

# The Women's Center Newsletter

Gender News

Spring 2002

## Letter from the Director

### Safety and Location

by Laura Lockwood

Many students comment that the Women's Center is in an obscure location on campus, and should be in a more visible venue. I agree, but there is some merit to its present location. The largest advantage is the security and safety offered by the Women's Center being tucked away, at the end of Mather's second floor hallway. For students who desire counseling or consultation for sexual assault, eating issues, relationships or other concerns, and fear being seen walking into the Women's Center, the Center's present location offers anonymity. For female students who are afraid that walking into the Women's Center labels them a "femi-nazi" or "dyke", or for men, a "wuss", the Center's hiddenness solves that problem.

On the other hand, I feel more students would come to the Center if it was visibly located, like the game room's

location in the basement. So there's the dilemma. The short-term solution is to spread the word that the Women's Center is a friendly and welcoming space for ALL students, as well as a safe and secure space for students wishing privacy or quiet. For those who don't know, the Women's Center is comprised of two rooms: the office, where the director and a staff of four students work; and the lounge, which houses a wonderful library, magazines, archives and comfy couches for meetings or studying. We are located directly behind the Washington Room, next to Terrace Room C. To become involved in the Women's Center, to consult privately, or to hang out and have fun, just call Laura at x2408, or stop by!

### Woman of the Month

by Amara Westheimer & Daniella Bonanno

Senior Amanda Holden certainly has her hands full of theater. She first became involved in theater with a children's Shakespeare company playing Ariel in the "Tempest" at age eleven. Ten years later, Amanda continues to work with the same company (now as director) and shares her love of theater with children.

At Trinity Amanda recently directed the spring musical, "Working". She also balances an internship at the Hartford Stage while working on the written component of her senior thesis. On top of all that, Amanda is also the director of the all-female a capella group, the Trinitones.

As an intern at the Hartford Stage, Amanda gives us insight into the world of professional theater. In a world where directors are predominantly male Amanda has the

opportunity to work with a young (26 year old) director. However, she notes, "You're finding this more and more in theater, younger people in higher positions".

*"Theater allows people to break out of their shells. If they feel self-conscious, theater might be a good outlet."*

In regards to the Theater and Dance Department at Trinity, Amanda discusses the "sisterhood" atmosphere of performing arts at this small college. "It is more of a family atmosphere, and the theater department is less competitive". Unlike some departments at Trinity, the Theater Department is small. Those involved in performances tend to stick together and support each other.

Issues of representing femininity and body image are often encountered with performance and presentation. At Trinity this is a significant topic which, according to Amanda, manifests itself differently in the various performing groups. "Body image is not so much as an issue here especially with all the experimental theater at Trinity".

When discussing the Trinitones, however, it's hard to avoid the issue of image. As a group, they face persistent rumors that they favor appearance over vocal quality when selecting new members. Amanda attests to the

challenge of performing confidently in front of an often critical audience. It's insulting and frustrating when the comments generally refer to physical appearances rather than the vocal performance. "It's hard for girls to perform just as girls". She notes the difference between the carefree manner of the guys' groups and the self-conscious nervousness of female singers. Amanda also mentions that she loves the dynamics of the Trinitones, "all-female energy can be so supportive". The Trinitones are also coming out with a new cd that will be available at graduation.

Amanda has obviously touched many lives through theater. She is a strong force on Trinity's campus, and her commitment to the performing arts is inspirational. From her work with children to her own experience as an actress and a director, she advocates theater as a way to build self confidence. Amanda says, "Theater allows people to break out of their shells. If they feel self-conscious, theater might be a good outlet."

