

Trinity College Women's Center Newsletter

Volume 9, Issue 2 Winter 1999

Skinny Trinity

By Sara Getman

"Smaller is better" seems to be the attitude about the way a woman's body should be. Maybe that is why two-thirds of the people who responded to the recent survey the Women's Center conducted about eating disorders stated that they felt uncomfortable with their bodies. This survey asked questions about people's individual experiences with eating disorders as well as their experiences with friends and eating issues. It asked questions about how they perceive the problem of eating disorders on the Trinity campus and what they feel impacts expectations of women's bodies.

Over 90% of the respondents stated that they thought they had a friend with an eating disorder. Everyone who responded seemed to think that eating disorders are a major problem on the Trinity campus. However, the topic of eating disorders is rarely addressed.

Trinity students are exposed to food all the time, and many social events center around meals or snacks. It is no wonder that food can become such a major focus of attention for many individuals. One-half of the respondents stated that they are uncomfortable with their eating habits. One respondent to the survey stated that "food should be a happy, nourishing, fulfilling experience to be shared with others...." When eating becomes an issue, when individuals feel uncomfortable with the way they deal with food and

weight, or when food becomes a way of coping with emotional issues in an individual's life, a problem exists.

Eating disorders can include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, compulsive eating and compulsive exercise. A person who is anorexic practices self-starvation in an attempt to gain control of his or her life. A person who is bulimic binges on enormous quantities of food and then attempts to rid his or her body of this food through self-induced vomiting, abusing laxatives, or engaging in vigorous exercise. The compulsive eater has an uncontrollable obsession with food. Food is seen as a comfort or reward, and often a way of hiding emotional problems. Compulsive exercise is characterized by an individual who maintains a vigorous exercise regime, strictly restricts his or her diet and overall lacks a healthy perspective on food, weight and exercise.

These eating disorders can combine and overlap. However, it is important to remember that not all individuals who watch their weight or what they eat, or who exercise after eating, have eating disorders. It is when eating, weight, food and exercise interfere with the individual's ability to live his or her life, that a problem exists that needs attention.

Many people felt that while the pressure to maintain an ideal body is definitely present in general American society, there is an increased emphasis on body image at Trinity. A lot of respondents expressed the feeling that Trinity

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Letter From the Director

Laura Lockwood

Hello! Welcome to the Spring semester. The Women's Center is sponsoring a lot of exciting events this semester, and we hope that you will participate. The Spring semester is a busy one. February is Black History Month and Eating Disorders week is February 21-27. March is Women's History Month and April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month! Phew!

On February 17, Tasia Valenza, former star of "All My Children", will be speaking on her struggle to overcome bulimia...an unfortunately large issue on this campus. Her presentation will be in the Washington Room at 7pm. She will be available to answer questions afterwards...this is a

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Sisterhood is Global

News From Around the World

Sexual Terrorism in Iran

A result of unchecked military power is the abuse of innocent citizens. Rape is one of the unreported constant consequences of military power and war. Young girls suffer desperately. According to the India Journal, New Delhi, "...[A] young girl hailing from Gurdaspur, Punjab was abducted from her home, brought to the valley and sold off to a 55 year-old Kupwara resident for Rs 15,000 and sexually abused for three months." According to the article, "...militants usually come seeking food and shelter and once inside, young women fall victim to the militants' lust."

In one instance, the parents of two girls were forced to watch their daughters rapes. "...[M]embers of a family living in Budgam, were held captive by militants and two girls in the family were assaulted and raped repeatedly while the parents were mute spectators to the assault." Because rape reduces a girls marriageability, one chief of a leading militant group suggested the solution of making the rapists marry their victims. "...Hizbul Mujahideen issued a statement expressing displeasure and ordered the culprits to marry the girls who had been raped. The report said that in Hakbana, Baramulla, some of the militants asked a resident to give away his daughter in marriage to one of their accomplices and when he refused, his son was abducted, tortured and eventually killed while the girl was forcibly married to the militant."

