Dear faculty and staff members,

Dear students,

February and March are always a busy time of the year. We celebrate black history month, which is immediately followed by women’s history month. We marked both months with a lecture by Twilight-Scholars-in-Residence Charlotte Farlane ’09 and Felipe Pruneda Senties ’07, founders of the Men against Violence student group, invited different men on campus to wear a white ribbon as a sign of their commitment. They exhibited pictures of these men in the main lobby of the library, a place with heavy foot traffic. Their example undoubtedly inspired others.

Pierce Baker and Houston Baker, who gave a moving account of overcoming the trauma of rape as a couple. Houston Baker, former president of the Modern Language Association, stressed how important it is for men to actively oppose violence against women. As you can see on this page, some men on this campus already have become active. For the Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender Violence in November 2007, Micah Mac-

Aaron Gensler ‘08 and Maegan Mishico ’08 directed a spirited version of Eve Ensler’s ‘75 *Vagina Monologues*. The production raised $3280 for WomenSafe, Addison County’s sexual and domestic violence prevention program.

Women’s History Month was marked by a whirlwind of events. We celebrated International Women’s Day with girls from Addison County. We awarded the Alison Fraker Prize for best paper written on the subject of women’s and gender studies to Kate Silbert ’08. Writer Julia Alvarez talked about the multifaceted nature of the *quinceañera* celebration for 15-year-old Latina girls. Andrea Olsen, professor of dance, reflected on how our attitudes about our bodies affect our lives. Alumna and trustee Pam Tanner Boll ’78 presented her new documentary on artists who are also mothers. The film investigates the question of how we balance the analytical with the emotional and creative sides of our lives. Former Vermont governor Madeleine Kunin explained what it takes for women to run for office and win. A topical issue indeed!

Have a great rest of the semester!

Karin Hanta

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**Inside This Issue**
- Faculty & Student Achievements
- Charlotte & Houston Baker
- Fraker Prize to Kate Silbert
- Julia Alvarez & ALC
- Pam Tanner Boll’s Documentary
- Madeleine Kunin talk

Karin Hanta, Editor  khanta@middlebury.edu
**WAGS Faculty Achievements**


**Louisa Burnham** (History) recently published *So Great a Light, So Great a Smoke: The Beguin Heretics of Languedoc* (Cornell University Press, 2008). In parts, this book explores the significant roles women played in Beguin resistance to the inquisitors of Languedoc at the beginning of the fourteenth century, as martyrs, stops on an “underground railroad,” and as visionary leaders of the community.


**Darién Davis** (History) and Carlota Caulfield, poet and professor of literature at Mills College, edited *A Companion to U.S. Latino Literatures* (Boydell and Brewer, 2007). The book features women and men who have shaped the diverse Latino literatures in the 19th and 20th centuries.

**Kathryn Kramer** (English & American Literatures) was awarded a Bogliasco Fellowship by the Bogliasco Foundation to spend a month at the Liguria Study Center in Italy during her 2007-2008 leave. During this residency she will be working on a project entitled “The Rise and Fall of the Republic of West Delphi.” She describes this book as “a memoir, with forays into fiction” about a village community in Vermont during the 1980s, “an exploration of the meaning of place and its relationship to community.”


**Sujata Moorti** (Women’s and Gender Studies) recently published two articles: “Imaginary Homes, Transplanted Traditions: The Transnational Optic and the Production of Tradition in Indian Television” in the *Journal of Creative Communications* 2, no. 1 (2007): 1-21; and “The Perilous and Imperial Black Family Romance” in *Genders* 46 (2007). She also edited the Special Issue of Social Semiotics with Jenny Kitzinger. In addition, she co-authored the introduction to the issue entitled “Judging Black Masculinities: Media Spectacles of Celebrities on Trial,” 17, 4 (2007): 413-415. Professor Moorti also gave the keynote speech at the The Newcomb Center Symposium on Campus Violence at Tulane University in November 2007. The title of her speech was “Sexualized Bodies, Consenting Cultures: Reassessing Media Images.”

**Kevin Moss** (Russian) was a Lillian S. Robinson Scholar at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute at Concordia University in Montreal. This award provided additional support for his 2007-2008 leave and funded a short-term residency and talk at the Institute this spring where he continued work on a project entitled “Three Gay Films from Former Yugoslavia.”