## Advertising

by Daniella Bonanno and Amara Westheimer

In the twisted world of advertising bodies are dismembered, packaged, and used to sell everything from pool tables to televisions.<sup>1</sup> Think this advertising doesn't influence you? Think again. Even if we don't want to admit it, advertising undermines human relationships, encourages the objectification of human bodies and facilitates an emotional attachment to products and commodities. Furthermore, advertising derives its power from the perception that we as intelligent consumers are immune to its influence. In general, people regard advertising as entertaining and trivial while often overlooking its potentially damaging subliminal messages. We laugh at the Superbowl ads - the singing bulldogs and Britney Spears endorsing Pepsi, but do we consider the psychological impacts of these seemingly harmless commercials? All advertisers want to sell their product whether it is a long-distance cellular plan, a microwave-able dinner, or alcohol and cigarettes. The success of advertisements lies in their appeal to human insecurity and to plain greed. We *need* that new pair of Nike sneakers not only to jump as high and run as fast as the

superhuman actor in the commercial but also to fill some kind of a void in our lives. Advertisements encourage us to scrutinize our bodies, to judge those around us, and to never feel satisfied with the status quo.

The average American is bombarded by 400-600 advertisements a day on TV, in magazines, and on billboards.<sup>1</sup> Which means short of living your life in a hole, ads are impossible to avoid on a day-to-day basis. Each year designers and advertisers raise the bar and test our tolerance as consumers.

Marketing products by infusing them with images of sex, rebellion, half-naked women, and unrealistically muscular men is so normalized that these representations are now expected if not culturally accepted. Today advertising objectifies both women and men.

However, women's bodies

have historically been the victims of the worst commodification, sexualization, and exploitation. For example, let's examine this advertisement for a Phillips Flat TV for its visual effect and for the underlying ideas about women

projected to consumers. The message for this advertisement reads, "Introducing a television so thin it will give regular TVs a complex". The thinness of these models is abnormally exaggerated, and they are dressed in rather tight, revealing clothing that amplifies the distorted appearance of their bodies. If the Phillips Flat TV is going to give "regular TVs a complex" what will these models give regular women? Will we fill a void and feel good about ourselves by buying this television and owning the newest home entertainment technology? Or will we suddenly become ultra-thin and sheik in the eyes of others? Probably not, but that's what the designers of this ad want us to believe.

1. Kilbourne, Jean. "Can't Buy My Love." Touchstone: New York, 1999. pp. 26-27
2. [www.about-face.org](http://www.about-face.org)



### Movie Review: *Fat Girl* by Amara Westheimer

*Fat Girl*, directed by Catherine Breillat contains explicit sex, but is hardly titillating.

Anaïs (Anaïs Reboux) is an overweight 13-year-old girl who may be on the verge of budding attractiveness - it's hard to tell just yet. Her whiny self-centeredness, combined with her constant and compulsive overeating and the fact that she's arrived squarely at an age that for many of us is just plain awful, manages to obscure many of her potentially good qualities. Although even at thirteen, she has some shockingly sophisticated (some would say cynical) ideas about sex. She has already decided that it's much better for a woman to lose her virginity to someone she doesn't care about, and it's clear she can't wait to have such a sexual adventure herself. But partly because of her age and partly because of her "unattractiveness," there are no such adventures on her horizon. However, her 15-year-old sister, Elena (Roxane Mesquida), is the beauty of



family. She's eager to fulfill her own fantasies of love and sex. She wants to fall in love with and seduce a man. Her ideals are more conventional than Anaïs's, -she dreams of snaring a man into marriage but hasn't thought much about what comes after that. She's acutely aware of her sexual power and ready to reap whatever benefits it allows her.

Elena and Anaïs are on holiday with their parents. Breillat subtly pits the girls against one another. Elena is constantly reminding Anaïs how fat and unattractive she is, and how unlikely it is she'll ever get a boyfriend. Anaïs calls Elena "slutty" and describes her behavior as immoral. The plot gains momentum when Elena meets an Italian law student (Libero de Rienzo) at a coffee bar and beds him in the room the sisters share -- she primes Anaïs for the event by bullying her and hissing that she had better go to sleep, or else.