- From the **India Journal**, New Delhi, reported by women3rdworld.miningco.com/

Child Rapists in England

This report from England hints to the influence violence and sexuality have on the world's youth. "A nine-year old school girl was raped and assaulted by her classmates aged nine and ten during a school lunch break. The girl was pulled into a bathroom and stripped, forced to the ground and fondled before three of the boys took turns raping her, prosecutors alleged. Two other boys, one of them her cousin, laughed as they looked on."

- From, **CATW**, London, AFP, 1/15/98 as reported by "**MediaWatch**," Summer 1998 issue

No Asylum in Belgium

"Twenty-year old Semira Adamu fled to Belgium [from Nigeria] to avoid marrying a 68-year-old polygamous man who has a record of beating his current wives. She arrived in March and was held in a detention center. On September 22, [Belgian] gendarmes(policemen) forced her onto an airplane to Nigeria. She resisted, and they pressed her head into a cloth. She died of a cerebral hemorrhage." Unfortunately courageous women fleeing oppression in their homelands are not always helped by the international community. Outrage from some of the international community, however, was effective in holding Belgium accountable. "There have been protests in Paris. Nearly 100 international legislators attending a conference in Brussels wrote a letter of protest to the Belgian government. Belgium's interior minister resigned as a result of the publicity over her death."

- From, "**Coalition Against Trafficking in Women**" as reported by "**off our backs**," November 1998 issue

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By: Sara Getman

Trinity seniors Jamie Roseman and Emily Harting are two dynamic women. Together, they founded a campus student chapter of NOW, the National Organization for Women. Both Emily and Jamie are committed to studying and being active in supporting women's issues and women's rights.

After attending an event at the University of Connecticut and hearing Patricia Ireland, the president of NOW speak, Emily had the idea to start a chapter of the National Organization for Women here at Trinity. Jamie joined Emily in her efforts. Together Jamie and Emily are working to establish NOW as an outlet for active involvement in women's issues on the Trinity campus.

In addition to her involvement with NOW, Emily Harting is an active member of the President's Special Council on Women. She is one of five student representatives to the Council. As a member of the President's Special Council on Women, Emily played an active role in planning the Gender Equity Forum which was held in the Fall of 1998.

Jamie Roseman is presently a mentor for First-Year Students. In the past, she also worked with First-Year Students as a Resident Assistant. Earlier in her career at Trinity, she founded the Religious Tolerance Forum which aimed to promote religious tolerance on the Trinity Campus. The Religious Tolerance Forum also provided an outlet to talk about a wide-range of issues with input from many different viewpoints.

Both Emily and Jamie are teaching assistants for Women's Studies 101. Emily stated that she has particularly enjoyed being a teaching assistant because it has given her the opportunity to watch students grow and become comfortable with women's issues while developing stronger viewpoints about those issues.

Emily and Jamie are both Women's Studies minors. Emily is a political science major and Jamie is a psychology major. Jamie stated that being a Women's Studies minor has been "a pinnacle part" of her experience at Trinity. She believes that it has shaped her academic experience and she finds it constantly creeping up in whatever she is doing. The focus of Jamie's Senior Seminar is abortion.

Through her studying, Jamie has learned that a female's right to choose is a right that is not nearly as protected as we think it is. She has become passionate about this topic and protecting this right.

Next year, Emily is hoping to travel. Eventually, she would like to work at a career that focuses on women's issues, and she is positive that she will continue to be active in this area. Jamie is hoping to eventually pursue graduate school and obtain her doctorate in psychology. Then, she would like to work in the mental health field. After Trinity, Jamie plans to stay active in women's issues by remaining affiliated with NOW and NARAL.