Student Achievements

Wells for Afghanistan

Shabana Basij-Rasikh ‘11 won a $10,000 grant for a Peace Project from the Davis Foundation. This summer, she will travel to her native Afghanistan and commission projects to drill six wells that will give thousands of people access to clean water. Based on her previous experience with setting up a school and well in her ancestral village of Qalatik, the project will be concluded in a record time of three weeks. “Afghanistan very recently has faced years of drought,” Shabana says. “A main cause of illness is the lack of access to clean drinking water. People travel miles to obtain it. Not long ago, I, along with my brother and sister, had to carry buckets of clean water to my home from far away. I still see little children in my neighborhood and around the city slogging buckets of water. Six strategically placed wells will reduce illness considerably - especially for children.”

Crafts for Elm Street

Liana Sideli (‘08) received a $200 grant from the Volunteer Service Council to do craft projects with the residents of the Elm Street young parents’ home in Middlebury. For the past year, a group of students has formed a bond with the residents of Elm Street and their children, helping them with chores and babysitting. Students and residents plan to make scrapbooks to preserve early memories for the children.

D.C. Conference Grant

Kolbe Franklin ‘08 was chosen to be a participant in the “One Voice: Reproductive Health and Population Summit” in Washington, D.C. from April 11 to 14. The conference is sponsored by the Sierra Club, Advocates for Youth, SIECUS, and the Feminist Majority Foundation. Kolbe received a full conference grant after submitting an essay about the role of young people in creating a sustainable world with universal access to reproductive and sexual health services.

VCC Award

Hallie Fox ‘09 won Middlebury’s Commitment to Service and Engagement Award from Vermont Campus Compact in honor of her service to Middlebury’s “Sister-to-Sister” program. A three-year participant in the program, Hallie has mentored two local girls, managed monthly events, and co-organized an annual summit that involved workshops and discussions groups for more than 50 girls in the community.

Ropes Course Grant

Kate Silbert ‘08 received a $200 grant from the Volunteer Service Council so that middle school girls participating in the Sister-to-Sister program and their Middlebury College mentors can go on a ropes course at Bolton Valley. The event will take place on May 3. The activities are designed to boost the physical confidence of all participants.

KC ACTF Design Award

Aaron Gensler ’08 received the Region 1 Barbizon Scene Design Award from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for her sets for Rinne Groff’s Five Hysterical Girls Theorem. Winning this award allows her to compete in April at the National KC ACTF Barbizon Scene Design competition at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.
Events in Review

A SONG AGAINST SILENCE

Felipe Pruneda Senties ’07 responds to a presentation by Twilight Scholars Charlotte Pierce Baker and Houston Baker entitled “A Healing Journey” on overcoming the trauma of rape.

Allow me an approximation to describe the effect of rape: the victim-survivor carries inside the corpse of her spirit, its tissue necrotized by violence and hatred. Nobody wants to file a police report from that place, even when it becomes imperative to do so to fight gender violence. Without people like Charlotte Pierce-Baker, a Professor of English at Vanderbilt University and a survivor of rape, I wouldn’t chance the description above, or any other. But again, it is necessary that all attempt this exercise. Language, as Dr. Pierce-Baker demonstrates, needs to change in order to engage with the very real issue of gender violence. And the engagement is essential.

If rape is a spiritual death, then on the night of Monday, February 25th, attendees at Dana Auditorium were told the story of two souls that resonated until each came back to life. Or rather, in the case of Dr. Pierce-Baker and her husband Houston A. Baker, Jr., I dare say the tragedy that befell them could not destroy them completely. A pair of brilliant scholars, the Bakers never failed to express a love for life (and for each other) that makes one believe they’re impervious to spiritual annihilation. They are certainly people who have learned to love the world despite its imperfections and that find happiness in the struggle to improve it. I will hold onto these assumptions – even though I recognize them as such – because their song (I dare not call it a “lecture,” for their talk was certainly an entirely different creature) persuaded me with its sincerity, its beauty and its humor. Indeed, they played music together.

And music they needed, because their enemy was silence. Dr. Pierce-Baker’s disarming clear, austerely beautiful prose provided the narrative of their journey of healing. To complement her, Dr. Baker supplied his poetry to convey the emotional atmosphere of the tale with uncommon precision. The prose gives us the facts and arranges them into a compelling account, while the poetry allows us to glare at the wounds, the pain, and the recovery as vast landscapes.

Here, art and literature are not frivolous, but vitally utilitarian. They are tools of survival of a most fundamental sort. Not therapy, but a serum that enters the mind through the eyes and the ears.

