

Margaret  
Cunningim  
Women's Center

## Body image, feminism, and womanhood

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The Madison Avenue ideal woman is not actually a woman, but in fact an adolescent: narrow hips, slender, firm thighs, small breasts, flat tummy. With the advent of body building, women have even taken on characteristics of an adolescent boy: add the muscles, the hard-body look. Softness and voluptuousness, ideals of earlier times, have been replaced by the adolescent look just as the quest for youth emerged to counter the fear of the full and powerful development of women.

Many women conform to our culture's standard, denying appetites, exercising to excess, even vomiting and undergoing painful, expensive surgery to shape and perfect their bodies they feel *forced to inhabit*. Those torturing their bodies with such rigors seem unaware of their confession of dislike for themselves as women and for their bodies. Many couch their obsessions with a concern for their health.

As a therapist I do not advocate large girth; rather, I encourage accepting the life process that brings us to maturity. The body grows fuller before menstruation; the hips grow larger after giving birth; the breasts grow heavier and the thighs softer. As we gain experience and deepen our commitment to life, we enlarge. If our culture respected women for our maturation, we would more easily respect the body's manifestation of it. However, as Kim

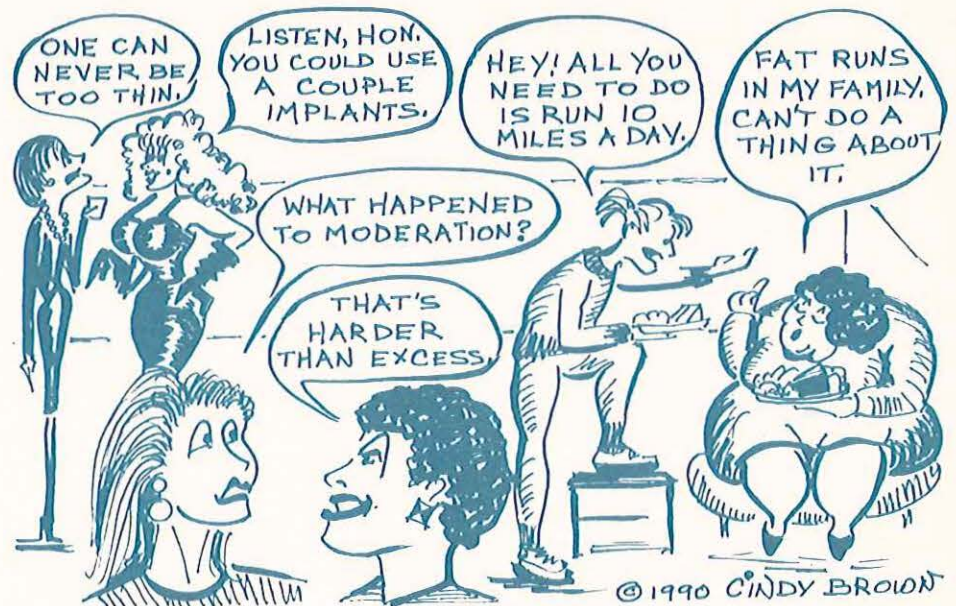
Chernin says in *The Obsession: Reflections On the Tyranny of Slenderness*, (1981), "We hide from ourselves; we deny the seasons of our bodies."

The struggle to dominate the body is characteristic of women in male-dominated cultures. By accepting society's prescription of the adolescent girl or boy as the ideal woman, we acknowledge that power lies in youth and maleness. Because society regards middle-aged, round women as negative, we associate fat and flesh with what is lacking in our lives. Women make up the overwhelming majority of persons in weight-reduction programs, with anorexia and bulimia, and undergoing body-reconstructive surgery. Our minds are constantly struggling against our bodies in the effort to reduce their size and change their shape. Why?

Author Alice Walker is credited with first recognizing the similarities between our obsession with reducing ourselves and the binding of women's feet in China. Both practices are in response to a socially-dictated norm for women; both have more to do with domination and reduction of power than beauty. Recalling the brouhaha created by American feminists over the practice of genital mutilation in Africa, I wonder how many of us, so horrified at the extremes practiced by African women, are the same ones who vomit after a good meal.

The task of changing the culture may seem awesome, but this task of changing our bodies to suit a culture of domination presents us with a lifelong struggle pockmarked with anguished failures. Women can define their beauty or let Madison Avenue define it for them. We can claim our right to mature and be seen as beautiful in our maturity. The choice is ours. ■

*Because this is such an important issue with diverse perspectives, the editor encourages readers' responses that could be published in future issues of Women's WU.*



# News quotes

Even at a former women's college, male students are taken more seriously, a researcher finds.