Both Emily and Jamie see eating disorders and body image as the most major issues facing women at Trinity. Before they graduate, they hope to make progress to help the Trinity community deal with this issue. Jamie and Emily believe that the many women's groups at Trinity are unique, and though they may have different individual goals, their ultimate vision is the same. Jamie and Emily expressed that alliance between the members of Trinity's different women's organizations would be a major asset to their contributions on campus. Hopefully, unification will lead to a greater ability to deal with women's issues at Trinity and in larger society.

Our Own Enemies

By Beth Miller-Lee

As a feminist, I analyze the ways society undermines women's self-esteem. In doing so, I have sometimes forgotten how frequently women attack other women. To begin healing, it is essential to notice what we do to damage ourselves and each other. Sexism is a cancer with tentacles winding through the flesh of society. It cannot be killed by extricating part of it. Complete healing can only occur after confronting sexism around us and inside us.

"Look what she is eating!" "Can you believe she is wearing that?" "She didn't fight back hard enough!" You've probably either heard or made comments like this. At the Date Rape Play, many students reported hearing men cheer the "rapist" and women criticize how little the "victim" fought back. This was an enactment of rape. These responses reveal the persisting attitude that sexual assault is acceptable to many men and that women blame victims for their victimization.

Competition was the reason for these comments according to women at a recent

Sexual Assault Task Force meeting. According to the Rape Prevention Education Program at the University of California, competition between women fosters an environment where they can be victimized. "Women are . . . kept vulnerable through their isolation from one another. Women are socialized to compete with each other for the attention of men and to mistrust each other." In other words, women trust men more than they trust women because other women are the competitors.

This competition comes out in daily comments we make judging women's appearance, eating habits and reputation. Every time we insult another woman and every time we look someone up and down to analyze their clothes and weight we injure ourselves. Consciously and subconsciously, you know if you insult women they insult you right back. This causes mistrust of other women and contributes to low self-esteem that creates the foundation for many other problems, including eating disorders and promiscuity.

We are taught overtly (by friends, family and society) and covertly (by the media, history and convention) that men are important for who they are, and women are important for what they look like. Men are "Objects" and women are the "subjects" of the "Objects."

I've started noticing how often I insult women about how they look. I've started noticing how infrequently I make critical comments about men's appearance. I challenge Trinity women to take note of how many times you insult female friends, professors, staff and strangers. Compare these insults (content and quantity) to insults about male friends, professors, staff and strangers. Next, notice how often you compliment women for their intelligence, talents or character. Compare these compliments (content and quantity) to compliment about men's appearance.

The Rape Prevention Education Program, UCal, asserts: "Competition and mistrust are not conducive to collective strategizing among women. Women must learn to see other women as sources of aid and to work together to decrease the vulnerability of all women."

It is important that women not blame themselves for the conditioning that has resulted in isolation. You can start your own silent, feminist revolution by stopping the insults. No one has to know, and I guarantee you will begin to feel better about yourself when you start treating other women better.

isn't a very tolerant place. One respondent to the survey stated:

"I believe (the pressure to look a certain way and be a certain weight) is definitely part of Trinity's atmosphere. Our campus, our environment, is so geared towards making everyone the same. Same clothes, same cars, same bodies... Maybe not everyone can afford the JCrew or the forerunner, but anyone can limit what they eat."

Another student stated: "I was never concerned about my weight until I came here. Now I definitely always think about what I put in my mouth. Trinity has a mentality about "looking fit," Even if most don't become extremely underweight, there are too many that are concerned with how they look."

When this concern with how we look interferes with "normal eating" a problem exists that needs attention. Normal eating involves being able to eat when you are hungry and stopping when you are full; it is flexible. Normal eating varies depending on your schedule, your emotions, your hunger, and the presence of food. Normal eating takes time and attention, but it remains only one important part of life.

Almost every respondent said they would confront a friend who they thought had an eating disorder. The most important thing you can do to help a friend is to be there for him or her. You could express your concern and over time encourage him or her to talk to someone who has experience dealing with eating disorders. At Trinity, the Women's Center and the Counseling Center can both provide resources and support.

