

# Woman In Mind

Southern Connecticut State University  
Kappa Chapter of Iota Iota Iota



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# *Acknowledgements*

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*Cover and back cover By Debbie McCarthy -- The Other Side*

# Editors' Note

*We, the co-editors of Woman In Mind, are pleased to be a part of the tradition this journal represents. For the past ten years the journal has been produced by students from the Women's Studies Program at Southern Connecticut State University, and our campus chapter of Iota Iota Iota, the Women's Studies National Honor Society.*

*When we first met, in the Fall of 2006, to discuss working on the project, we couldn't have imagined how educational and fulfilling the experience would be. We are most grateful for the inspiring writing and artwork that we are fortunate to include here.*

*We are also grateful for the support and encouragement of our advisors, Professors Rosalyn Amenta and Yi-Chun Tricia Lin. The advancement of academic and activist feminism has been their life's work, and we have felt, in their presence, the spirits of all those who have come before us, in this journey toward gender equality.*

*Thank you,*

*Christan Moran*

*Khoi Nguyen*

## Without Regard

w eat.  
i r  
t I live o  
h my life k  
out regard tal  
for ,

the way I look

*Long ago, I wore skirts,  
defined my face with make-  
ups and my body with  
parfum-lathered scents.*

**I styled my hair in colors, textures and cuts.**

*Several times, I expressed a penchant for*

*earrings, especially  
those big and round  
or long and slinky.*

**I re-  
member, too, my high  
heeled boots and  
snazzy heels.**

*Am I  
less a woman  
n for who I  
ow am?*

*By Vanessa Raney*

# The House of the Lagoon: Battle against Silence

By Tania Carrasquillo De Franco

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*"... The family tradition perpetuates a culture of terror that humiliates the woman, teaches the children to lie and spreads the pestilence of the world."*

*Eduardo Galeano*

**T**oday's feminist writings are remarkable for raising themes that do not have room in other media. They seek to rehabilitate human history, politics, socio-cultural elements, and above all, to rearticulate the canonical discourse - clearly patriarchal - in order to propose a new dialogue, based on an ideological standard that offers a fair space to those alienated by society, especially women.

The Puerto Rican woman has been manipulated throughout history by a cultural and religious standard which has restricted her role as a virgin's pedestal, where she is entirely immobilized. Her image is that of a selfless and suffering mother, who has been transformed into a living piece of china that serves to decorate her family, within the confines of the house, a place where she performs her traditional role of a lady entrapped by an immaculate silence that culminates with her last exhale before death.

As a starting point, let us draw on these affirmative statements to establish a constructive dialogue that allows us to reveal how, through the novel The House on the Lagoon, the Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferré demystifies this devastating standard.

And Isabel said to Quintín; "Mi novela no es sobre política. Es sobre mi emancipación de ti" ("My novel is not about politics. It is about my emancipation of you," Ferré 408).

The contextual parameters of Isabel Monfort's manuscript outline the tragedy lived by Puerto Rican women as a result of domestic violence. Where the woman's daily routine discloses the rearticulation of the canon as a result of a new literary voice, that announces the



Eileen Miller

birth of a complete woman, able to strike down the cultural stereotype, preserved in the description of the female symbol as a long-suffering, quiet and domesticated symbol.

In order to initiate this didactic exercise, we must define specifically the meaning of the terms patriarchy and paternalism. The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (La Real Academia de la Lengua Española) defines the term patriarchy as a "primitive social organization in which authority is exerted by a

male head of household, extending this power even to distant relatives of the same ancestry." Likewise, his source defines the term paternalism as the "tendency to apply forms of authority and protection typical of the father in the traditional family to other types of social relations" (Twenty second edition).

The South African feminist, Bernadette Mosola, asserts that "when a man is oppressed, this act is a symbol of tragedy, but when a woman is oppressed; it is only an exercise of tradition" (Beasley 6). This serves as a foundation to state that the cultural tradition is totally responsible for the consecration of the male figure as the central axis of authority and absolute power throughout history which has confined women to an inferior level.

Juan G. Gelpí, a Puerto Rican literary scholar, states that paternalism is characterized by "the fact that it presumes a hierarchic relationship between subjects, one of which constitutes itself as "superior" while relegating the other or others to the category of "subordinates" (Gelpí 12). On the other hand, Norma Valle Ferrer maintains that "with the establishment of patriarchy, women were placed in a private sphere and men prevailed in the public space. Women were divided into 'good and bad,'

For example, a public man is a leader; however a public woman is a prostitute who must be condemned. A woman was considered good when submitting herself docilely to her father, older brother or husband, and later on, her son." (Valle Ferrer 27) This act restricts the freedom of individual development, which impoverishes the reality of women, whose only alternative is the total dependency which characterizes the patriarchal marriage.

María M. Sola refers to marriage as the state where "the wife sells access to

her body and herself to only one man, for life, in exchange for which the husband supports her and the children" (Sola 23). This action represents the destruction of female dignity, on behalf of the patriarchy, which gives woman space exclusively within the confines of the marriage or the whorehouse.

It is here that Rosario Ferré becomes a resonant voice that confronts and transcends the traditional canon. In this novel she revisits the home, a space characterized by an environment systematized around the male figure. Ferré advises women to leave the confines of macho domination and demand their freedom and sexual identity within a society submerged in anonymity due to the lack of self identity.

*Ferré advises women to leave the confines of macho domination and to demand their freedom and sexual identity within a society submerged in anonymity due to the lack of self identity.*

Affirming that houses are small theaters that give space to the spectacles of life, Ferré builds the Alamares house. It is an architectonic structure whose foundation is built on lies that from its origin requires falseness, "I will build your house right here, on this spring," Pavel told her, "This way the muse will always inspire you" (Ferré 62). This is the purest representation of the act of plagiarism, since Pavel was a simple imitator, his works were replicas that could not give shelter to Rebeca's artistic hopes. Her husband Buenaventura was only interested in building a house that was more attuned with their new circumstances.

Acting on his humanly impulsive desire he built and knocked down the house as many times as he wanted to, just to fortify his empire in front of his subordinates, not taking into consideration that his domain was built on water, fading due to the lack of firm land and vulnerability to collapse.

The House on the Lagoon maintains a circular rhetoric, where the plot re-

volves around violence from beginning to end. The author uses this technique to transform the word into a literary tool with the purpose of parody and to distort the traditional and religious foundations that define the institution of marriage.

According to Robert Grima in his book, Love and Sexuality, marriage is not a contract, but is an alliance, a community sustained by love. Where the couple, through a religious sacrament, sign an everlasting agreement where both swear love and fidelity until the end of their lives.

Now let's ask ourselves, if marriage is a divine pact where man and woman, as honest beings of equal capacity and conscious of their acts, affirm an indestructible love, how is it possible that

this sacred and pure alliance can be transformed by giving the husband a position of greater advantage that allows him to subjugate his woman to anonymity? Where then is the right to gender equality within the ministries of the marriage?

Let us take for example some aspects from Buenaventura and Rebeca's marriage to expand on our questioning. In this relationship, the man is shown as the head of the family, since he is the bread winner. On the other hand, Rebeca, as the wife, superficially shows us the face of a woman who enjoys a life full of pleasures, thanks to the economic stability her husband has offered her. She enjoys trips out of the country, celebrations in high society and the freedom to satisfy her most capricious wishes. It is freedom that only money can give, but at the same time it comes with a great price to pay.

The reality is that Buenaventura was a very busy man and did not lend importance to his wife's desires. It reached the

point that when he was in a strong economic position, the house of Alamares was transformed into the headquarters of all types of business meetings. As a result, Rebeca was forced to abandon her interests in the arts to organize her husband's social activities.

In time she began to feel unfortunate since her temple consecrated to the arts had become a sanctuary to commerce and to diplomatic ceremonies. In this way the distortion of the immaculate love, symbol of their marriage, began.

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project of Duluth, Minnesota, establishes that this type of behavior is representative of the emotional abuse in which the woman is undervalued by the offensive comments made against her person, in order to make her feel bad about herself (Duluth Minnesota Power and Model Control developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project).

At the same time, the spouse reaffirms that the man has a greater privilege over his wife, which establishes him as the king of the house. Similarly, this type of behavior is accompanied by friendly gestures, like the affectionate light pat, to establish a mental game that confuses the feelings of the victim.

In the 1950's, Simone de Beauvoir, stated that the relationship between a man and a woman was founded on hierarchic power, based on the concepts of different and complementary, in which the man is defined as absolute subject, and the woman is not more than an object of her partner, who amuses her as the other sex and who has no power over her actions (Beauvoir, The Second Sex).

So, what limits of power will be granted by the social and religious culture to the man in his house? How is it justifiable that Buenaventura, when Rebeca was in the middle of her interpretation of "Salomé," took off his belt and gave her a

## The Secret's Out

We've stirred it up  
The dog's awake  
Pandora's box is open

We've boldly gone  
Where we mightn't have  
Too late to tug the rope in

We've spilled the beans  
The cat's de-bagged  
Our lips just kept a-flappin'

We went that far  
We egged us on  
How did all this happen?