*Fat Girl* is such a tangle because it isn't solely about a pretty girl's cruelty towards her heavier, homelier sister. The sisters, for all their squabbling, are friends. During one scene they lie together on a bed, their arms entwined, giggling over the sisterly insults they jab at each other. Indeed, the most beautiful, tender scenes in *Fat Girl* are these intimate, dialogues between the two

sisters. And for all Elena's shallowness, Breillat evokes sympathy for her, particularly in the way she gullibly accepts that all girls who love their boyfriends offer themselves up without hesitation.

Anaïs is the much more perplexing character. She's both more hateful and more likeable than Elena, and it's hard to define an opinion of her. Sometimes it's sympathy and other times it's the kind of frustration that makes you want to shake her by the shoulders, but mostly it's a knotty combination of both. Breillat repeatedly shows Anaïs chomping on long, thick marshmallowy strings of candy, as if they were her lifeline to the comforts of her fast-fading childhood; she's too sullen to be appealing, but too childishly chubby to be despicable. But there's one scene that pulls her close to us (and makes the film's brutal conclusion that much harder to watch). Anaïs's lack of naivete breaks your heart.

*Fat Girl* is sexually explicit, and the sex scenes are excruciatingly painful. The director portrays the sexual negotiations between Elena and Fernando with such deadly accuracy and absolutely unsentimental clarity, it makes you cringe. Relentlessly, Breillat exposes and undermines the eroticism. Breillat is not interested in the

warmth and tenderness of sex - only in exploring its ability to cut and confound. There are ways, though, in which her detachment is refreshing. Breillat refuses to conform to movie-sex conventions, which means we witness a sex scene where a male character is shown fully erect and putting on a condom.

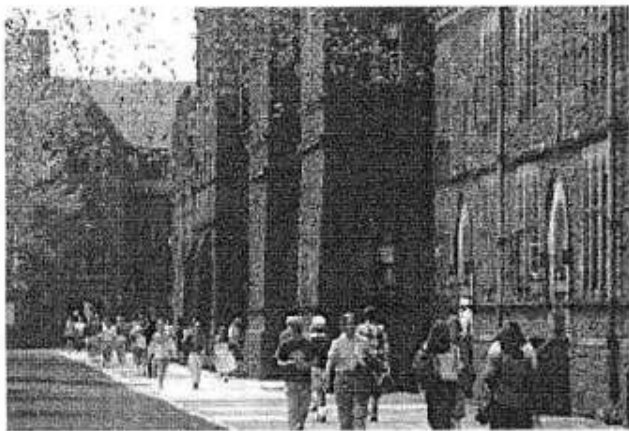
Breillat also makes no distinction between honesty and brutality. The climax of *Fat Girl* and the movie's conclusion is both despairing and queasily heartening. As the final scene proves, *Fat Girl* is designed to challenge, not to comfort.

### Body Image at Trinity by Rachel Gravel

Recently the group, RIBS (Redefining Ideal Beauty Standards), from the Trinity Women's Center conducted two surveys. The purpose of both surveys was to identify which body types females and males on campus desire for themselves, to examine how students identify health, and to determine if females and males feel pressure to look a certain way in society or specifically on campus.

The first survey was given to females. We asked which of four body types the females would like to have.





The first body type was athletically toned and thin, the second was plump, the third was emaciated, and the fourth was curvy and voluptuous. Of the 74 females that took the survey, an overwhelming majority, 74%, chose the first body type. 14.9% chose the fourth body type and 9.5% chose the third body type. The most troubling findings came from the last two questions. When asked if the females felt pressure to look a certain way, 75% answered "yes" while almost all who answered "yes" to that question also answered "yes" when asked if they felt pressure to look a certain way on the Trinity campus. A few people even answered "yes" to feeling pressure on campus, but not in the outside world.