Dr. Pierce-Baker’s book, Surviving the Silence: Black Women’s Stories of Rape, stands tall as a work that packs a multiple wallop: it brings to light tales formerly stifled by gender and racial inequalities, it charts the author’s own process of healing and questions the effectiveness of conventional approaches to constructing rape narratives. In her tale of coming to terms with rape through communication – with others and with oneself, for Dr. Pierce-Baker listened to her own refusal to be defeated – she identifies two silences to be broken. One, as indicated by Dr. Pierce-Baker’s initial wish to tell nobody, is the survivor’s silence. Speaking up was the first step in her medical, legal and psychological excursion to her current state of informed happiness. More strikingly, she had to overcome guilt: she actually had to tell herself that being raped was not her fault. From that came the further support of a sense of community. When she spoke up, others soon followed. After all, their being shared is the fate of all stories, for as T.S. Elliot put it, they are “tools for life.” Her book and her activism distribute these invaluable instruments.

The other silence is that of the man, the partner, and here is where the music not only heals but also prevents. I had the pleasure to speak to the Bakers during a lunchtime gathering at Chellis House, and how men’s participation in events such as Take Back the Night changes their dynamic.
A Song Against Silence continued

There is an implicit acknowledgement that the perpetrators of these crimes were men, and because of that, it is men who must play a key role in stopping them. It is everyone’s responsibility to rage against gender violence, but men’s increases due to the involvement of their peers. It is not enough to simply not commit the kind of rape that is recognized as such – namely, the random act of brutality. Sexual violence has quieter, more casual manifestations, and they all must be openly rejected – be they physical, verbal, cultural – even among friends and colleagues. Dr. Baker does this, and became unpopular with members of his own sex for his resolve – a product of the same desire from which his willingness to stand by his wife came.

I would like to see Dr. Baker’s stance not as espousing a “new masculinity,” but an existing one that must become the norm. For all the bravery he displays, this is not a case of a man saving his woman or any other knight-in-shining-armor-style fantasy. Dr. Pierce-Baker did not need to be rescued. Her own strength made her recovery possible. He simply encouraged and nurtured it, just as his verses harmonized with her storytelling. The artistic and emotional teamwork resulted in the continuation of two outstanding careers in academia and activism (Dr. Pierce-Baker’s book actually made history for being the first of its kind) and the strengthening of a relationship where jokes and smiles have left little room for the traces of the catastrophe. They are there, but they’ve been built upon: they have ceased to be ruins.

In short, their song is simultaneously a guide to and example of loving solidarity, and a tribute to endurance: two most gender-blind qualities.

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LET’S TALK ABOUT SEX

by Tina Coll and Nick Palmeri

Sex educator Jay Friedman with a supersize condom.

In February and March, a group of campus organizations (Chellis House, the Office for Health and Wellness, MOQA, ALC, FAM, Women of Color, MCAB, and Cook Commons) joined forces to take a look at a taboo subject at Middlebury: sex. Students engaged in fun activities such as speed dating and a sex toy workshop, but also learned about gender fluidity in a gender identities panel mediated by Professor Laurie Essig. As a first in the history of the student-run dinner night Dolci, the event was a gender neutral blind date experience.

Sex educator Jay Friedman gave a keynote talk to a full house on the “sexual state of affairs” in the United States today. Friedman’s biggest point is that sex education in America ranges from awkward to non-existent. The tendency for young people today to turn to “Sex & the City” or locker room anatomists for information is symptomatic of an inadequate education system, a problem that Friedman is actively trying to remedy. His presentation was a healthier alternative, and he spoke honestly about one of the most tabooed issues in the United States.

The symposium succeeded in encouraging mature dialogue on an often misunderstood topic. Unless sex is discussed as a natural, pleasurable part of life rather than a necessary evil, how can we ever begin to discuss sexual assault or homophobia? A next step would be to address these tougher issues in a frank, accessible forum where people can ask questions beyond the sex signals presentation, the only perennial source of sex related dialogue on campus. Perhaps more presentations like Jay Friedman’s that break the ice surrounding sexuality can contribute to improving the sexual environment at Middlebury College.
Wednesday, April 9
“Violence in Same Sex Relationships”
Lecture by Ann Atkins, Director of Safe Space Vermont
Chellis House Lounge, 12:15 p.m.

Wednesday, April 9 - Saturday, April 12, 8 pm; Saturday, April 12, 2 p.m.
Lysistrata by Aristophanes, directed by Claudio Medeiros.
Seeler Studio Theatre, tickets at 443-MIDD

Thursday, April 11
“Liberatory Epistemology and the Sharing of Knowledge”
Life of the Mind talk by Professor Heidi Grasswick
Chellis House Lounge, 12:15 p.m.