One respondent to the survey made an important observation: "Eating disorders are not just about

image. They can not be cured by forcing one to eat and believe that she is pretty. Other emotional and psychological issues must be addressed. For this reason, I believe that they also reflect the chaos in one's life."

Forty percent of the respondents to the survey stated that their weight/shape is the most important factor in how they feel about themselves. Many people feel that there is an underlying pressure from parents, friends, peers, and general society to be thin. This is a major problem, and when individuals internalize this pressure it can drastically affect their lives. Naomi Wolf stated "A woman wins by giving herself and other women permission to eat; to be sexual; to age; to cover up or go practically naked; to do whatever we choose in following- or ignoring- our own aesthetic. A woman wins when she feels that what each woman does with her own body -unforced, uncoerced -is her own business." (The Beauty Myth p. 290)

Trinity is an institution that is supposed to promote education and diversity. It should be an environment where individuals can be comfortable to grow physically, mentally and intellectually. It seems that the emphasis on eating and body image interferes with this. This is something that needs to be overcome by all of us in the Trinity Community.

**I write for those women
who do not speak, for
those who do not have a
voice because they were
so terrified, because we
are taught to respect fear
more than ourselves.
We've been taught that
silence would save us, but
it won't.
Audre Lorde (1934-1992)**

good opportunity to learn firsthand about how a woman came to grips with disordered eating.

In March, Attorney Jamie Mills of Hartford will speak on the 9th at 7pm in Wean Terrace Room B about her involvement in the battle to pass the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment). On the 11th Professor's Lise Waxer's all women jazz band "Offbeat" will perform in Hamlin Hall at 7pm. On March 16th there will be a one-woman play titled "First Ladies," showcasing six historic First Ladies: Abigail Adams (the performer is her direct descendent), Eleanor Roosevelt, Mary Lincoln, Rachel Jackson, Julia Tyler and Jackie Kennedy. An exciting night! The performance begins at 7pm in the Washington Room. Also, watch your emails for an announcement of five short videos on women's history.

April is still being planned, but we have one confirmation: that of Adrienne Ortolano, the rape victim of Alex Kelly of Greenwich. Mr. Kelly made national news as a fugitive who lived in Europe for seven years, who then turned himself in and was convicted of raping Ms. Ortolano following two trials. The rape occurred in high school. We could use your help in planning the rest of the month: watch your emails for Sexual Assault Task Force meetings. See you around!

Laura

IS IT COLD IN HERE, OR IS IT JUST ME?

By Beth Miller-Lee

The original 1982 "Chilly Climate" study investigated inequalities suffered by women in classrooms. In an attempt to include other marginalized groups, The National Association for Women in Education published a second, more inclusive "Chilly Climate" study.

"One of the changes that has occurred over the years is that there is a greater understanding of the complexities of women's experiences and the recognition that theories of gender do not always apply to all women. Increasingly, theorists are paying attention to the intersection of gender not only with race and ethnicity but with factors such as age, class, disabilities, religion, sexual orientation, and rural/urban differences." It is also important to address backlash against men experiencing neglect or discouragement in the classroom by professors attempting to redress past wrongs against others.

This November I distributed a survey to examine Trinity's students' experiences of classroom discrimination. Subtle kinds of discrimination are difficult to identify because people get used to them and it seldom feels worth it to complain. Most students reported encouraging, supportive experiences at Trinity. Some

reported alarming examples of discrimination.

Admittedly, some students complain, even lie, about professors they don't like. Some might have taken the opportunity to complain about such professors through the comfortable anonymity of a survey. But the specific examples given by respondents substantiate the existence of some discrimination in Trinity's classrooms. When it comes to discrimination in the classroom, "some" is too much.