The second survey was given to males. Again we asked which of the three body types the survey takers would like. The first body type was extremely muscular, the second was fairly muscular but skinnier, and the third had a bit more of a gut. Of the 50 males who took the survey, a

majority, 58%, liked the second body choice for themselves, while 28% desired the first body choice. Very few wanted the third body choice while 3 males wanted none of the choices.

When asked if males felt pressure from society to look a certain way, 40% answered "yes." When asked if males felt pressure from the Trinity campus to look a certain way, only 26% answered "yes" while one student answered sometimes.

When asked to define "healthy," many females responded with "exercising, eating healthily, and feeling good about yourself." Many females made comments like, "not overweight but not *starving* yourself (like #3)" and "...comfortable with your body and also having *some meat on your bones*." Only one girl responded with, "...eating what you like." But some girls disturbingly answered that they want to be, "very skinny and have a flat stomach." One girl said that the second and fourth body types were too fat and the first was too athletic, but the third "looks good." When the males were asked to define "healthy," most males said eating

right and exercising, though one male responded, "at or under weight." Another male stated that being healthy entailed exercise and "good food." One male also admitted that, "...men have more leeway on this than women," after answering "no" to feeling pressure to look a certain way.

If you have any questions about this survey or about RIBS, please contact Kerry Hood, Maggie Downing, or Rachel Gravel. RIBS meets **Mondays @ 11 am** in the Women's Center Office. All are welcome!

### "Keeping a Breast"

by Daniella Bonanno

Actor, dancer, and writer, BJ Goodwin, presents her one-woman show, "Keeping a Breast" in two performances at Trinity College. "Keeping a Breast" is a 50-minute show about Goodwin's experience during her six-year struggle with the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

From the first discovery of a lump in her breast, Goodwin



uses humor and passion to tell her story on the road to healing and health. From her first experience in her doctor's office when Goodwin finds her breast between two cold metal plates to her lumpectomy to her bee-sting therapy "treatments" to her trips to an alternative health clinic in Chicago, Goodwin pokes fun at western medicine and alternative healers alike. Along the journey, she artfully assumes the personas of the myriad doctors, nurses, healers, therapists, dieticians, friends and family who touched her in the ongoing battle with this disease.

At the suggestion of her friends, Goodwin wrote this piece at a writers' colony in Mexico where she discovered her talent in the company of other "nerdy" writers. Moving beyond the humor of this piece, Goodwin grapples with the frustrations of bouncing from hospitals to health centers to clinics and receiving different information along the way. She tries various diets (including the unthinkable, the no-sugar diet), receives opinions, and second opinions and goes around and around in the exhausting struggle of "keeping a breast". In her journey through western and alternative medicine, fighting breast cancer transforms Goodwin's life, body and soul.

Perhaps one of the most moving scenes in the piece is

Goodwin's chemotherapy "poem". The energy of this scene gradually ebbs and flows and finally builds to a fatiguing crescendo as Goodwin recounts the weekly treatments and the side effects. This "poem" especially brings to light that the battle with cancer is a lonely journey. Goodwin discusses her gratitude for the wonderful support she receives, yet when it comes down to it, friends and family leave at night, "they can't be with you in the ICU, and you realize that you are alone". However, performing "Keeping a Breast" is therapeutic and gives Goodwin strength to courageously face her disease.

### **Vox: The New Reproductive Rights Group at Trinity!**

In 1973, the Supreme Court decided in *Roe v Wade* that a citizen's right to privacy "is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy" ([www.saveroe.com](http://www.saveroe.com)) Today, women's reproductive rights in America are in serious jeopardy in wake of the conservative political climate and a rise in membership in religious fundamentalist groups. Anti-choice organizations have gained momentum and with the impending Supreme Court and

Lower Federal Court judge nominations, it is highly possible that *Roe v Wade* could be overturned in the near future.

Considering that half of all pregnancies are unwanted, a lot of women will be seriously affected if the right to control their own bodies is revoked. Already, many states have passed laws that limit a woman's right to choose to terminate her pregnancy. For more up-to-date information about *Roe v Wade*, the legal threats to the right to abortion, or to take action, visit [www.saveroe.com](http://www.saveroe.com) or [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org).