By Edward B. Fiske

Do men get more for their money than women do when they slap down \$50,000 to \$100,000 for a college education? Based on her analysis of thousands of hours of college teaching, Catherine G. Krupnick says the answer is a resounding yes.

Detailed observations of thousands of hours of videotapes of college classrooms show that faculty members consistently take male students and their contributions more seriously than females and their ideas. Moreover, they permit males to dominate discussions far out of proportion to their numbers.

"College catalogues should carry warnings: the value you receive will depend on your sex," she suggested.

Ms. Krupnick's findings are among the latest in a steady stream of research over the last two decades showing that while they may be sitting side by side, male and female undergraduates have substantially different educational experiences.

In a survey of the literature on the subject for the Association of American Colleges, Roberta Hall argued that women face a "chilly climate" in most college classrooms. Professors are more likely to remember men's names, call on them in class and listen attentively to their answers. By contrast, they feel freer to interrupt women and ask them "lower order" questions.

Ms. Krupnick suggested that the goal for . . . any college . . . should be to promote all strengths in all students. "Teachers should encourage women to initiate comments, resist interruptions and be willing to assume the risks of a public role," she said. "Likewise, men need listening skills. They must also be shown that when they give instant answers to complicated questions, mostly for the sake of social posturing, they are not getting a very good education."

*excerpted from The New York Times*  
April 11, 1990

In France, day care is every child's right

By Hillary Rodham Clinton

Ten years after the U.S. started talking about "family values," many wonder why we are still unable to provide decent education, health care, and opportunity for all of our children.

The House and Senate are about to confer on child care legislation and review a range of options. At this pivotal moment, much can be learned by comparing America's child care system to France's. Of course, given the differences in political philosophies and tax structures between our nations we should not duplicate the French system here -- wholesale.

Recently, I joined a study team of child care professionals who spent two weeks in France . . .

What we saw was a coordinated, comprehensive system, supported across the political spectrum, that links day care, early education, and health care -- and is accessible to virtually every child.

Much more significant, though, are the pervasive beliefs in France that children are a precious national resource for which society has collective responsibility, and that one goal of a child care system is to help children develop and thrive.

Child care is not just a family matter. To do our children and our country justice, we need to develop a nationwide consensus on how to best nurture our children, and through that nurturing, prevent the personal and social costs we all pay when children's needs are not met.

*excerpted from The New York Times*  
April 7, 1990

## It's your health

Beth Colvin Huff, RN, MSN  
Department of OB/GYN

### Skin cancer on the rise

Skin cancer is on the rise, and women have higher rates than men. Although the chance of cure is good when skin cancer is detected early, it is important to remember that skin

cancer can kill or cause disfigurement and therefore must be taken seriously.

There are three major types of skin cancer:

- basal cell carcinoma
- squamous cell carcinoma
- malignant melanoma.

Each of these acts in somewhat unique ways, but the major risk factor for all is exposure to the ultraviolet rays of the sun. Other risk factors include: a family history of skin cancer; fair-skinned (people who sunburn easily); a personal history of blistering sunburn as a child. Southerners are also at greater risk due to our closer proximity to the equator.

Choice of treatment is based on the type, size, and location of the cancer. Surgical removal, laser therapy, cryotherapy (freezing), radiation, and chemotherapy may each be utilized to shrink or remove the tumor.

Prevention is the key! Most of us enjoy being out in the sun and getting a mild tan, but burning and long, deliberate overexposure should be avoided. Sunscreens with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 or greater should be used, especially when exposure occurs between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Remember that all outdoor activities put you at risk for exposure -- gardening, exercising, swimming, and even snow skiing. Wide-brimmed hats are currently popular and provide a practical and fashionable approach to skin protection. Repeated sun exposure also causes wrinkling -- something most women would like to avoid!

The Dermatology Clinic at Vanderbilt is presently offering a free skin cancer screening to all faculty and staff. The Melanoma Skin Cancer Screening Program is a national project sponsored by The American Academy of Dermatology to offer a rapid screen to detect skin abnormalities. If a lesion is detected, you will be referred back to your own dermatologist or you can be seen in the Dermatology Clinic, probably on the same day. Although they advertise to "get your birthday suit checked on your birthday," you may go anytime. No appointment is necessary but you may want to check with the receptionist (322-6485) for the best days and times. ■

# Speaking of women . . .

June Stewart is Senior Women's Administrator and Women's Sports Information Director in the Athletic Department. In June she will take office as president of the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), the first woman to hold that office. She was interviewed recently by Sherre Dryden, Coordinator of Bibliographic Instruction, General Library and Chair-elect of the Women's Center Advisory Board.