One respondent said she reported her experience of discrimination to the Dean of her department, but he did not support her. Professor --- has gender biased classrooms. Men are used as examples when something is correct and women are used as examples in the class when they have the wrong answer. Even when a woman answers correctly, he puts her down saying things to express his dismay and laughing, "What do you know she actually got one right!" I complained to the head of the department and my concerns were "pooh-poohed." He did not investigate by talking to other students. He simply defended Professor --- as being above reproach. "We've never had complaints about him before," which I later found out was a lie. My concerns went nowhere."

When asked about professors flirting with students, one female

student said she hadn't experienced unwanted advances, "But I have friends who have."

Several female students spoke at a recent Trinity women's meeting about professors sexually harassing them. Though they spoke at the meeting, not one victim responded to this survey question. Maybe they were afraid something would happen to them, or their futures if they wrote about their sexual harassment. Maybe they want to get on with their lives. Maybe they hated the survey. There are myriad reasons for their silence. Vocalizing personal experiences of sexual pursuit by professors at a public meeting with President Dobelle, however, excludes any argument that it didn't happen at all.

It takes courage just to get through discrimination. It takes courage, determination and support to talk about discrimination when you think nothing will be done about it, you are criticized and everyone on campus will know it happened to you.

A few men responded about their experiences of discrimination by female faculty. One male student discussed discrimination in the "hard" sciences. "I have noticed they tend to get a little better treatment from males in the heavy science fields most likely

(Continued on the next page.)



because there is a perception that since there are not very high numbers of women in the hard sciences (i.e., engineering, physics, etc.) that the few that venture into these fields should be treated as "special" or "unique" as encouragement to stay in the field of study."

Penalizing men to advance women is backlash. Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines backlash as "... any sudden or forceful recoil or reaction." Retribution against male students inspired by past discrimination against women is just another form of discrimination.

One female student discussed instances of discrimination with two different professors, both females. "Both instructors generally favor men. They listen more carefully to what a man has to say. Both solicit feedback from men more than women. Both provide objective critiques of responses to men. Both instructors have more of a tendency to dismiss what a woman has to say. Instructor A has openly laughed or ignored what some women students have said while participating in class discussions... Physical appearance seems to play a large part in instructor A's hierarchy of male preference."

Another male student responded to the unfair interaction question. "I and others have noticed that some professors pick out favorites (almost always a Caucasian student), and cater to these students but don't go out of their way to help you. This can also be seen at receptions where they talk a lot to these students and say only "Hi" to you." He also experienced backlash from women administrators. "[The] Academic Affairs Committee was

at one time all women. Once I had to go in front of the board, and as a male minority, I felt attacked. They said my career plans were not for me. Very discouraging."

One professor shared an experience about being accused of discrimination when she had corrected and returned all but ten papers. The remaining ten papers were all by female students. When confronted by the students about this, she explained that they just happened to be on the bottom of the pile. Since the class is predominantly female, the chance of a continuous grouping of women's papers was a predictable result. The good news is that the students and professor talked about it instead of being silenced by the fear of accusing someone of discrimination or the fear of being accused of discrimination.

In our last survey, Women reported they had not been discriminated against at Fraternity Parties, but when asked if they had any negative experiences they often reported clear examples of sexual harassment. Most people don't like to identify themselves as victims. They can, however, respond easily to the term "negative," without committing to a feminist issue and risk being branded a "manhater." Women and minorities are not believed when they talk about harassment. Complaining about sexual or racial harassment has become a sign of a weak or disagreeable character—a whiner, a "man-hater," etc.

Society is imbued with subtle prejudices. Thus, it is impossible to attribute all negative experiences to personality conflicts. Nor is it valid to blame everything on sexism, racism, ageism and the pantheon of other -isms out there. It is important, however, to

separate rudeness from prejudice. The power imbalance inherent in some relationships, like student/professor relationships, for example, shades experiences of rudeness and should encourage students to question possible motivations behind unkind or patronizing comments.