We've said it now  
We let it fly  
We yanked the seam out hard

We tossed our fate  
To haughty wind  
We watched it soar skyward

We birthed the thing  
We gave it life  
Revived it from slow death

The thing that weighed  
So anvil-like  
Now floats like baby's breath

By Janet Lombardi

tremendous beating in front of everyone, leaving her unconscious? Was it just that after several weeks of recovery, he said to her "you were losing touch with reality and I had to give you a lesson so that you would put your feet back on the ground" (Ferré 82).

There is no reason on this planet to justify this aggression even though some dare to justify it by saying that the woman is responsible for provoking the husband's violence. The truth is that this common belief has only served to excuse the

aggressor's behavior. The abuse destroys the woman's physical and mental health.

Soon after the new way of life was imposed by Buenaventura, Rebeca became surprisingly obedient. "She tolerated with patience her frequent pregnancies, and was apparently resigned to her fate. She put away her dance slippers, her silk tunics and her poetry books in the bottom of the dresser, and was shutting down little by little like one of the water lilies forgotten at the end of the terrace" (Ferré 85). Through the development of Rebeca's

character, Ferré externalizes the woman's moral destruction by the oppression of her intellect that results in a totally bitter, defeated and demoralized woman. The House on the Lagoon demonstrates that domestic violence has been incorporated to Puerto Rican society's everyday living, and this conduct is passed down to new generations. Homes that allow violence develop children who suffer and who are prone to repeat the same pattern in the future. Lenore Walker states that if this pattern is not properly addressed, the cycle of violence in a couple can escalate to the point of leading to a criminal act (Walker 232). The relationship between Quintín and Isabel reflects the total crisis of the domestic violence cycle.

Quintín represents the second generation of the Mendizábals. He is a businessman, who learned very well from his father the effective and calculated handling of his company. Isabel is his wife, who for many years hated her mother in law's bad temper, swearing never to be like Rebeca. She symbolizes the new generation of women who feel they are equal to men. She is patient, loving, a good mother and a good wife. She is an educated woman who breaks the stereotype of the submissive woman, established by the patriarchal society.

From the beginning, Quintín recognizes that he has his father's bad temper and if he does not learn to control it, his genetics will sink him. After the suicide of the young trovador, Quintín assures Isabel that "love is the only sure cure against violence." (Ferré 17) At that moment, both swear to analyze carefully the events of aggression in their families, so as not to commit the same mistakes of their ancestors.

The peace of this agreement lasted until the moment in which Quintín discovered that Isabel was quietly outlining the history of his family. "Quintín was surprised. How could Isabel write that pack of lies about his family." (Ferré 87). It is here where the stressful stage begins, as determined by Diana Ferrer Valle. The phase can last from mere hours to years. The victim recognizes

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that tension is building up and she tries to understand her partner. "He implored me to forgive him for what he had done and after all I ended up forgiving him" (Ferré 16). Isabel, in her understanding, fostered the hope of a positive change in her partner. Nevertheless the love and the passion that defined this relationship also brought with it violent disorder, transforming their happiness into chaos and suffering. Quintín implemented oppression against Isabel through irrational limitation of her intellect, through isolation, infidelity and even controlling access the finances.

This man reaches the peak of his aggression when he decides to destroy the manuscript of The House on the Lagoon. He enters the bedroom furiously with the intention of confronting Isabel. He grabs her by the shoulders, shaking her aggressively, and saying to her "I swear to you that if you publish the novel I will kill you" (Ferré 398). George Bataille states that within an unhealthy relationship the center of attention turns to the possessed, "death is meaning of control. If the lover cannot have power over the loved one, sometimes he thinks about killing her. He frequently would prefer to kill her than to lose her" (Bataille 25).

In the middle of so much disorder and anger, Isabel decides to leave Quintín when he confirms to her that he prefers to send his own son to a boarding school rather than pay for treatment abroad, "it took me twenty-seven years to discover that Abby was right: (nuestro matrimonio habia sido un gran error) our marriage had been a terrible mistake" (Ferré 422).

Isabel's ultimate position represents the escape plan besides domestic violence, but at the same time, it is the declaration of war to the traditional canon of the island. Rosario Ferré places Isabel in the prow of the boat, "I stood in the stern, in front of the control panel, and grasped the rudder" (Ferré 429). Here the author is returning to the stern of René Marqués, one of the most representative icons of the traditional canon.

This last assertion summarizes the overall plan of the House on the Lagoon.

Where Rosario Ferré collects the feelings of all Puerto Rican women who find themselves confronting the oppression they have been subjected to under the patriarchal society, a result of a learned cultural tradition that has not been able to recognize in its totality the right a woman possesses to have an equal sexual identity as the male figure.

It is here the author pays tribute to the icon of the new woman, who is able to reject her role of virgin and martyr, to become an idol willing to confront face to face the violence hidden in paternalism, which has only led to the devastation of the pillars of our society.

Finally, the remaining question is: Why was Isabel able to find relief on the coast of Florida and not on those of San Juan de Puerto Rico? Is there some explanation for the fact that this woman has had to deport herself outside her mother country in order to attain a little peace? We will never know, Isabel never communicated it.

The only thing that my brothers and sisters of the Island have left to do is to humbly recognize the fact that our history has been humiliated by the great wave of violence that has been conducted against Puerto Rican women. Statistics show that in 2005 more than 22,700 females were victims of their partner's aggravated assaults, for example: intimidation, freedom restraint, sexual assault and even murders. Acts that in their majority were performed in these women's homes (González: Domestic Violence Statistics 2005, Puerto Rico).

In conclusion, the feminist literature that the House of the Lagoon represents is characterized for being the media that exerts an articulated voice against the silence of domestic violence, a self-reflection of the Puerto Rican patriarchal society. My humble intention has been to employ the work of Rosario Ferré, to stress the necessity of re-educating our people on the fact that true love between a man and a woman is the one that is manifested in the great splendor of freedom (de libertad), and has nothing to do with the male discourse generated by the inequality of gender supremacy.

## The Sand Path

I am two hundred seasons,  
fifty years fallen  
from my eyes--

drifted fifty snows

heartened fifty lilac blossoms

longed for days

on chance to glimpse Aurora

night, baby-blue and pink  
blanket

June moon a suckling's breast.

Through the narrow of the hour  
with her born  
the summer of my winter's solstice

the sand-wend, cool juniper basin  
which gave way  
to barren life under the beating  
sun.

With bare feet we climbed, stepped  
aside on sparse wild grass to avoid  
the burning sand, the dune-crest  
and saltless sea  
a breath away  
and another

on the path mistaken at the trailhead  
to be the easy way.

The last push--  
Lake Michigan, blue-wide and  
water-sky horizon.

Laughing girls we ran, the water  
swallowed in, kissed skin and tongue  
as if we were oblong  
freshwater freeform pearls.

One memory for fifty years:

Sand in clear blue-green, bottled  
on the kitchen window sill

above the sink where I stand  
washing dishes, cups and saucers  
drained of tea, leftover meal  
scraped into the pail.

By Rlynn Michaels

# Secrets of the Ladybugs

By Tímíka Therriault

It happened when I was twenty, two months before I could legally drink or bet at a casino, three years after I'd moved out of my parent's house on Roanoke Drive. It was early morning—when the sun has not yet risen, but you can feel its presence because it's just light enough that the blinds are no longer sufficient and you have to shove a pillow over your head to catch a few more minutes of sleep before the alarm goes off. The real truth was that I was not sleeping much those days anyway, for reasons that had nothing to do with sunlight. One night previous, I'd taken sixteen Nyquil, all at once, one after the other, sometimes two or three at a time, because the warning label said "may cause drowsiness" and I figured drowsiness times sixteen had to equal true sleep. And then I'd hidden the package of foil wrappers under a stale pizza box in the garbage so Dan would not know what I had done. Threat of severe damage to my liver notwithstanding, I was desperate for what I'd heard my aunt call sleep once: a little snatch of death.

It was six o'clock at night, only an hour after I'd taken them, when my boss called me into work, begging me to come in and stick around until closing time so that he could go to dinner with his wife. I could have said no, that it was my night off, but I didn't and I went in feeling as though my entire face was an over-filled Mylar balloon, just about to

explode, and like I needed to have my stomach pumped to escape the severe nausea. My fingers felt like swollen sausages even though they didn't look any bigger than usual. Three hours later, I got home and was tired, but even drugged, I could not sleep.

I toyed with the idea that my insomnia had something to do with Dan, that he was to blame because he didn't really love me. Don't ask me how that made



Contributed Photo

sense—it just seemed natural to blame him for my health problems, since I spent all of my nights worrying about how much life would suck when I entered a loveless marriage. He surprised me one night, I don't remember the occasion or if there even was one, and asked me to marry him. We had problems in our relationship even then, but I had said yes because I always wanted to get married. I said yes to Dan because I had fallen in love with being in love. Shortly after we told my parents, they informed me that I had a week to move out—they'd never liked Dan and didn't want their only daughter to have anything to do with a guy who, they felt, was abusive. They blamed me for hurt-

ing them by staying with Dan. My mom said, "I'll never forgive you for making this choice." She'd been crying, and she seemed to choke on each word. I always thought it ironic for my mother to tell me I had made the choice to leave when in the back of my mind I knew she wanted me to go anyway.