Thursday, April 11
“Liberty of Conscience: The Attack on America’s Tradition of Religious Equality”
Lecture by Professor Martha Nussbaum, Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law, University of Chicago.
Mead Chapel, 4:30 p.m.

Monday, April 14
“Smart Start Workshop”
Wage and salary negotiating skill workshop with Anne Houle, WAGE Project.
Warner Hemicycle, 12:00 p.m.

Wednesday, April 16
“Freeheld: The Laurel Hester Story”
Screening of an Academy Award winning documentary on gay rights activism. Q&A with director Cynthia Wade.
Dana Auditorium, 7 p.m.

Thursday, April 17
“Whither Bioethics? From Relational Ethics to Public Ethics”
Lecture by Susan Sherwin, Professor of Philosophy, Dalhousie University
R.A. Jones Conference Room, 4:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 17
“Healing Fires”
This ceremony recognizes women and men who have suffered the effects of sexual and domestic violence.
Chellis House Lounge, 5:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 17
“LoveFest”
FAM’s annual speak-out against sexual and domestic violence.
Gamut Room, 9 p.m.

Monday, April 21
“The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene”
Lecture by Celine Parrenas Shimizu, Associate Professor of Asian American Studies and Film Studies at UC Santa Barbara.
Hillerest, 4:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 24
“Who Wants to Be A Porn Star?”
Lecture by Karin Hanta, Director of Chellis House.
Library 201, 4:30 p.m.

Monday, April 28
“Shaping Democracy: The Role of Women Legislators in the Mexican Congress”
Lecture by Caroline Beer, Latin American Studies Program, University of Vermont
R.A. Jones Conference Room, 12:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 29
“The Business of Being Born”
Film Screening and Q&A with midwives from Addison County to follow screening.
BiCentennial Hall 216, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, April 30
“Democratic Meritocracy”
Lecture by Lani Guinier, Bennett Boskey Professor of Law, Harvard Law School
Mead Chapel, 8 p.m.

Thursday, May 8
“Menopause is not a Disease”
Lunchtime talk by Dr. Katherine Hikel and Dr. Jane Waterman.
Chellis House Lounge, 12:15 p.m.

Saturday, May 10
Feminist of the Year Award reception
Chellis House Lounge, 2 p.m.

Thursday, May 15
2008 Thesis & Senior Essay Presentations with a Focus on Women’s and Gender Studies
Robert A. Jones Conference Room
9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Every year, the WAGS Program awards the Alison Fraker Prize. Established in 1990 by Drue Cortell Gensler ‘57, Middlebury College trustee emerita, this award honors the memory of Alison Gwen Fraker ‘89, a much-beloved, vocally feminist student who was killed in a car accident a few weeks before graduating. The prize is awarded to a student whose essay on a topic specifically concerning women and gender studies is judged the best.

This year, **Kate Silbert ’08** won the award for “Real Human Bodies” for Professor Sujata Moorti’s WAGS 400 Seminar class. **Emily Asher ’09** received honorable mention for her paper “A Mirror of Her Own: Reflections of Female Identity in ‘The Bloody Chamber’” for Professor Maria Hatjigeorgiou’s class “Introduction to World Literature: Storytelling.” Also nominated were **Amy Beck, Torey Crim, Nicholas Desantis, Zaheena Rashid, Lili Weekler, and Caitlin Vincek** for their projects. **Elyssa Granados, Alina Levina, Morgane Richardson, and Tracy Young** were nominated for a group project “Fashion and Body Image through Patricia Hill Collins” for Professor Laurie Essig’s “Development in Sociology Theory Class.” A 20-person collective—**Emily Allison, Hannah Babcock, Shabana Basij-Rasikh, Liz Bueno, Elise Cohen, Sam Collier, Lissa Crane, Annie Davison, Thea Francel, Steph Hastings, Tory Hayes, Matt Joseph, Madison Kahn, Nate Kerr, Allegra Morasani, Ben Poole, Baylie Roth, Ben Rudin, Cory Schubert, Aaron Smith, Monica Sull, Lauren Sullivan, and Becca Wear**—was nominated for the ‘zine “Gender Trash” for Professor Essig’s “Sociology of Gender” class. Here are excerpts from Kate Silbert’s and Emily Asher’s papers:

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**The 2008 Fraker Prize**

Nominee Emily Asher ’09 and Fraker Prize winner Kate Silbert ’08 at the award ceremony at Chellis House (fr. left to right)

“**Real Human Bodies Viewing: ‘Real Human Bodies’: A Critical Examination of BODIES: The Exhibition in Pittsburgh**”

“Since October, 2007, the Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has been hosting ‘Bodies: The Exhibition,’ a show that displays a series of human bodies and body parts that have been preserved and prepared for viewing through a process of plastification. In the media and through official museum outlets, much has been made of the exhibit’s educational value and respect for human dignity.”

