaker, led the audience at her presentation in a free association exercise to come up with a list of terms descriptive of fatness. Judgments such as "lazy," "greedy," and "out of control" dominated our offerings. Wann also suggested that fitness can make us feel good, but she added that exercising is not a duty; we don't owe it to anyone. Both neoliberalism and Puritanism would argue that we do owe that obligation, either to our state or our God.

Fat as a moral issue popped up throughout the conference. Heather Lang, in "Big (Fat) Burlesque Backlash: Burlesque Bodies as Rhetorical Agents of Social Change," mentioned the kinds of comments that her burlesque troupe's largest performers evoked in online responses to the group's Web site. While many responses were positive, Lang said that they also received lots of "fat as a moral failing" rants. Kathleen LeBesco, in "Fatness and the Self-Governing Citizen: Health, Morality, and Ideology," mentioned the concept of "healthism": the healthy is moral, the unhealthy is immoral. People are at fault if they do not meet the currently



Photos: Dana Maxson

fashionable standards for a healthy body. Jackie Wykes's critique of the television series *Huge* referred again to a neoliberal frame; Wykes stated that citizenship is premised on the proper functioning of the individual. Obesity is not a right, since it conflicts with the interests of the state, which is the guardian and arbiter of morality.

Maintaining a culturally-approved weight equals maintaining health, as a duty of citizenship, but there seems to be an additional factor involved. American exceptionalism and utopianism has long made extraordinary claims on its people. We aren't just asked to be good citizens because that is what a rational republic requires. We're called to help build a "virtuous republic," a New Jerusalem that needs our whole bodies and souls to succeed. Founding father Benjamin Rush said each citizen must become "public property [and] his time and talents—his youth—his manhood—his old age—nay more, life, all belong to his country." Do women's bodies, then, belong to their country and to its quest for a moral republic; does dieting demonstrate godliness, as well as civic virtue?

■
To read the full review with citations, go to <http://goo.gl/bRN55>

To watch a video of Marilyn Wann's keynote address, go to <http://goo.gl/zXyJW>



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Please e-mail a brief abstract and CV/resume by Monday, December 5, 2011 to: tjames@sarahlawrence.edu

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Women's History Program
1 Mead Way
Bronxville, NY 10708



WOMEN'S HISTORY NEWSLETTER

Directors

Rona Holub
Priscilla Murolo

Associate Director

Tara James

Editors

Shirley Stewart
Tara James

Contact Information

Sarah Lawrence College
Women's History Program
1 Mead Way
Bronxville, NY 10708
(914) 395-2405
E-mail: tjames@slc.edu

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