So, even after having consumed enough cold medication to take care of at least a dozen colds the night before, I got out of bed that morning a few minutes before the alarm was set to go off, not having slept at all. My eyes burned and I knew without looking in the mirror that they were horribly bloodshot. My health, at that point, had declined so much that my parents thought I'd started taking drugs. I saw them on all the major holidays. When my father had seen me on Thanksgiving, barely touching the food on my plate, he just sat and stared at me from across the table. I think he was wondering whether to say something to me or to wait until my mother was out of earshot so that he wouldn't upset her. When mom left the table to heat up the gravy in the kitchen, dad said, "I've seen Cocaine addicts on TV that look healthier than you, Sky. Eat something for God's sake."

Getting out of bed, I pushed aside thoughts of my parents' concerns and focused on what I needed to do to get ready for school. As usual, Dan's bedroom and in fact his whole house, was cold—bitterly cold. So cold that I would sometimes try to wear my mittens to bed, the ones with tiny pompom ladybugs glued onto them that my mother had given me for Christmas a few years before. Though I would never have admitted it aloud, they did seem a little childish, but they helped keep my fingers warm and were mostly concealed in the dark anyway, and so I resented it whenever Dan poked fun at them. If he caught me putting them on while I thought he was sleeping, he'd always

wait until I settled myself under the covers, head on the pillow, hands and arms squished under my ribcage for extra warmth and only then would he say, “What are you, four years old? My little cousin Lea wears her mittens in the house. They have dragonflies on them though.” Then, he would give a little laugh, like he could play it off that he thought I was just being silly, but I knew for some reason those mittens, or maybe just the ladybugs on them really bothered him.

“Can’t you close the window, please Dan?” I’d ask in a pleading voice. “There’s frost on the grass outside, I can see it under the streetlight.”

“Light a fire,” he had told me once. His house didn’t have a fireplace.

Despite the chill permeating his bedroom that morning—I say ‘his’ because although I lived there with him for several years, it never felt like ‘ours’—I resolved to leave my small pocket of conserved warmth underneath the blankets and prepare for the day.

Much as I wanted to disturb Dan, who slept on his back, with the covers rolled and entwined around his body in such disarray that only one unclothed leg pierced through the ruby redness of the comforter, I decided to leave him be.

I decided that a few minutes alone in the hot shower sounded a lot better than a couple seconds of satisfaction at having disturbed his peaceful slumber. He was snoring on every other breath, loudly, and it annoyed me for some reason. A long line of drool dripped out of the side of his mouth into a wet spot on the pillow about the size of one of those half-dollar coins that people collect but never spend. I didn’t wipe it off, just stood observing for a moment longer before turning around to head for the bathroom.

Making sure to close the bedroom door behind me, I heard the click of the

knob as it latched into place and hurried off down the hall as I did every morning, so long as no one was looking; I took quick, hopping steps, on just my toes to avoid the cold slate of the tiles which I could feel even through my socks.

In the bathroom, I started the shower, turning the faucet as far over to the hot side as it would go and waited until the entire bathroom filled with steam before I took my clothes off. I didn’t turn on the vent—which would have sucked all my precious steam right

over and fragile to the touch. All the while, I imagined what Daniel would say if he knew I’d allowed the bathroom to look like a sauna—“Sky, you’ll make the wallpaper peel” or “Sky, there’ll be mildew on the grout between the tiles.” Only years later would I realize the irony of this—as long as Dan and I had been together, he’d used the bathroom for only a few reasons: to shit, shower, and jerk off. Cleaning it though, had never been a part of his bathroom activities.

As I stood in the steam luxuriating in the comfort of the nearly scalding water, letting it mottle my back to a blotchy pink. I’d grown sullen and quiet again, my humor from just a few moments before completely gone, probably washed down the drain with the dead hair and bits of used soap. Once, I remembered, Dan and I had visited Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, not for any school project or family trip, but just because we were both big history buffs and the pilgrim society fascinated us. We’d both left laughing because we reeked from having joined “the Parson’s wife” making soap from scratch. Once, I thought, Dan and I had had things in common.

I hadn’t even gotten to wash yet when I heard the bathroom door slide open—it was one of those pocket doors, so it didn’t have a traditional doorknob because the entire door had to fit into the wall. Instead, it had a little bronze loop, big enough for two fingers, which jingled after you let it go. It was this sound that snapped me out of my reverie and I pulled my head, heavy with water in my hair, out of the stream. Instinctively, I covered myself with my hands



Eileen Miller

out of the room, wasted it when it was thick enough to wrap around my body like a down blanket, heavy enough to have some trouble breathing in it, warm enough to melt the chill out of my lips, fingers, and nose.

The glass doors around the tub, which always made me feel watched, even when I was alone, would fog up, giving the illusion of privacy. The mirror, which I rarely used anyway, became like the surface of a puddle just frozen

*I am in a fishbowl, I thought, a gigantic fishbowl. I wanted to make fish lips at him and see if I could get him to laugh. Instead, I crossed my arms over my chest, more to hide I knew, than to be intimidating. I was never very scary with my clothes on, let alone standing naked in the shower, thinking about making fish lips.*



even though I knew it was just Dan and that he'd seen me naked many times before. Still, I thought, a little panicked, even the foggy glass wasn't protection—it didn't conceal me from him. I wiped away a small patch of the glass to look through, all the while wishing that I could be invisible.

Just as I knew he would, Dan had stepped into the bathroom looking at once surly and irritated, muttering something about “the goddamned vent.” But I couldn't be entirely sure that's what he said because the drumming of the water hitting the tub was pounding in my ears.

He flipped the switch to turn the vent on and gradually I felt my steam being sucked up into the lucky place in the ceiling that didn't have toes to warm or goose bumps to smooth away. The metal slats of the outlet above me dripped with moisture, the fog around me lifted, and I felt an aching sadness.

“I need to get out of the house earlier than you do.” He slid the door shut behind him and my glass cage shuddered. “In fact, I can't recall a time when you've ever needed to leave before me. So tell me, why do you insist on hogging the hot water today?”

I am in a fishbowl, I thought, a gigantic fishbowl. I wanted to make fish lips at him and see if I could get him to laugh. Instead, I crossed my

arms over my chest, more to hide I knew, than to be intimidating. I was never very scary with my clothes on, let alone standing naked in the shower, thinking about making fish lips.

“I wish you'd be more considerate.” He mimicked me, crossing his own arms over his chest. Despite his curly-haired bed head, hair completely flat on one side and fluffy on the opposite, I thought that he was intimidating.

“I'm sorry,” I said, looking down and away to face the shampoo sitting on the ledge of the shower. My cousin, Shania, very wise for her twenty-eight years, once told me that if a guy you don't know on the street tries to intimidate you by making eye contact, you should never look down, you should look up and away. If you do that, they are less like to attack you and will look for easier prey. But, I thought, Dan was hardly some criminal off the street, and I had already looked down anyway.

“Why don't you join me and we'll shower together?” I asked. I wanted things to be the way they once were, in the days when the thermostat never fell below seventy degrees and Dan used to get up early so he could surprise me with glazed munchkins and a mug of hot chocolate in bed. There used to be mornings when we'd share the shower and laugh about whose turn it was to wash whose hair, and debated about which soap smelled the best. But that was three years before and it

felt like an eternity. Things, for whatever reason, just weren't that way anymore.

“I guess I have no choice but to get in with you, do I?” He asked, leaning up against the marble countertop behind his back and bending low to remove his socks. He didn't look at me, instead focused intently on each article of clothing as he threw it on the floor. I thought how he would

leave the pile of clothes there and expect me to pick it up. I thought about the fact that I would.

He said, “Next time, just wake me up so I can get in here first. One of these days I'm going to be late for work because of you.” He'd never been late to work before, because of me or anything else. We only lived two minutes away from the office he worked in, and he'd frequently told me that his boss loved him because he never arrived less than five minutes early. His boss believed him to be an “honest, upstanding young man.”

I knew it would be futile to start arguing with him. I would never win. Dan had once told me that in relationships, compromise didn't exist, and that any couple having an argument was bound to be very one-sided. “Someone has to win,” he'd told me as we sat on his bed, discussing the theory of “romantic relationship psychology” as it had been termed in my Psychology class at school. “But that also means that some-



Contributed Photo  
Woman in Mind

one has to lose,” I had replied. “Exactly,” Dan said with a nod, and he flicked a knobby ball of lint off his sweater.

In the shower though, at that moment, I knew that he hadn’t meant just anyone had to win...he had meant that he, Daniel Maniscarpo, son of a cheapskate millionaire who paid more attention to his stocks than anything else in life, also the son

of a twice divorced psychotic woman, always had to win. Period.

I didn’t say anything, even as I felt the heavy glass door open, punctuated by the “whoosh” of the rubber panel losing its suction. Cold air rushed in, stealing the last of my steam and causing the little hairs all over my body to stand on end. I looked at my feet, counted the spots on the ladybug tattooed on my left foot, even though I knew how many there would be. I’d gotten it done over a year before and hid it for months from everyone, for fear that people wouldn’t like it, and worse, that they would say so. When Dan had finally seen it, one evening in the shower, no less, he’d said, “That’s fake, right?”

I had grinned, hoping desperately that he wouldn’t tell me he hated it. “No, it’s real.”