“(...) How gender is depicted by the bodies on display needs to be critically examined as well, particularly because feminist theorists so often look to how gender gets inscribed on the living body. Judith Butler has argued that the gendered self is “instituted through a stylized repetition of acts,” and without such acts, which derive neither from individual choice nor outside imposition alone, there would be no gender. By her framework, then, the rigid, lifeless bodies on display at surface would appear to no longer be held within the confines of gender. At first glance, the exhibit declares itself devoid of gender, referring to the pieces as “the bodies” or “another body,” rather than stipulating if a particular piece happens to be male or female. However, closer scrutiny of the promotional material of the exhibit reveals that the overwhelming majority of the bodies displayed are male. Male bodies are posed conducting symphonies, playing basketball, (...) or imitating Rodin’s famous “The Thinker” statue; in the show’s online interactive classroom, the muscular, respiratory, digestive, and urinary systems are all portrayed with male bodies, and the only system to employ a female body is the reproductive system. Thus, when journalists or museum representatives discuss how ‘the bodies’ or ‘a body’ on display reveal the intricacies of human anatomy, they skim over the fact that primarily male ‘bodies’ expose male human anatomy. Clearly, even if the specimens on display can no longer actively “compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman’ [or ‘man’],” the living bodies who make decisions about which bodies to employ and how to pose them do continue to perform gender. This trend of implicitly or explicitly projecting the male body as normal and applicable to all human bodies has long haunted Western medical and scientific study. Feminist scholars have noted that as recently as 1989, most anatomy textbooks have portrayed the “normal human body” as “pervasively [...] male, making it impossible to learn female anatomy without first learning male anatomy.” For instance, an educator’s guide for the ‘Bodies’ exhibit, echoing Cartwright’s characterization of a typical anatomy text, describes the female external genitalia in male terms: “One of these folds corresponds to the male scrotum, [and] surrounds the clitoris, which consists of erectile tissue like the penis.”

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this framework, female anatomy can not be described separately from the male, implying by extension that the female body can not exist without the male body to define it. This issue of the female body’s visibility and representation gets at the heart of a central paradox for feminist scholars and women in general: how can one prevent biology from becoming one’s destiny while asserting that one’s biology should not be seen merely as derivative of a man’s? When the female body does specifically show up in the ‘Bodies’ exhibit, it is typically fragmented, as in the case of a healthy breast next to one ravaged by cancer, detached from what is being highlighted, as in the case of the fetal development gallery, or highlighted only for its reproductive capabilities. As mentioned previously, in apparent contrast to the rest of the exhibit, female bodies figure prominently in sections dealing with reproduction. Cartwright has noted that unlike other aspects of the female body, which Western medicine has traditionally dismissed as “waste,” reproductive parts are privileged (and even coveted). Indeed, studying the historic representation of female anatomy and fetal imagery, Karen Newman has pointed out that the vast majority of female anatomical models, whether in fifteenth century drawings or eighteenth century wax models, were depicted as pregnant. However, in the ‘Bodies’ exhibit, even the pregnant female body seems to be valued more for its individual parts rather than its whole. As one journalist previewing the show commented, the female reproductive gallery, “reminds visitors that the uterus, which was the first home of all of us, is smaller than a lemon prior to pregnancy.” In his perspective, the uterus, and not the whole female body (let alone the embodied woman) is what becomes pregnant and all of humanity’s “first home.”

Tellingly, one of the few places where the projected universal appeal of the exhibit breaks down is the gallery of fetal development, which is the only part of ‘Bodies’ that visitors may completely bypass. Unlike the rest of the show, which is exhibitionists proclaim as pertinent to “anyone with a body,” museum representatives “understand that this gallery in particular has very emotional connections.” The reproductive female body, the only female body worth specifically portraying, is apparently also the only body of the exhibit too “emotional” or disturbing to be viewed. Ironically, in this controversial gallery the pregnant body fades into shadow as the fetal body itself is highlighted. For instance, the teacher’s guide on the gallery stresses “all embryos and fetuses died of natural causes in utero,” subtly leaving ambiguous if and how the women whose uteruses contained those embryos and fetuses also died. Following a trend in medical science since the Renaissance, the surrounding female body that carries the fetuses is erased from the display. Similar to the way the mature bodies of the exhibit are selected and modified, aspects of the fetal body, particularly the bone structure, have been artificially tinted to “make it more recognizable.” In another instance when the scientific perspective of the exhibit is distinctly not “aloof to popular culture,” these techniques of altering the coloration of the fetuses parallel those used by lobbying groups with anti-abortion agendas.