**Sherre Dryden:** Why don't you tell me a little about who you are, what you do, how you got to be here:

**June Stewart:** I've been here seventeen years. I came in as a secretary for the Commodore Club and Sports Information because I wanted to be in athletics. From there I went up to Assistant Sports Information Director on the men's side, and then Sports Information Director for the women. Then about three or four years ago I became Senior Women's Administrator.

This year, for the first time, I'm on the NCAA women's basketball committee. That's fun! The arena for the NCAA women's tournament holds more than the arena that will host the men's final four this year, so for the first time they believe that the women's final four will outdraw the men's.

**SD:** How does women's athletics at Vanderbilt compare with other institutions -- either SEC schools or other peers?

**JS:** We've always been under the umbrella of the entire Athletic Department -- we were just physically situated in the gym. We just moved over here [the McGugin Center] in November. Now we're all in one place and I think that will be an asset to us.

**SD:** Is it true that there are no admissions exceptions made for athletes here? Is that a problem?

**JS:** There is no exception rule whatsoever. It probably affects you less in women's athletics than it does with the men. For women, for instance in basketball, there is no beyond. So they are looking for their college education because that's their future; it is not in basketball. Female athletes are very much interested in what you can offer them educationally.

**SD:** Are there scholarships for women athletes?

**JS:** When I grew up they were not available for women at all. You played in high school, but to earn a scholarship and be able to get your education for your athletic ability was unheard of. I think it's tremendous that women have that opportunity now. Some of them could come anyway; some of them would not be able to set foot here without a scholarship.

**SD:** What is the goal of women's athletics? Is there a goal of remaining separate and getting more funding and more facilities or is there a goal for greater integration of women's and men's athletics?

**JS:** The only school in the conference that is totally separate is Tennessee.

I can't see us going out on our own. I wouldn't want [that]. We are going to go next year into a lot more promotions and marketing for women's athletics and really sell it, but that will still come in as part of a Vanderbilt athletic department.

**SD:** I know some people have been concerned that there aren't very many women in the administrative positions in the athletic department.

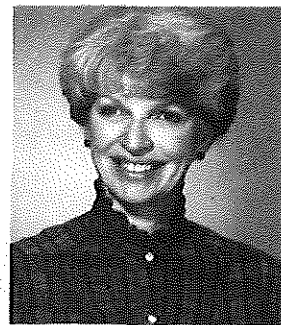
**JS:** Everybody has a women's senior administrator. And then, they have maybe more women coaches than we do. We have a male basketball coach; we also have a male cross-country and track coach. We have a female golf coach and diving coach. Maybe that bothers some people, but what we've done is always hire the very best person who applied for the job, whether they were male or female, period.

**SD:** How did you get interested in sports?

**JS:** Dad wanted a son, and I was the only child, so from the time that I could even move, I was sitting in the football stadium at Vanderbilt watching football. After school I would go and watch Vanderbilt practice.

**SD:** What did your mother think?

**JS:** Mom was O.K. She'd have to read the sports pages so that she could enter in the conversation. I have just always been interested, but not as a participant because I'm not talented in that area.



**SD:** Something that bugs me is the name - "Lady Commodores."

**JS:** We've heard that for thirteen

years. I've never had anybody come up with a suggestion that can replace it. If you can do that, we will consider it. We did design our own logo. I've noticed now, that in several places they mention men's swimming (for example), instead of saying swimming and women's swimming.

**SD:** What do you see as the future for women's athletics at Vanderbilt?

**JS:** To be competitive in the SEC in every sport. We are working toward that every day.

Last year there were twelve basketball players Academic All-SEC, and six were from Vanderbilt. You would think the opposite, because you know that it's harder for the Vanderbilt kids to gain that 3.0 or better than it is at the other schools. In every sport we outnumbered other SEC schools when it came to academic honors. I'm really proud of that.

You travel with them and then you watch them get on the bus, get out the books, get out the highlighters.

When we went to the National Women's Invitational Tournament in 1984, we had one player I'll never forget, who had a suitcase that none of us could lift. It was entirely books. She was a Biomedical-Electrical Engineering double major. She asked permission not to leave the room except to play the game and practice because she had so much work to do. It's not unusual.

**SD:** I think that the athletes at Vanderbilt blend in -- they are like everybody else.

**JS:** I think that is by design. A lot of schools have athletic dorms and Vanderbilt has chosen not to do that. So many of the schools set them aside as untouchables.