“You’re not the only person who has to see that you know.” He said it with such a look of disgust, brows wrinkled tightly together above his brown eyes that I knew he hated it. He’d hated my ladybug collection so much that a few months before that, he’d trashed them all in the dumpster at work while I was at school. I’d once had hundreds of ladybugs—some gifts, some things that I had bought myself: metal picture frames with tiny ladybugs etched into the sides, a ceramic dish with one painted on the top, a stuffed animal that my six-year-old cousin Alyssa had given to me for my birthday. Dan had gone through all of my things, thrown them into some black garbage bags and driven them down to the dumpster at work. When I returned from school that evening, everything was gone.

So, I’d gotten a ladybug that he couldn’t ever take away. And now, secretly, I loved my ladybug for the power it had over him. I derived the smallest pleasure every time he saw me looking at it because I knew he hated it and there was nothing he could do.

I counted the spots until I could feel his raw presence behind me. He was physically cold, to be sure, but worse than the iciness of his skin was the aggression—some of it angry, some of it sexual—emanating off of him in waves.

Don’t ask me how I knew that some of the tension was sexual, I could just feel it like the blast of heat you get when you open the oven door and are standing directly over it, only he had no chocolate chip cookies to offer me when the time was up. All I could think was “please, Dan, not right now.” His aura, if that’s what you call it, was pulsing against my back in waves practically tangible enough to pluck and tune like the strings of a violin. I wondered what would happen if I turned around in the face of all this raw energy.

I couldn’t understand his anger or even begin to fathom how he could possibly want me, at that moment, so I didn’t turn around. I waited. For what, I wasn’t sure, I just knew that whatever it was, it would be completely unforgivable.

## 64 Days of Nonviolence

SCSU

Women’s Studies

Since 2004, the Southern Connecticut State University Women’s Studies Program has observed “The 64 Days of Non-violence,” a national campaign to raise awareness of non-violent principles. This annual season long celebration of peace officially begins on January 30, the day Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, and ends on April 4, the day we commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King’s passing. As such it encompasses Black History Month, Women’s History Month and Asian Pacific Heritage Month.

At SCSU, the observation includes a wide range of events, which honor many cultures in many forums. Highlights in recent years have included student productions of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologs*, a seminar with Winona LaDuke, poetry reading/performance art by E. Bok Lee, the symposium “Women of color Writing: Negotiating Gender & Ethnicity,” and the SCSU Women’s Studies Graduate Student Conference.

Yi-Chun Tricia Lin, director of the SCSU Women’s Studies Program, presented another exciting slate of event in 2008, which included an art show celebrating Hispanic heritage, a symposium on Women of Color and leadership, and the 6th Annual SCSU Women’s Studies Graduate Conference, *Feminist Art: Create Resistance*.

# To Abide is Temporary

By Elinor Slomba

I am thinking about the old fashionedness of money. I feel the old fashionedness of money when the coins fall and I have to pick them up. These things belong in museums. I am puzzling over the old fashionedness of love. How old fashioned is it to lick an envelope, put a key in a door and recognize a place?

Excellence in love equals restraint. What volumes could not be written on beautiful, blank pages of a love already spoken for by nouns, beliefs, developmental stages, fears, hopes, other people's notes in the margins, narcissistic reflections, and other spoiled concoctions of ink? We abide until the right words prepare themselves.

Every meeting is a passage. I meet you and I am changed merging onto a highway. I meet you and I am changed having a sandwich on a park bench. I meet you and I am changed walking the streets. We revel in the City's capacity to change us by rearranging our bodies in space. We revel in the cacophonous tune of our subways and bicycles and strollers and Vespas and dogs. We meet, unsheltered, and thus remake the City in our flesh and out of our desires.

The vagina is the human person's first vacation, a place to recharge and get a different perspective in between extended stays. Take a moment to luxuriate with one's head in the open light of civilization and one's body in a tropical embrace: the original best of both worlds. No wonder some urbanites accumulate island chains like charms on a bracelet and use the beaches of whole countries as playgrounds. We could all do with an extra slice of the liminal.

I say my mother was too narrow. She says I was too wide. Things were not progressing normally; this set a precedent. A collarbone was wrenched and broken in the doctor's strong hand, a procedure named in textbooks. It is not the name of anyone I know, and I am glad.

My mother and I have to wait thirty-five years, until I resemble my own earliest memories of her in the sterile secret of a stale marriage, for her to offer

me spa-like accommodation. I found hospitality in the desert, heard the sound of a stream trickling somewhere. It was the sound of my mother praying for me, and I could understand the words.

Inscriptions on the eve of every baptism should extrapolate this openhearted reality: how little it takes to be a good mother. I will offer you this tent of my hands, and we will make something together.

I will mother as a verb. Today we pull up roots of onions and look at their pearlescent bulbs, so created. Yesterday we sat down to study a map of our City, found the block of our street and drew a little star. What could I impart more valuable than the geography of your own body and exact, matter-of-fact words for things like separation, disappointment, anger and

**The vagina is the human person's first vacation, a place to recharge and get a different perspective in between extended stays. Take a moment to luxuriate with one's head in the open light of civilization and one's body in a tropical embrace: the original best of both worlds.**

love?

Son, I am your mother. This is your father. Here is your bag of concrete. Mix it.

There is a hard justice in the hands opening and closing. We release in order to practice for the greatest inevitabilities. We embrace and become joyous in the stillness, wherein I sigh and pretend to be the stillness of death, that fortunate force which can enclose you and keep you forever someday, as I cannot. Life, like these green, uncurling days as all mothers tell it, is too achingly temporary.

The City is full of sons and daughters, and I love them all. I love the Flag Man on the wharf feeding colorful codes to the wind and the oysterman who shucks oysters and sells them in big, glass jars from the back of a truck. I love the Latino adolescent and his father who walk close together down the street in tank shirts looking like a pair of lesbians. I love all the women on the City Council. I love the Muslim girl who hangs upside down from the monkey bars in her headscarf. I love the sunburnt man who wanders the boardwalk. I love the editors and reporters of the weekly paper. I love the dancers whose bodies are trained also in massage and babysitting. I love the clerk who transcribes Planning and Zoning meetings and changes the flag on her house for every holiday. I love the guys

## Urban Irony

Lonely  
Late at night  
Strange city  
Go out by myself for a pint

Tuck my long hair under my black hat  
Pull my hooded sweatshirt over my head  
And put on my baggy pants

Think to myself:  
Maybe I'll feel safer  
Maybe I'll be safer  
If I can just look less like a woman

And it works well  
Because I'm tall  
Maybe too well

As I rush home on the dimly lit street  
The woman ahead of me turns to look back  
Then quickens her pace,  
Thinking: "Is that man in the hooded sweatshirt  
Following me?"

*By Helen Anderson*

who run the bike shop. I love the girl in black T-shirts who hangs out on the fire escape with two boys who look beautiful to each other. I love the silhouettes in the underpass.

I want my children to see how the City weaves together. I want them to see the spaces in the City and recognize human beings huddled and hiding and hopeful in those spaces. I want them to feel the hands of growers and pickers and bakers in their mouths when they eat sandwiches on park benches. I want them to be able to fully inhabit themselves out-of-doors.

Truly every meal is a picnic, every glow of light a campfire.

The songs and poems stored within our bodies may end up being the only food we have to feed each other. Feast well, then, in your days of plenty. Prepare a meal laden with pleasures so the young can converse, meet and be changed.

We say goodbye to the City every time we walk its streets. Greet someone you know outdoors and sing a verse in the hymn of mutability and passage. To our little star: I love you. I will miss you. Goodbye.

Three is the maximum number any family can hold. This is the curse of the modern, nuclear family. Fall in love and have a baby and you build a stool. Anyone can sit on it. Have another and you become a table. One leg always wobbles. Large

families and extended families can probably form groups of threes and remain stable; I admit to not knowing this firsthand.

This I do know firsthand: wobbling for years creates a powerful illusion of movement. It satisfies the need for movement. Such satisfaction is temporary.

Come see the food I have brought to this picnic. Come and eat old fashioned food with me from old fashioned places. Oh, who among us is expert at transporting joy?

I have brought mulberries imported to my backyard by merchants once learning to weave silk. The trees are good to climb. We waited against all advice until the third year when, pale and soft as grubs, the berries came. My small son let them rain down on his face, and he laughed and laughed so we know they are sweet. Come and eat and don't be afraid.

My father has brought a tray of shad roe on ice from the Chesapeake. Its twin red crescents are salty as tears and placentally rich. A white bush bloomed the birth announcement. We let tiny eggs pop in our mouths like woken dreams.

My grandfather brought a box of giant California pinecones, spread-tabbed and spiny. He meant to humor us with decoration, but the needles, too, provide subtle sustenance. It is my oldest son's pride to feed them to me and watch my jaws grind them up like a factory. Sometimes he thinks I am a factory.

My grandmother brought a huge bouquet of flowers from Hawaii. They are the signs of life on other planets, blooming. The small square of white cardboard says this: I wanted to remind you of how infinite and unpredictable this is, our so-called civilization and the impulse to love.

Look in your own back yards for what to bring to the picnic. I will eat clover with you; we can become fat from the grass in your yard. We can chew dandelion leaves, roots, and flowers and fresh onion bulbs and scented honeysuckle. We cannot go wanting, so strip the prickly pear of its thorns and filet its flesh. Boil up the rose hip tea. Wrap something in the leaves of the wild grape and marinate it in mustard seed oil. Crush up your mint! The yards of America's neighborhoods are full as a dinner plate, teaming with vitamins, staples of the joyous and unafraid.