“A Mirror of Her Own”: Reflections of Female Identity in “The Bloody Chamber”

Angela Carter’s short story “The Bloody Chamber” reworks Charles Perrault’s well-known fairy tale “Bluebeard” with a focus on issues of female identity. Though the story retains the same basic storyline, its first-person narrative adds depth to the female protagonist as she grapples with her changing identity throughout her rite of passage into marriage. Carter uses the many mirrors in Bluebeard’s castle as a motif that literally “reflects” these changes in identity. In Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass, scholar Jeni Joy LaBelle puts forth a theory that fits Carter’s use of the mirror in “The Bloody Chamber”: the identification with a mirror image, LaBelle says, is an ongoing process of self-realization that occurs especially in the life of the female, a journey that Carter creates for her protagonist to show her internal struggle with the marital transition from girl to woman and the conflicting self-conceptions that result. This conflict arises from the presence of the male – for Carter, the Marquis – as an influence upon the image seen by the female protagonist; the recognition of one’s self in the mirror, according to LaBelle, is also the recognition of a male-created ideal image against which women will always compare themselves. Despite its particularly feminine use, the looking glass thus also functions as an instrument of male power that reasures or criticizes the female according to social norms. The many mirrors which the young piano-player in “The Bloody Chamber” faces reflect not only her struggle with the loss of her pre-marital innocence but also her changing relationship with an impossible image that her husband creates and expects to see, one that is both pure and corrupt, chaste but utterly seductive. The journey of Carter’s protagonist is thus an attempt to move from such a male-dominated reflection to one that reflects her “true” image, free of the Marquis’ ornaments or perceptions, a quest of the child-become-woman that is intricately linked to her sexual awareness.
On March 11, Middlebury College’s writer-in-residence Julia Alvarez gave a reading and slideshow presentation about her non-fiction book Once Upon a Quinceañera: Coming of Age in the USA. In this book, Julia explores the – often very elaborate and increasingly costly – celebration for a girl’s fifteenth birthday that brings a Latina girl into womanhood. Here is an interview with Julia Alvarez:

**Julia, what is the quinceañera celebration in the contemporary U.S. about?**

**Julia Alvarez:** It is a big party which is prepared months in advance. On their fifteenth birthday, girls dress up in a princess outfit and celebrate with dozens to hundreds of people. The “quince” celebration has taken on a quite materialistic character. Families will spend thousands of dollars rather than saving for their daughters’ college education.

**Why did you choose to focus on this celebration?**

**JA:** When I was first asked to write the book, I declined because I thought that we should get rid of the whole – rather sexist – tradition. But when I started reading the statistics that one out of every four Latino girls gets pregnant before the age of 18 and that one out of every six Latino girls attempts suicide, I started to wonder who are these young girls going to grow up to be, what are they going to pass down to their daughters. The project gave me a lens to look at what is happening in the Latino community at large and also with the complex history/legacy we inherit as Latinas.

**You offer a critique of the celebration. Weren’t you considered a traitor to your own community?**

**JA:** As a politicized Latina feminist, I had to critique it especially because I am more invested in the community than an outsider could possibly be. Mind you, there are some really powerful feminist moments within that tradition that can be harnessed. The celebration is really about the mother/daughter relationship. Throughout the preparations, mother and daughter have to learn how to negotiate with each other and listen to each other. They have to try to find a balance and it’s often messy. But throughout the months, they work towards a common goal: the girl wants her party and the mom often wants to offer her daughter an experience that she never had.