In response to these threats, The Planned Parenthood Federation of America Inc., a pro-choice organization that provides health services, including abortion, on a sliding pay scale to both men and women, has instituted a new campaign to get college-aged men and women active around the issue of reproductive rights.

"Vox", which means "voice" in Latin, has been chosen as the title for the organization whose goals are to organize events to raise public awareness about reproductive rights, educate young people about sexual health, and mobilize students as reproductive rights' advocates. As of the Spring 2002 semester, Trinity College

has its own Vox group, and has joined the ranks of hundreds of colleges and universities around the country. To find out more about the mission of Vox, visit, [www.plannedparenthood.org/vox](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/vox).

Although new, the Trinity chapter of Vox has already started planning events with the aim of educating the Trinity community about their rights and how they are threatened. Vox is planning and has scheduled a letter writing campaign in the first week of April to try to encourage the Senators to support pro-choice Federal Court judges. Although the membership is still small, Trinity's Vox is actively working to increase the awareness of reproductive rights issues on campus.

**For more information about Vox, contact Sarah at x4942.**

## La Voz Latina: March Events

In the month of March, La Voz Latina (LVL) will be celebrating national women's history month. La Voz Latina is a cultural organization on campus with the purpose of increasing the awareness of Iberian and Latin American cultural politics and social issues through programming in

the Trinity and the greater Hartford area.

In doing so we celebrated Latina women and their accomplishments with a Café con Leche on March 10<sup>th</sup>, in the LVL House at 69 Vernon St.

A Café con Leche is gathering of people to talk and be informed on different subjects in a casual setting, while drinking coffee, tea and eating desserts. The theme for March will be *Latinas en las Americas*. The speaker for this evening was Glaisma Perez-Silva. Glaisma Perez-Silva, is a Puerto Rican woman, educator, poet, community activist, radio personality and mother. Living in the greater Hartford Area since 1988, she is now a Spanish professor at the Arts & Humanities Department at Capital Community College in Hartford. Amongst her many endeavors, Glaisma is the producer and host of the weekly radio show "*De Mujer a Mujer*," which broadcasts every Tuesday from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. through WRYM 840 a.m. Her talk show highlights the values of Latina Women in Connecticut and serves as a source of inspiration and enrichment for the audience.

As a poet, her work targets themes from feminist/erotic to cultural identity issues. She is an educator who promotes the development of creativity and cultural awareness within our population. Glaisma's work has

been published in local newsletters and newspapers. Her poems have been included in the selected works of Southern Connecticut State University, Seventh Annual Women's Studies Conference publication: Latina Visions for Transforming the Americas (March '99). Also, she has been featured in The Favorite Poem Anthology and Video, National Project for the Archives for the Library of USA Congress. Glaisma was the winner of the Excellence in Literacy Award at the Urban Artist Initiate Conference in 1999, and (Working Artists: a Community of Hopes) from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts and Institute for Community Research.

**For more information about upcoming events contact LVL president, Shakira Ramos.**



**Opinion** by Gabriel Dark

I am a man, and I've been characterized by the traditional slurs of the common man, "Fag, homo, queer, sissy". In the Oxford dictionary I am defined as an adult male or a person showing characteristics associated with males. Homosexual as defined by Oxford is again inaccurate in defining me; it simply refers to sexual attraction to persons of the same sex. In a world defined by Oxford or Webster, I am a man or a human who is not homosexual. I dare to assume that the majority of contemporary American society isn't limiting their perceptions of the world around them to the literal definitions in a dictionary. As a westernized, modern culture shaped by the hands of capitalism we are consistently reminded of the "American way" mediated through television, radio, film and print media. I am concerned with the perceptions of a male, working-class culture largely shaped by the media's influence on the idea of masculinity.