A man planted a strip of yellow daylilies along his driveway; his wife dug up the bulbs and ate them. She remarked, "Darling, I was starving." He blamed it on the squirrels.

I dreamed forty years from now the wetlands of Southern Connecticut had become a bamboo forest. A Zen gardener from Woodmont did not consider that his plantings would outlast him. He died, and armies of assertive sprouts grew up like tarot wands. The wind

from Long Island Sound blew across them. You could hear it all the way across the Sound. A folktale sprung up in Montauk about a glacier calling up ghosts of ice and stones to re-assemble and do battle on the old murrain. Winter had to use summer's voice in order to grieve its own passage.

A farmer, a poet and a philosopher went hunting whales. Do not ever think New England humorless; the region sets up these kinds of nonfictions. The bones of the earth poke up in strange places. Lumber yards show up in neighborhoods and great sections of grass in the middle of towns. Narratives of desire have been known to pass through regular cycles of budget hearings and park clean-ups like silken threads through the eyes of sharp needles; those who attend to such things are permanently amazed at the intricate patterns of stitchery. What we used to do we do still, if for no other reason. Our children walk to school, play in the street and like to tell their fortunes in the graffiti on moving trains.

This page is a nest of comings and goings. I am a bird bringing back twigs and sparkles of hair to make a season's shelter. It will teem with an urgent goodness witnessed and enjoyed by the vulnerable who share a common fate. Unlike the bird, I am fully aware that by summer's end it will be a box of dirty straw.

A vacation becomes a scourge at a moment's notice, even if the family is stable with three or six people and still in love. Leaving home involves risk; leaving home for no reason invites absurdity. Driving into Maine, on the bridge exiting New Hampshire, one sees a big, green sign proclaiming the northernmost, easternmost state of the union to be "The Way Life Should Be." This is exactly where traffic backs up.

Perhaps this is the answer to my puzzle: love is old fashioned be-

## A History of Trains

The morning train out of New Haven nears the Quarry Road trestle,  
Whines a muffled cry to fogged houses banking Oyster River.

To the captain and passengers with a view of the tracks that run,  
The colors and shapes must have seemed all wrong.

Against rust-red steel and scarred ties, her thin arms and wheat hair.  
Fingers reaching for air, eyes open to guide her landing.

When I hear the train, I remember our meeting in the principal's office  
To hear trouble more trouble about our bad and beautiful boys,

The time I papered blue flowers over yellow walls,  
Reached for bare wires calling from the bathroom light,  
Then researched the way one dies from shock.

But she was through with contemplation.  
Balanced on the bridge, she had planned perfectly  
The time between school bell and warning call.

It was early spring when she left,  
Weeks before salt air and roses could pull her from the chill  
To her straightened kitchen and our laughing boys.

This gray day, our sons grown and subdued,  
I hear the warning again and think of her, and wait for roses.

by Catherine Garlick Hildreth-Reed

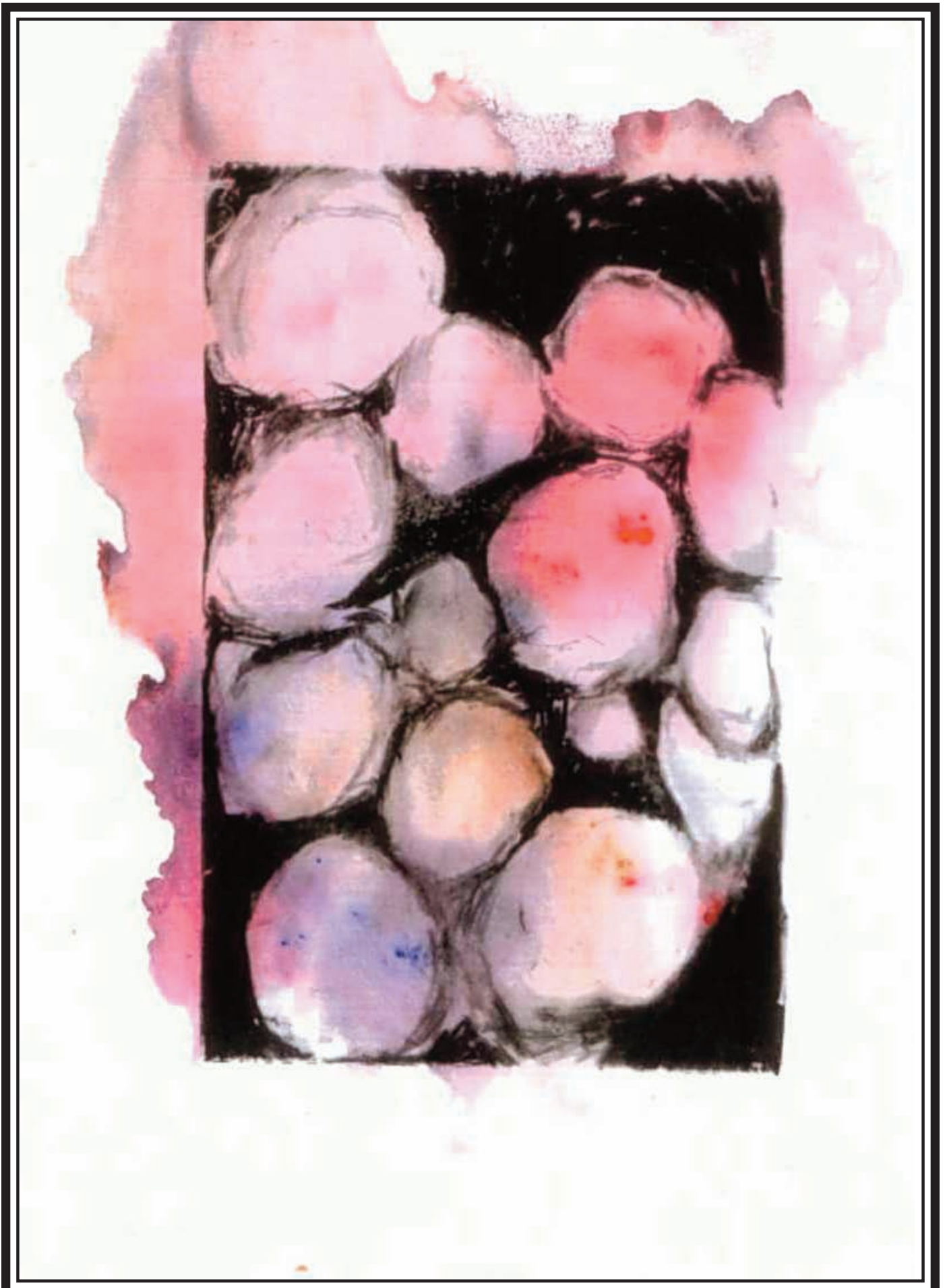
cause it involves waiting. To attend to someone or something is to wait while it reveals itself. If you want to know what to do while waiting, ask a waitress. She will pass out crayons and tell you to scribble on whatever paper is available. "Just be a second," she says as she strides calmly away. In the meantime, while you are waiting, you love her.

Some people enjoy waiting tables, though this is not any sort of permanent or firm dividing line. People who enjoy waiting tables know that an empty pocket can just as soon be filled with wadded up cash as remain empty. They know that bus-boys are great to have around even when they do not speak English. People who enjoy waiting tables pick up coins that drop onto the floor because they believe that every bit adds up to something. To enjoy waiting tables is to learn by heart the specials of the day. It means being grateful to be busy and equally grateful to rest. It means being interested in people, recognizing intuitively who wants to be doted over and who simply wants to be left alone. Waiting tables and enjoying it, one acquires firm and permanent knowledge that the world resists flattening into two, simply divided things.

A woman who was kicked in the stomach while pregnant and later run over by a car delays moving away from the source of the violence because she does not know what would happen to her cat. Tenderness is her strongest portion. She has no sanctuary. She is sanctuary. She is temporary.

While we wait, tell me about the most recent meal you ate or wanted to eat.







Woman in Mind



# Romantic Signs in Pornography

By Eric Maroney

Pornography, soft-core pornography and erotic images in particular, permeates the American culture and media so much that one might wonder what the contemporary mediated landscape might consist of without these representations of sexuality. Depictions of sex, once considered lewd and inappropriate for women and children, have been normalized and synthesized with American culture. In an article, printed in Canada's National Post, Pamela Paul discusses the prevalence of pornography, "Celebrity couples boast about their trips to the hottest strip clubs. Furthermore, characters on sitcoms extol the benefits of

cerning pornography have changed, so has the industry. Pornographic films are no longer targeted towards men only but towards women as well. There is also a large market for films and images targeted toward couples. In an article published in the Village Voice, Tristan Taormino interviews adult film star turned producer, Candida Royalle. Royalle is known for launching her own line of films for women, which she calls "erotic movies from a woman's point of view." In the article, Taormino quotes Royalle asserting, "I helped give permission to women not only to watch, but step up and create their own vision"

Tristan Taormino, in her 2005 released "House of Ass" filmed only naturally breasted actresses—representations of idealized bodies and sexualities remain. In addition to the threat of body dysphoria associated with viewing pornographic films, much of pornography—particularly that which is targeted toward couples or women—presents traditional romantic signifiers that reinforce the artificial manner in which romance is constructed. Mediated depictions of romance rely heavily upon traditional romantic signifiers; roses, wine, exotic settings, etc. These signs are used, often to sell products thus supporting a capitalist consumer-driven economy, but also reinforce conservative relational values and idealized notions of love.