**What would be your ideal quinceañera celebration?**

**JA:** I have found programs throughout the country that take the tradition and recast it in a way that really empowers the young girls so that they become strong women who haven’t lost touch with their roots. I found one celebration in which the family erected four altars. To the North, all the older people put symbolic gifts on the table and talked about what they could pass on to her. Then to the South, the children in the family talked about what she shouldn’t lose as she became an adult. Then to the East, the men talked to her about what kind of respect she should command from them. On the opposite side, the women did the same. There was also a central altar of the nuclear family. The family said that “in your life we aren’t going to be there for you at all the challenges, but we want you to be able to carry this community inside because we are with you every step of the way.” I thought what an empowering experience to give a young girl.
On March 18, Madeleine Kunin presented her new book *Pearls, Politics, and Power: How Women Can Win and Lead*. Throughout her political career – Madeleine Kunin was the first female governor of Vermont from 1985 to 1991 and served as an ambassador to Switzerland from 1996 to 1999 - she has brought graciousness to politics without sacrificing her ability to get the job done. She was again gracious but on a clear mission when she returned to speak to students, faculty, staff, and community members at Middlebury College, and once more got the job done.

Kunin had a goal in mind when she addressed the crowd at the R. A. Jones House on March 18th. It was the same goal she had in writing her book *Pearls, Power and Politics*. She wanted to inspire the next generation of women to get involved in politics while also helping the men in the audience understand why it is so important that they do so, too.

Using extensive research and interviews of women in all walks of political life throughout the world, Kunin was able to identify both the barriers and the resiliency of women in politics. She used the narrative form to tell the story of her own political education and the lessons she learned during her long career. Kunin also told the stories of women in politics nationally and internationally hoping that they might touch women and inspire them to get involved in the political process.

Along with the narrative, Kunin used humor, detailed data and the recurring 16 per cent to lay out the role women play in American life: women make up 16 per cent of all Congress members, and 16 per cent of top corporate positions. While 16 per cent is a record number in the United States, it is low compared to many other countries. Kunin wondered that given the high number of women heads of state internationally, why so many Americans continue to question the legitimacy of a female president.

After helping the audience understand the realities of current political demographics in the United States, Kunin offered some basics to counter the barriers to women’s entry into politics. In order to enter politics Kunin found that one must be optimistic, believe that the system will respond to you, and that your efforts can effect change. She notes that for the most part men are born with that attitude and American society works to reinforce it but that women must learn to cultivate such an attitude on their own (Middlebury College might consider designing ways to foster such an attitude as part of the liberal arts educational experience for all students).

A major barrier to entry into politics for women is that they typically believe they do not know enough. However, Kunin points out that it is not what you know but rather having the ability to find out what you do not know that is important. Women need to know that they have the capacity to change the conversation when they sit at the table and that politics can be fun!

Kunin suggested that by taking the plunge into politics and getting involved in the process, women will be surprised to discover that they do indeed measure up and in many cases will surpass the work of their colleagues who have traditionally occupied the positions of political power and authority ... men. That was true for her in her political career and it may well be true for you. Now go forth inspired by Kunin’s words, put on your pearls, find your passion in the underlying discrepancies that create politics and get involved!

**From Madeleine Kunin’s book:**

“There is consensus that the chief barrier to electing more women is disarmingly simple: No one has asked them to run (…) Women are (…) more likely to be uncomfortable by the seeming arrogance of declaring their own candidacy.”
Events in Review

WHO Does She Think She Is?

Pam Tanner Boll at Chellis House. Maria Hatjigeorgiou, Ariela Yomtovian ‘11, Pam Tanner Boll, Karin Hanta, Jeanne Rogow, Linda White (from left to right).

On March 17, Middlebury College alumna and Board of Trustees member Pam Tanner Boll ‘78 hosted a pre-theatrical screening of her feature-length documentary WHO Does She Think She Is? Pam Tanner Boll is the executive co-producer of the documentary Born Into Brothels, which won an Academy Award in 2005.

WHO Does She Think She Is? is Tanner Boll’s directorial debut. The film examines how six female artists balance their creative lives with their motherhood responsibilities.

“T he film is really about changing the world,” said Tanner Boll at a lunch with students, faculty, staff, and community members. “It calls for a paradigm shift. It is basically about our values. Art in this movie simply serves as an illustration.”

“The film crystallizes a reality that is hidden in the subconscious of contemporary society,” said film major Saila Huusko ‘10. “The reality is that female artists are still not unconditionally welcome in the high halls of art. As a representative of my generation, I want to believe it is not true. We are told and, indeed, tell ourselves that we are equal, strong and in a different position from the earlier generations of women. But the truth is out there. Hanging naked on the walls of the museums, literally. Seeing this documentary made me angry. Women are welcome to talk about art, to analyze it and to teach it, but not to make it. Art by women is marginalized as feminist or feminine art, when it really is about humankind.”