**SD:** Is the pressure from outside to win as strong in women's athletics as it is in men's?

*(continued page four)*

Stewart (from page three)

JS: I hope I don't live long enough to see the women fall under "win at all costs" which some of the men have done. Fighting this is part of us growing.

I have watched it grow, and it's been a lot of fun. I don't want to swap my job with anybody else's. ■

### We still need your help!

Please help complete the endowment of the Margaret Cuninggim Lecture Fund by designating all or part of your contribution to the Faculty and Staff Campaign to the Lecture Fund.

*Ms. Magazine* reemerges -- with Robin Morgan as Editor-in-Chief

A new *Ms. Magazine* will debut in June, entitled *Ms: The World of Women*. The redesigned bimonthly will be free of all advertising and will be edited by the feminist writer and editor Robin Morgan. The premier issue will contain an article by Gloria Steinem called "Sex, Lies, and Advertising" describing how magazine content is forced by advertisers' "desire" for supportive editorial content. The old *Ms. Magazine* fought a constant and eventually losing battle to maintain advertising revenue without compromising editorial content.

Since it will be advertising-free, the new *Ms.* will be supported completely by subscription revenues (\$40 to first time buyers, \$25 to old subscribers). Dale Lang, the new owner, has announced that his goal for *Ms.* is to break even and that any profits will go to the *Ms. Foundation for Women*. Lang also owns *Working Woman* and *Working Mother*.

Eleanor Smeal Report  
March 27, 1990

*Editor's Note: To read the complete article cited above and others on women's issues, check out the bulletin board and library at the women's center.*

Page 4, *Women's VU*, May 1990

## KUDOS!

Congratulations to Women's Center Advisory Board Member Carolyn Williams and Vanderbilt's Engineering School for receiving the award for the best minority engineering program in the country. This award was given at the March convention of the National Society of Black Engineers. Dean Williams is Assistant Dean for Minority Affairs in the Engineering Department.

Lagenia Belcher, A&S Senior who has been named number one cadet at Vanderbilt this year, has recently been recognized for being in the top 5% nationally of Army ROTC cadets. A graduate fellowship to the school of her choice comes with this honor. In addition she has the distinction of being nominated for the national Pallas Athene award for superior female cadet. Good luck, Lagenia!

Lagenia is a past member of the Women's Center Advisory Board and is the first student to declare a minor in Women's Studies (see article page six).

Congratulations to Lynn Bray, this year's winner of the Margaret Stonewall Woolrich Hamblett Award, a one-year travel scholarship granted to a senior fine arts major based on the judgement of a panel of local artists. Lynn plans to explore Ireland and Germany, then return to Florida to work on her art, which is inspired by a feminist perspective and concern for women's history and issues.

Lynn is co-chair of Students for Women's Concerns and you may have seen one of her silk-screened posters for National Women's History Month on campus.

Monica Peek, A & S Junior, will go to New York City April 30 to receive *Time* magazine's College Achievement Award. She has been named in the top twenty outstanding college juniors for her political service and advocacy. Watch for the article in *Time*.

Monica is well known at the Women's Center, since in her freshman year she was a student employee and has served as a member of the Advisory Board the past two years. ■



Laura Warren and Guatemalan child

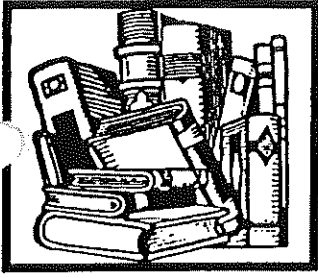
## Alternative Spring Break: Indiantown, Florida

There were four vans of students headed down the highway to Indiantown, Florida for the week. None of us had been to Indiantown and this was the first time many of us had been in contact with another culture in our own country. This was all part of the Alternative Spring Break program, an exciting opportunity to meet new people and share new ideas and thoughts while providing services for our hosts.

We went to help the Guatemalans within Indiantown assimilate into the larger community. We spent most of our late afternoons and evenings tutoring many people in English. During the days we helped make crafts, set up a food bank, filled out income-tax forms and prepared English-tutorial tapes. We visited the health clinic once, which adjoins the police station. It is a small, understaffed office that lacks many of the resources needed to care for the townspeople. The Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program operates from the clinic, and the baby, Michelle, in the picture above, is a recipient of the WIC program.

The lifestyles of the people we met were completely new and different from those of us who went to Indiantown. Alternative Spring Break provided us with an opportunity that is hard to pass up: a chance to see how others live, and to help them make the transition to a new culture while retaining their own cultural identity. ■

Laura Lee Warren  
A & S Junior



## In the library

Naomi E. Heiser  
Women's center librarian

It is important to recover the history and experiences of women by re-printing works by women who have been "forgotten" over time. The Feminist Press has revived the work of Margery Latimer in *Guardian Angel and Other Stories* (1984). Latimer's stories, which are beautifully crafted pieces in their own right, are also a disturbing testimony of the life experiences of middle-class, Midwestern white women in the early years of this century.