*Now, The pornographic material is no longer relegated to a stack of dusty magazines to be hidden in the basement; rather it is a mainstreamed phenomenon which both men and women consume.*

porn. Even mainstream women's magazines advise women to enliven their marital bedtime routine by turning on late night Skinemax," (Paul).

Now, The pornographic material is no longer relegated to a stack of dusty magazines to be hidden in the basement; rather it is a mainstreamed phenomenon which both men and women consume. In an internet poll taken by www.queen-dom.com 81% of those surveyed who were sexually active within the last year used pornographic material to enhance or aid the sexual experience. Pornography has been moved from the subversive sphere to a healthy sphere—this, of course, refers only to heterosexual non-fetish oriented sexual depictions or "soft core" pornographic materials. Pamela Paul concludes the introduction to her article affirming that "Pornography, we are told, is good for you, and especially good for relationships" (Paul).

As individuals' conceptions con-

*Woman in Mind*

(Taormino). Certainly pornography is being used in the bedroom to enhance intimacy and relationships. Women too are now invited to consume such films and images as pornography has become a significant element of the contemporary mediated landscape.

Considering that pornographic films and images have been moved from the basement to the bedroom, these representations of sexuality now maintain greater influence over peoples' expectations of relationships. One can expect a certain amount of body dysphoria associated with couples who watch erotic films together. Female partners may be made to feel unattractive or unfeminine compared to large breasted slender penthouse actresses, while male partners may feel inferior compared to the stamina and size of the actors. Though some film producers have made attempts to stray away from these traditionally signified images of "sexy"—for example

Although roses do not ensure a 25-year commitment and responsible fatherhood, they do suggest and contribute to the ideological notion of romance. In examining several contemporary pornographic films, "Sexspheare," "Intercourse with the Vampire" and "The House of Ass." one notes the film-makers' reliance on romantic signs to enhance their products' marketability and appeal to couples. The aforementioned signs—roses, wine, exotic settings—arise repeatedly in such films.

## Semiotics in Pornography

Semiotics is the study of words, sounds or images as signs for ideas. Originated and developed by some of the following theorists; Charles Sanders Peirce, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, semiotics or semiology is the study of signs, both individually and

grouped in sign systems and emphasizes the study of how meaning is made and understood. In pornography a breast is not just a portion of a woman's body but is suggestive of arousal, sexuality, violence, maternity, objectification, etc. The prevalence of romantic signs in pornography indicates that the mediated concept of romance is both arousing and that the films seek to reinforce the power and significance of the signs. A rose is not a necessary element to a pornographic film. One can achieve the desired effect of sexual arousal by the mere depiction of nude bodies—though, here to, the role of semiotics is observed as bodies (whole or in part) are signs for sex, procreation, power, pain, intercourse etc. The presence of the

sex is great otherwise.” Here, literary humor is used to present the film but it is followed by an arousing and raunchy disclaimer intended to titillate the viewer (much in the vein of Shakespeare himself). “Sexspeare” is a particularly interesting film because of the amount of romantic signs coupled with the bawdy parody.

The first scene, a lusty rendition of Romeo and Juliet presents an abundance of romantic signs. Romeo, standing at the balcony is dressed in a ruffled poets' shirt, while Juliet wears a silk negligee and a crown of beads. Romeo watches as Juliet lounges on a velvet comforter surrounded by roses, wine, and velvet curtains. The scene, though clearly shot on a tight budget as many pornographic films are, is indicative of a castle and evokes the balcony scene in Shake-

“Would a rose by any other name smell so sweet.” The line coupled with the phallus combines two signs which belong to different sign systems thus creating a new meaning. The phallus, suggestive of power, eroticism, sex, and control is meshed with the connotations of Shakespeare's lovesick Juliet. Interestingly, the line delivered by pornographic Juliet addresses the issue of semiotics. A rose by another name would not smell as sweet because rose, the word-image-sign, carries whole layers of meaning with it then perhaps daffodil. Since the history of language cannot be erased, a daffodil cannot be as sweet as a rose just as pornographic Juliet cannot be as romantic as Shakespearean Juliet, though the invocation of the famous lover does contribute to the development of the scene.

## *As Juliet caresses the phallus, she questions “Would a rose by any other name smell so sweet?”*

rose implies the existence of romance, a relationship beyond the act of intercourse. For couples, mediated representations of sexuality may require a richer or more complex grouping of signs wherein the representation of sexuality becomes safe or healthy as it is relegated to a relational or romantic sphere. Romantic signs aid in the achievement of such.

### **Film Analysis**

“Sexspeare,” directed by Shawn Ricks, is an erotic parody of Shakespeare's best known plays. The film, released in 1999, opens with a series of photographs of European castles flashing across the screen as credits role. The viewer is then introduced to the descendent of William Sexspeare, an individual who leads the viewer throughout the film. The narrator introduces the film saying “a life without love is a hollow and baseless affair, but the

speare's Romeo and Juliet. The scene continues as scantily clad Juliet cries out “Romeo, Romeo, where for art thou Romeo,” echoing direct dialogue from the famous love story. Sexual parody on the Shakespeare play continues as Juliet searches for Romeo finding a large phallus with the name Romeo printed at its base above the mock copyright, “made in Mantua, Italy.” As Juliet caresses the phallus, she questions “Would a rose by any other name smell so sweet?”

This scene, rich in romantic signs, appeals to both male and female partners. As conventionally espoused, the sex, breasts, and scantily clad Juliet appeals to the male viewer, while the plot—though a parody—appeals to the female viewer. Here, the presence of the roses, wine, velvet curtains and the echoing of Shakespeare's lines indicate a relationship between the actors more substantial than a mere sexual encounter. Consider the line delivered by pornographic Juliet, as she strokes the phallus:

In observing pornographic Romeo and Juliet at play, the viewer is reminded of the Shakespearean lovers. The names, signs themselves, cannot be divorced from their literary and historical significance thus contributing an element of romance to the pornographic film. Even the lighting is suggestive of romance. The dim lit room, again a sign, indicates a level of intimacy one would not expect between casual sex partners. Here, pornographic Romeo and Juliet are no longer actors engaging in intercourse for profit, but a true pair of lovers the viewer has stumbled upon.

Similar to the use of romantic signifiers in “Sexspeare,” “Intercourse with a Vampire” relies on romantic notions to create a product which is acceptable for both male and female viewers. Like “Sexspeare,” “Intercourse with a Vampire” plays of the romantic thriller “Interview with a Vampire” starring Brad Pitt. In the opening scene the viewer observes several men and women gathered

## For Linda

: after viewing the documentary *Inside Deep Throat*

Twelve hundred dollars for  
sixty two minutes. In and out,  
up and down; that trick  
he taught you – your pimp lover  
who showed you the ropes  
then left you twisting in the breeze  
like a broken kite.

Was there some break in the booze-  
some drug free hour when you  
faced the past and hated the future?  
Shoulder to shoulder with Gloria Steinem;  
Lina Lovelace – the shining diamond  
in the tiara of feminism.

So why, why did you do it?  
Hypnotized, battered, coerced?  
Or maybe you did it  
just because you could.  
Like a kid on top of the highest slide  
in the playground.

*By Marilyn Terlaga*

in a large house or mansion. The lead actress wears platinum blonde hair to contrast with a sleek black cocktail dress. Her partner, a tall angular gentleman, is dressed in a tuxedo and wears his hair slicked back—evocative of Carlton Heston. Much of the film, including this first scene, is filmed in black and white. The actors gather near a fireplace as another woman brings a tray of wine and glasses. The room is complimented with roses which lie on a table, candles, and soft music.

The presence of romantic signs establishes a mood suggestive of early black and white filmed romances. The film's title and the romantic signs are intended to appeal to the female viewer's sense of sexuality as she is reminded of the handsome Brad Pitt. The mixing of sign groupings as indicated by the title allows for the male partner to enjoy a more fetish oriented film while his part-

ner remains comfortable with the viewing as well. The wine, the roses, the fireplace, and costume are not essential for the intent of the film. The viewer is not watching a love story. The film is intended to titillate and arouse, but still one finds the mis-en-scene brimming with romantic signs. These signs indicate a level of commitment between the actors, thus rendering the film safe.

Tristan Taormino, writer and producer of the "House of Ass." is aware of the use of romantic signs in her film. The film, shot as a mock reality show, depicts six porn-stars living in a house together (written in the vein of MTV's "The Real World") but the "Fire Place" scene in particular is constructed with conventional romantic signifiers. In the director's commentary feature, Taormino claims the scene was intended to poke fun at over-the-top romantic signs in other pornographic films, yet the actors

claim to have enjoyed it. When asked what their favorite scenes were and why, Mr. Marcus and Keeani Lei both indicated the fireplace scene because it was "romantic."

The fireplace scene features Mr. Marcus, a muscular dark-skinned man, coupled with Lei, a petite Asian woman. The lighting is soft as Lei lies on a shag rug by the fireplace. Her size compared to Mr. Marcus creates a sense of vulnerability which is eased by the presence of romantic signs. In addition to the romantic signifiers, the viewer is given the actors' opinion that the scene was "romantic." Here the signs of the fireplace, the rug and the lighting are given more weight and power. If the actors feel the scene is romantic then the viewer must feel the same.