We watch Janis Wunderlich, a mother of five children, who uses her children’s precious short nap time to furiously produce sculptures of quirky mother figures laden with devouring animal-like children. Maye Torres, an artist in Taos, actively integrates her children in her work when she paints, draws, and sculptures. Her boys fully support her ambitions and flourish at her side. Japanese-born Mayumi Oda turns her art into activism, openly protesting against the production of nuclear weapons.

“In this movie, I argue for cross-disciplinary thinking,” Pam Tanner Boll said. “We have to integrate the emotional with the analytical part of our lives. Otherwise we only live half a life.” According to Tanner Boll, the division of labor has followed the warrior:caregiver model for too long. “Many men will find nothing wrong with that because they don’t want to give up power. Yet, they are losing out on a lot. Our culture is strangling for a lack of intimacy and for a need of community.”

Michael Schoenfeld, Vice President for College Advancement, agrees. “What I learned from the film is that there is a lack of feminine/masculine balance in our lives and in our society – a balance that we need to achieve to be fully human. Has society devalued our care giving instincts to the point that we feel guilty if we take time to pursue artistic expression? Women artists, particularly those who are also mothers, are on the front line of this feminine/masculine collision, struggling to make a living while trying to nurture their families, yet feeling the desperate need to nurture their souls through their art.”

Pam Tanner Boll also made a conscious choice to feature a very varied selection of artists from all over the country. “I wanted to stay away from the established artworld, which is all to narrow in its esthetic,” she said. How else should we explain the fact so few female artists are included in the collections of major museums or given big solo exhibitions?

According to Pam Tanner Boll, women should step up to the plate and invest in art. “In general, women are more concerned with adorning themselves with jewelry than with supporting the arts.”

The film also aims at teaching students not to be afraid of failure. “In our drive for excellence, we often forget to reflect on the most essential questions: Why are we here? How do we get along with each other? These questions should be at the heart of a liberal arts education.”

Student Saila Huusko drew a great deal of inspiration from the documentary. “There is something mystifying about these female artists. They are moved not by anger, but love. Love for their art and the people around them – a cliché that deserves repeating. As their voices, paintings and sculptures flooded the screen, I felt like I was seeing the positive role models we are starved for in the midst of the often theoretical talk of gender balance. WHO Does She Think She Is? is a beautiful film that, without preaching, encourages us to question societal values, and inspires women artists to see motherhood as an enriching part of their artistic lives, not an obstacle.”
LYSISTRATA

Athens and Sparta have been at war for years with no end in sight. Lysistrata has the solution: to unite the women of Greece in a general sex strike to force politicians, husbands, and soldiers to come to their senses. A hit since 411 B.C., Aristophanes’ infamous antiwar comedy mixes fantasy, gender politics and plenty of bawdy jokes to remind us of the pleasures we give up when we do not vote for peace. Directed by Claudio Medeiros ’90.

When: April 9, 10, 11 and 12 at 8pm / April 12 at 2pm.
Where: Seeler Studio Theatre at the Center for the Arts.
For tickets, please call 443-MIDD.

SMART START WORKSHOP

Every American woman makes 71 cents to every dollar earned by men. Over a lifetime, this results in losses of $600,000 to 2 million. On April 14, students, staff, and faculty members can learn what they can do to narrow the wage gap. Anne Houle, National Director of Campus and Community Initiatives for the WAGE project, will teach a workshop on negotiating skills. The Start Smart Campus Initiative aims at empowering women to obtain the skills necessary to receive fair and realistic compensation. Participants will also be given the resources for benchmarking reasonable salaries and wages and to develop a “bare bones” budget.

When: Monday, April 14, 12:15 p.m.
Where: Warner Hemicyle
To sign up, please contact Karin Hanta at 443-5937 or khanta@middlebury.edu

Internation Women’s Day at Chellis House

Even though March 8, International Women’s Day, was accompanied by one of the worst ice storms in recent years, a few brave students and girls from Addison County middle schools made it to Chellis House to celebrate. Hosted by Middlebury College’s Sister-to-Sister program, the event brought together various international students with the middle school girls. Chinyere Amadi talked about growing up in Zambia and showed pictures from her home country. Htar Htar Yu spoke about her life as a child refugee in the Burmese jungle. Sabrina Françon cooked up some delicious crêpes from her native France and explained why “dating” is not a known concept among teenagers. Shabana Basij-Rasikh astonished the audience with tales about outsmarting the Taliban in Afghanistan and going to a secret school dressed up as a boy. She also brought along a burkha and visitors took turns trying outfit that covers the body from head to toe. The International Women’s Day celebration stressed our common womanhood, whatever our clothes or traditions!