Take responsibility for confronting any offending professor, or document the incident formally in writing, and report discrimination to the professor's department head or the Dean of Faculty.

**It is a hidden fear
that somehow, if
they are given a
chance, women
will suddenly do as
they have been
done by.**

- Eva Figs (b.1932)

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Collective Voices

Womyn's Space

Figure Problems

Our eyes are trained to search
for flaws, to see our bodies
as problems that must be solved-

thighs too heavy, ankles too weak,
hips too wide to suit an ideal
we did not create-trained to see

each body part as fundamentally
troubled, astray. We learn to
conceal, not reveal, not to show

the weaknesses each magazine cover
prompts us to hide, shrouding
or starving ourselves submissive.

What if we were to disregard
the slogans that keep us indoors,
to shun the shame that marks us

imperfect, using our bodies
as we please, pleasure more
important now, more necessary

than perfection, our senses
stirred as we walk outside,
moving thighs and hips however

we want, moving forward in
steady rhythmic motion,
feeling power deep in

calves, knees, arms
pushing as if against
current, yet still mobile,

aware of the air we breathe,
the persistent throb of our
heart, pulse. What if our bodies

were ours to master,
not the province of pills
or diet shakes, our own machines

to use however we wanted,
with variations here and there,
room for the slim and the curved

the angular and the heavy
each one of us pushing the other
on, not holding anyone back.

Allison Joseph

COMPLICITY

Innocently walking across the quad, sharp cheekbones
Stab me. Enraged at her, the world, at me. She feels
alone.

I know she's not. Do I hold her and let her cry
Or shake her awake-I never know. She walks by.
Determined brow hiding hate, eating her away inside
Chiseling cold flesh; her fashionable disguise
Like other rich girls draped in dolled perfection
All the fat desperately consumed-controlled deception.

If she weren't short, she could parade
With women like ten year-old boys; industry induced
charade
Of ideal beauty. Does she wish for their stilted height?
Is she trying to disappear or fit in?
Did her father call her fat, her new breasts and hips some
kind of sin?

Was there an uncle, friend or stranger
Whose groping hands put her in this danger?
Then and now dark memories eat her away
Starving and haunted everyday.
She haunts me too when she walks to class
I know, do nothing and let her pass.

Beth Miller-Lee

Maxine!



"The Pill Bill"

Women Need Equity in Prescription Insurance Coverage

Did you know that Contraceptive Drugs and Devices Are Not Routinely Covered by Insurers?

According to a 1998 survey conducted by CT NARAL, 62% of insurers who provide prescription drug benefits do not cover prescription contraception drugs (such as birth control pills) and 85% do not cover prescription contraception devices (such as diaphragms and IUDs). A year's supply of contraceptives can cost over \$300.

The vast majority of American women use contraception for some period of their reproductive lives. The typical American woman spends 90% of her reproductive life seeking to avoid pregnancy. In any single year, 85 of 100 sexually active women of reproductive health age who are not using contraceptives, will become pregnant. Over half of the 68 thousand pregnancies that occur in Connecticut each year are unintended. Nearly 14,000 of these end in abortion- many of which could be avoided by increasing access to contraceptives.

Contraceptives cost less than the services related to pregnancy. The cost of an uncomplicated vaginal delivery is \$3,368 and the cost of a delivery through cesarean section is \$10,638. A cost estimate prepared by the Health Insurance Association of America for California legislation similar to that proposed in Connecticut, confirms the low cost of adding coverage of contraceptive services- only \$16.20 per enrollee per year- a little more than \$1.25 a month.

Support this bill by calling: State Senator John Fonfara (860) 240-0414
State Representative Barnaby Horton (860) 240-8585

If you have specific questions call: CT NARAL (860) 524-1086

Source: Connecticut Women's Health Campaign, The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

"Ninety-eight percent of the adults in this country are decent, hard-working, honest Americans. It's the other lousy two percent that get all the publicity. But then we elected them."

Lily Tomlin