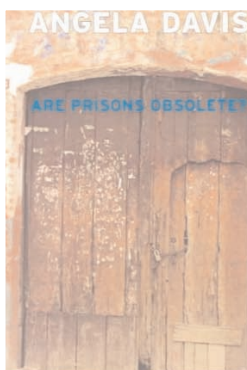
Romantic signs in pornographic films increase the marketability of these products. In constructing erotic images with conventional romantic signifiers the cultural taboos against sexually explicit material are nullified and made obsolete. Female partners are made to feel it is acceptable to participate in the viewing of such films and images while male partners are given permission to do so more openly. This phenomenon can both help and hurt actual relationships as expectations are increased with the viewing of such material. As discussed in Katz & Lui's "False Love Syndrome" as well as in Eidelstine & Epstein's "Relational Belief Inventory" couples who believe having great sex or easy sex is essential are at risk for hurting their relationships. The viewing of highly romanticized pornographic material increases this risk. Mediated representations of sexuality make it difficult for the individual to distinguish sex from romance from relationships. Certainly the three coincide, but great sex and roses do not necessitate a healthy relationship.

# Books Review

*Students in Tricia Lin's "Research Methods in Women's Studies," a core requirement for the Southern Connecticut State University Masters degree, were encouraged to explore ways in which women's lived experiences are portrayed by academic and mainstream writers. The following book reviews were selected from Lin's spring 2007 students.*

## **ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE?**

By Angela Y. Davis  
115 pages. Seven Stories Press: An Open Media Book  
\$8.95



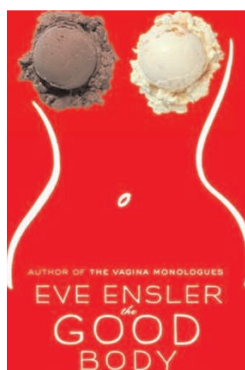
What if there were no prisons in the world we live in? And, going deeper—what kind of people would we be if we lived in a world where addiction is treated regardless of economic level or race instead of ignored; where schools were regarded as genuine places of learning instead of holding facilities complete with armed guards; where lawbreakers encountered conflict resolution strategies as "punishment" for their crime instead of solitary incarceration? Angela Y. Davis, the revolutionary activist, author and scholar, seeks to answer these questions and the subsequent "why and how's" that surface, in her book, Are Prisons Obsolete? Davis, a Professor of History of Consciousness at University of California Santa Cruz, has been an anti-prison activist since her own brushes with the law in the early 1970's. In this book, Davis argues for the abolition of the prison system entirely. She grounds her argument in the racist, sexist and corporate roots of the corrections system of America.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Johnson

## **THE GOOD BODY**

By Ensler, Eve  
112 pages. Random House Publishing Company \$10.95

With this work, Eve Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues*, offers an unflinching critique of American culture and popular society and its impact on women. The goal of her book is to present varying perspectives on weight, body image, and appearance. Included are interviews with an African American teenage girl at Fat Camp; Helen Gurley Brown of *Cosmopolitan* magazine; actress and Lancome spokeswoman Isabella Rossellini; ex-models; body art designers; and others.



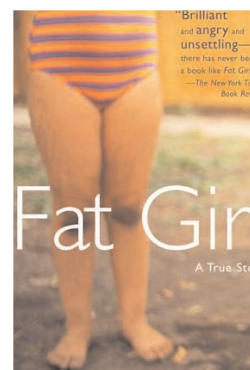
Each woman interviewed addresses her individual insecurities while also describing how she made peace with her own body in spite of societal pressures. One of the most interesting components of the book is the inclusion of the individual journey Ensler shares with her readers and her personal account of her struggle to accept herself and love her body despite what she sees as her imperfections. Her personal and valuable insights help to connect us to her, and to all of the other women she interviews who share their individual stories and experiences.

Reviewed by Kate Stephenson

## **FAT GIRL: A TRUE STORY**

By Moore, Judith  
208 pages. Hudson Street Press  
\$13.00

Moore's memoir addresses the impact her obesity has had on her life. She both embraces and loathes her fat and looks at the ways it both protects and alienates her from the outside world.



She discusses her love/hate relationship with food and exercise and their effects on her interpersonal relationships – including her relationships with lovers, friends and her children. Moore's story is told with a sad humor, a sense of hard fought, exhausted and reluctant acceptance of who she is and her recognition of her own responsibilities and her individual ability to make changes in her life.

The most eye-opening and insightful component of Moore's story comes from her analysis of the way society views obesity and the ways in which behavior towards women who are obese is different than behavior towards thin or average-sized women. While the author may seem overly self-critical at times, readers must attempt to put themselves in Moore's shoes to truly appreciate the painful admissions she makes about her life.

Reviewed by Kate Stephenson

# BETWEEN WOMEN: *DOMESTICS AND THEIR EMPLOYERS*

By Judith Rollins

256 pages. Temple University Press, \$24.95

Reviewed by Jevette Polycarpe

Between Women: Domestics and Their Employers is an in-depth look at the relationships between domestic service employers and their employees. Using occupational commentaries, interviews, and reflections by twenty Caucasian-American employers, twenty African-American employees, selected agency representatives, and her own personal experience, Judith Rollins draws parallels between the domestic work of today and that of antiquity. Rollins explores historical accounts of domestic work in India, Peru, and South Africa. While the low wages, long hours and lack of benefits Rollins references can be viewed as expected disadvantages of unskilled labor, her historical contextualization of domestic work relationships make it clear that these disadvantages of domestic work are historical traditions that indicate political and philosophical abstractions of identity and spatiality.

Although it is honest work, domestic labor has almost always been stigmatized. In many homogenous populations it gradually became associated with a certain caste of people - women. America has always been heterogeneous, and domestic servitude has typically been relegated to those with pigmented skin and/or female bodies, because "employers instituted various kinds of symbols and forms of behaviors designed to increase distance" between the superiors and the inferiors (Rollins 52). Using historical information, Rollins shows that this system of superiority and inferiority is intrinsically based on "differentness" (52). In a society where such a system is sustained legally and socially, women who seek social recognition or advancement submit to this prevailing construct despite their inclination to do so or not. After all, identity, as it is constructed in America, is distinguished by the role one plays in oppression. Thus, Rollins shows that the politics of racism and sexism enables Caucasian women to understand themselves differently from African-American women. White skin offers Caucasian women an escape from oppression, and Rollins shows that Caucasian

women have a better chance than women of color at reconstructing, and redefining their identities within the debilitating confines of the prevailing system of superiority and inferiority. The historical and social essentialism of the relationship between the Caucasian female employer and the African-American female domestic employee reflects:

the self-enhancing satisfactions that emanate from having the presence of an inferior and validating the employers' lifestyle, ideology, and social world from their familial interrelations to the economically and racially stratified system in which they live. (156)

Rollins reveals the relationships between domestic work and the politics of identity as well as the politics of spatiality. The female domestic phenomenon suggests that women's inability to proactively etch out a space for themselves is deeply seated in patriarchal and racist spatial arrangements. Because the relationship of females within the domestic arena parallels male manifestations of dominance, it must be acknowledged that this relationship disproves the idea that women and men operate differently in common environments. Because everybody yearns for personal space, which equates to visibility, the fact that women assume the character traits of the patriarchal and racist dominant groups is not surprising. Rollins uses commentaries by Black employees and personal reflections from her experience as a domestic employee to show that the role of Caucasian women in domestics yields them visibility. However, for poor women of color no such space exists. Rollins notes that this inability to become visible is "the strongest affront to [the] dignity [of] a human being" (209).

Rollins' analysis of the underlying political agendas of both the female employer and household worker affirms the paradoxical adage *the more things change, the more they stay the same*. By contextualizing this relationship Rollins shows that the need for Black household workers has



everything to do with racial superiority and the need for space.

The weakest aspect of this study is that it lacks balance. Rollins assumes the role of domestic employee but never the role of employer. Also, she examines the relationship between Caucasian employers and Black employees but not between Black employers and Caucasian employees. Further, Between Women: Domestics and Their Employers calls attention to issues without reconciling them. For instance Rollins uses the term exploitation to refer to the domestic relationship of female employers and employees. There is an inherent conflict here because exploitation exists in the presence of free will.

Rollins also states that little research has been dedicated to domestic workers suggesting that feminism, in spite of its claims to the advancement of all women, is still a self-aggrandizing movement facilitating female elitism. Lastly, the study suggests that the domestic worker relationship involves paternalism. Thus, the irreconcilable questions are: if women are endorsing such paternalistic attitudes, is sisterhood a figment of optimism? Or is it an essential aspect of womanhood? In any event, the book with all of its strengths and weaknesses is very much a shining light in a dark area of feminist research.

# LIVING TWO LIVES: *Married to a Man & In Love with a Woman*

By Joanne Fleisher

193 pages. Alyson Books, \$15.95

Reviewed by Christian Moran

Joanne Fleisher enters the field of works on so called late-blooming lesbians from a position of unique insight. In addition to experiencing a mid-life change in sexuality herself, she is a therapist specializing in women facing this situation and has, for the past nine years, moderated an Internet message board for married women attracted to women.