I've had a number of different jobs, from coffee shop cashier, pizza delivery boy to stone mason, barn builder, and photography teacher. In each of the positions I've held, I've gained a unique perspective on masculinity. My experience with Dream Barns Inc., or the Dream Team as we called ourselves, served as a catalyst for my re-evaluation of masculinity. The job was mindless, and most of the employees were also mindless. I was a framer and a roofer. In my opinion I was immersed in a overwhelmingly masculine environment.

I was surrounded by hard working men; men who shot guns and smoked cigarettes. We had barbeques on weekends and built barns during the week. To me that was masculinity overkill. The longer I worked with Dream Barns,

the more I became aware of the narrow-mindedness of the crew of guys I was working with. To say trailer trash to describe these men may offend a few, yet the description is entirely accurate. They lived in trailers and campers. Each had multiple children, a mean dog and a wife who came second to sleep or Budweiser. This was a situation where the stereotype was reality. To these men who had learned how to be men from their TV sets and country music, I was a "faggot". My gender was ambiguous because I didn't shoot guns or like country music. I am different but no less male. My example here is less than complete. What I've attempted to show is a small group of men of the trailer trash persuasion who perpetuate their ideas of masculinity by allowing their minds to remain closed to the alternatives of the stereotypical characteristics of the contemporary American man.

A genderless society looms over the horizon. Take up arms against the uniform of men, whatever you call it. Kill your Calvin Klein jeans and burn your Abercrombie cargo pants. All you cookie cutter, unoriginal men, I urge you to think for yourselves and allow for change in your hearts and minds. Do you really want rapper so and so or even worse, George Bush Jr. representing you? Wear a dress and lighten up. You are man or a woman or a person, I really don't care.

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The words and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the Women's Center and its staff.



**Letter to the Editors:**

In the Women's Center November 13, 2001 newsletter, there was an article entitled "Being Black and Female at Trinity." As a black female at Trinity College, the article was extremely insulting. The article expressed a "sentiment" of black females at Trinity College, although many of us were not consulted to verify the findings. The author had very few supporting facts or evidence and took the words of Martin Luther King Jr. totally out of context. King says "The Negro's real problem has been that they have seldom had adequate choices." I highly doubt that this quote referred to socializing on a college campus. Martin Luther King Jr. fought and struggled for people to come together, although the author interprets this quote to mean otherwise. This quote dealt with the struggles and oppression of a group of people not a party scene.

We find this article insulting for numerous reasons. The article by Andrea Thomas depicts the average black college female as weak. We know that we can function without men and without parties. The social setting is not crucial to a student's success. While it is a factor and socializing is important, we are not here to party, we are here to get an education. An important aspect of socialization in college that Thomas does not mention is the importance of interacting with those unlike yourself. We must be able to leave our comfort zones and be open to new experiences and meet other people.

There is no question about the lack of minority students and racial problems at Trinity College. However, this article does not deal with either of these issues. This article simply deals with the social scene at Trinity and relies on the opinion of ten black females. The vast majority of us realize that parties are fun and are needed from time to time, but that is not why we are here. In addition, we realize that there are many other ways to socialize besides going to a party and there are many opportunities to get off campus. We have the cultural shuttle, free U-Passes, and weekly emails letting students know what is going on in Hartford. It is up to the students to take advantage of these opportunities.

As a black female at Trinity College, this article is not only insulting, it is far from the truth. Black females at Trinity are not only academically, but also socially successful. Our success does not depend on the number of black men at Trinity or our social setting. We all have goals and are here with the hope of achieving those goals. Although the author claims that black women are unsuccessful, weak, and thrive on superficial aspects of life, this is not the case. We are strong, intelligent women who are here to better ourselves just as everyone else.

by Tanique Jones and Zoraida Lopez

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*Please feel free to  
voice your thoughts  
and concerns in  
response to articles  
printed in this  
newsletter.*