*Living Two Lives* is a “self-help” manual for married women who may be in any stage of awakening to their attractions to other women. Fleisher expertly guides the reader through each stage, from the first chapter, *The Questioning Begins* to the final chapter, *The Rest of Your Life*. Each chapter contains quotations from Fleisher’s Internet message board and detailed advice from her perspective as a therapist. Frequently insights from her personal experience are included as well. At the conclusion of each chapter Fleisher addresses “What You Can Do Now;” practical steps to help the reader progress through the stages of self-discovery.

Feminist, but not stridently so, the book arises from a number of fundamental beliefs. One of these is that a woman has the right to “explore and express her authentic sexuality without the burden of shame” (23). Rarely will a married woman come suddenly and with certainty to the conclusion that she is a lesbian. She is likely to be thrown into turmoil and feel unable to trust her previously established beliefs and values. Fleisher writes with the purpose of empowering women to seek the personal growth that results from embarking on this difficult journey. She notes that homophobia in our society contributes greatly to preventing a woman from examining her situation honestly.

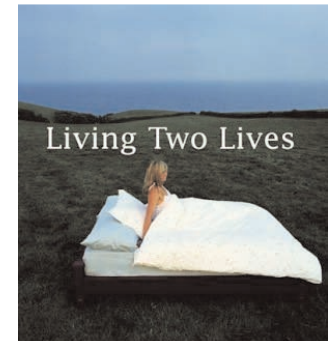
Fleisher spares no ink when it comes to the topic of honesty. She stresses that honesty is essential for progress in this transition. One’s

needs, both emotional and physical, must be examined and honored. When it comes to others, Fleisher counsels caution. Being honest with husbands is an important step but women are advised to carefully consider his potential reactions. In the case of an abusive husband or, if a woman fears that lesbian identity may threaten her right to custody of her children, Fleisher’s advice is to reveal nothing before seeking legal counsel. With one’s children, she advises, “Honesty is important, but I suggest that if there is no pressing reason for your child to know about your sexuality, don’t get into it while you still live with your husband” (117). A similar approach is recommended with others: “Speaking the truth to significant people in our life is empowering if you’re ready to do so.” (182).

Others involved in a woman’s transition may vehemently disagree with Fleisher’s advice that she adhere to her own time frame. She includes quotes from husbands and children who claim a right to the “truth” at every stage, even the earliest. Fleisher holds her ground. “Openness is important—but on your own timetable” (116). Her belief is that only the individual woman should dictate the moment for honesty. For example when a woman’s teenaged son faulted her for remaining closeted for several years, Fleisher counseled, “She could not tell him something she wasn’t prepared to tell his father or possibly even admit to herself” (119).

Fleisher is similarly steadfast in her belief that this process of awakening is a positive life event. The book is an antidote to women caught between extreme societal pressures to put their needs last and the pull toward self-actualization. Fleisher believes others in a woman’s life will benefit from her transition as well: “They will learn about strength, conviction, and self-respect by observing your ability to stay true to yourself without forcing their involvement” (129).

Fleisher does not gloss over the process or shy away from tragic outcomes. Guilt, pain, trauma and struggle are prevalent themes in the



*Married to a Man  
and  
In Love With a Woman*

Joanne Fleisher

stories of many women’s awakenings. She includes several stories of women who came to regret their actions or hasty decisions. Fleisher’s steady counsel to women is to “be thoughtful and patient. If you take the time to evaluate your actions, each new venture will add to your self-awareness” (169).

A great strength of *Living Two Lives* is its tolerance of a wide range of outcomes for the late-blooming lesbian. Possible outcomes she describes are working on marriage issues, recommitting to the marriage, “in-house separation,” postponing divorce because of children or for other reasons, maintaining the marriage while dating women, and living independently with a full transition to lesbian identity. Although she writes without moralizing, it is clear that Fleisher’s heart lies with those who arrive at this last outcome. She encourages a thorough and honest resolution of the exploration in spite of the many challenges women face. She notes, “You won’t know what you are capable of until you try” (168).

At once practical and nurturing, *Living Two Lives* is an important resource for those who seek to make the full transition from married life to lesbian identity. She reminds us that, while suffering is required for personal growth, we stand to gain that most precious of life’s gifts: honesty and intimacy in all of our relationships.

# The 18th Annual Women's Studies Conference

## "Girls' Culture & Girls' Studies: Surviving, Reviving, Celebrating Girlhood"

To be held on the campus of Southern Connecticut State University  
Friday and Saturday, October 17 and 18, 2008

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### INVITATION FOR PROPOSALS ON INTERDISCIPLINARY SCHOLARLY AND CREATIVE WORK

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The 18th Annual Women's Studies Conference at Southern Connecticut State University explores girlhood. What does it mean to be a girl? Who defines girlhood in an age when puberty and sexualization are happening at younger ages? How do girls assert their own identity in an increasingly medicated and consumerist culture which targets girls as a prime audience? Why are U.S. girls preoccupied with perfection? What challenges do girls across races, classes, religions, nations, and cultures face in an ever more globalized world? What is the relationship between girls and feminism? What effect can feminism have on constructions of boyhood and masculinity and how in turn can this affect girls? In the 18th annual SCSU Women's Studies conference, we will take a close look at girls' culture and girls' studies, among the most vibrant areas in women's studies. The Conference Committee invites individuals, groups, scholars, feminists, activists, girls and all to submit proposals that address topics related to all aspects of girlhood.

**Proposal Format:** Faculty, students, staff, administrators, community activists from all disciplines and fields are invited to submit proposals for individual papers, complete sessions, panels, or round tables. Poster sessions, performance pieces, video recordings, and other creative works are also encouraged. For individual papers, please submit a one-page abstract. For complete panels, submit a one-page abstract for each presentation plus an overview on the relationship among individual components. For the poster sessions and art work, submit a one-page overview. All proposals must include speakers' name(s), affiliation(s), and contact information (address, E-mail, and telephone number). Please also indicate preference for Friday afternoon, Saturday morning, or Saturday afternoon; all attempts will be made to honor schedule requests.

**Panels:** Each 75 minute session usually includes three presenters and a session moderator, but individual presenters may request an entire session for a more substantial paper or presentation. Presenters are encouraged, though not required, to form their own panels. The conference committee will group individual proposals into panels and assign a moderator. Please indicate in your contact information if you are willing to serve as a moderator.

**Posters, Art Displays, and Slide Presentations:** A poster presentation consists of an exhibit of materials that report research activities or informational resources in visual and summary form. An art display consists of a depiction of feminist concerns in an artistic medium. Both types of presentations provide a unique platform that facilitates personal discussion of work with interested colleagues and allows meeting attendees to browse through highlights of current research. Please indicate in your proposal your anticipated needs in terms of space, etc.

We also invite your ideas and suggestions. Conference sessions will juxtapose cultural, generational, and geopolitical perspectives in order to construct feminist renditions of girls' cultures, histories, and representations. Expect fun through meals, performance, and poetry slam, with girls and their allies speaking of their struggles and power.

**In keeping with the conference theme, suggested topics include but are not limited to:**

Girls and Pop Culture  
Construction of Girlhood  
Media and Girls' Culture  
Girls & Cutting/Self-Mutilation  
Politics of Girls' Studies  
Girls & Leadership  
Women's Studies & Girls' Studies  
Girls & Child Labor  
Race & Class in Girls' Studies  
Girls & Performance  
Coming of Age Globally  
Gender Research & Girls  
Body Image and Girls  
Girls & Disabilities  
Girls & Sexuality  
Girls & Ink.  
Human Trafficking & Girls  
Girls & Religion  
Indigenous Women and Girls  
Human Rights of Girls  
Girls & Sports

Chick Lit  
Girls & Resistance  
Globalization and Girlhood  
Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Girls' Studies  
Construction of "Tween" Agers/Girls  
Violence against Girls & Women  
Girls and Gangs  
Girl Power and Politics  
Transnational Adoption of Girls  
Girls' Studies in Academe  
Girl Power and Feminism/Anti-Feminism  
Growing up Incarcerated  
Girls and Grassroots Activism  
Girls across/between Worlds  
Parenting/Raising Girls  
American Girls and Beyond  
Girls as Parents  
Reviving Ophelia, Surviving Ophelia, Resisting Ophelia  
Representations of Girls

**Please submit proposals and supporting materials to:**

**Women's Studies Conference Committee  
Women's Studies Program, EN B 229  
Southern Connecticut State University  
501 Crescent Street  
New Haven, CT 06515**

Or via email to:

**womenstudies@southernct.edu** with attention to Conference Committee. If you have any questions, please call the Women's Studies office at (203) 392-6133.

The Annual Women's Studies Conference at SCSU is self-supporting; all presenters can pre-register at the discounted presenter's fee, not exceeding \$110.00 for both days, \$60.00 for one day. The fee includes all costs for supporting materials, entrance to keynote events, and all meals and beverage breaks.

**Submission Deadline:**

**Notification of Committee Decision:**

**Postmarked by Thursday, June 12, 2008**

**Mailed by Friday, July 18, 2008**

### **Letter to the Editors**

Letters should be addressed to Letter to the Editors, Woman In Mind, Engleman 229B 501 Crescent St., New Haven CT, 06515.

The e-mail address is [womaninmind@gmail.com](mailto:womaninmind@gmail.com). All letters should include the writer's name, address and daytime telephone number. We are unable to acknowledge or return unpublished letters. Letter may be edited for length and clarity.