Margery Latimer was born in 1899 Portage, Wisconsin. She was apparently a dreamy, sensitive child who was not interested in school, and had a difficult time being away from her family. She was deeply attached to a mentor, Zona Gale, a local writer who encouraged Latimer's writing and eventually persuaded her to enter New York literary society. Latimer scandalized her hometown by marrying Jean Toomer (who was African-American, and portrayed as a "free love" advocate by the media) in 1931. She died tragically in childbirth a year later.

Meridel Le Seur, a contemporary and lifelong friend of Latimer's says, "We must realize from these outcries, these hidden messages, how brave and bold women were in that time, to invade the altar of the good woman...Margery was willing to go through fire for illumination." The struggle between the values of the older generation and the "new modern woman" who was emerging in the 1920's is a major theme of Latimer's work. This is expressed through use of a pervasive surreal atmosphere in which characters who are supposedly speaking the same language actually cannot communicate, and consistently misunderstand

one another.

The older generation is represented by men who spew long inane speeches about the American Way of Life and the "right" thing to do, and women who chatter about carpets and their neighbor's bridge work while silently dying inside. These parodies are bitterly amusing, yet indicate a certain despair in Latimer's perception of her world.

Significantly, this fruitless and unhappy mode of interaction is also that which women and men consistently utilize in romantic situations. In "Two in Love," the narrator (female) makes depressing observations such as "Well, that's the kind of terrible time we usually have and he's perfectly unknown to me. I know everyone better than I do him..."

There are moments, however, when this is broken, or transcended, and there is a sudden, intense symbiotic meeting of minds, i.e. "love." Grottesquely, this is always a chance occurrence, never consciously arrived at, never understood, and always stimulated by the body. The state of "romantic love" is therefore shown in these stories to be ephemeral and false.

There is a way to circumvent this

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*"I knew that pity must not remain, that kissing was only a palliative, that love to endure must strangle sentiment."* -- Margery Latimer

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situation: "On the way home I decided to clear away all the images I had of him and find out directly what he was like. I cleared for days and spent my nights nursing the clearings. I knew that pity must not remain, that kissing was only a palliative, that love to endure must strangle sentiment. I knew all that and I used that knowledge as a whip." Ironically, this serves to kill "love," and the narrator ends up alone.

A typical exchange between lovers goes like this:

"Ronald, I've been awfully angry with you."

"Not really angry. You couldn't be angry with me *now*, could you *now*?"

"No, no!" and I kissed him but I felt

like meat."

This is especially interesting in light of the role that food plays in the lives of women in the stories. In "Two in Love," the narrator is a vegetarian, and "Ronald eats almost nothing but meat."

In these stories, women's lives are intimately tied to food, not only in constant preparation and serving, but in the tableau of the family meal in which the polarized, exaggerated roles of women and men are played out over and over: "From the dining-room window she saw Mr. Arnold flying to his food. She covered a plate with a white napkin bordered with hollyhocks, for the muffins. The door banged, a man groaned. She knew her husband was ready for his meal. 'Come into the dining room, dear,' she called. 'Don't I always dear?,' he answered...Mrs. Arnold tasted her soup. 'Will you say it's good?' she asked. 'All soup is good.' Her laughter was neither bitter nor amused. It was a plain flat sound. 'Well, do I have to say that everything you cook is splendid, wonderful, excellent, incomparable? Can't you let me forget that I am eating?'"

In the intimate privacy of the home, Latimer's main focus, women are imprisoned by their limited roles, and men are uncomfortably alienated from and baffled by their families. In a story entitled "The Family," dinner-time is an unhappy drama:

"Mr. Beale looked straight ahead of him as if his eyes were seeing something far, far off, as far away as the Baltic Sea or the Indian Ocean, and he held up his knife and fork dripping with gravy. 'I try to make everyone happy,' he said gruffly, 'I try to do good to everyone. I try to think right and talk right and do right. Who ever does anything for me?'"

'Please, you're dripping,' said Mrs. Beale gently."

Latimer's stories are a stinging commentary on the ironies of prescribed paths to happiness and love. The worlds in which women and men exist in these stories rarely overlap, unless it is in some kind of painful collision. Both sexes are constrained by convention, unable to meet on common ground. The way out that Latimer envisioned, through "clearing away the images," is today more of a possibility. ■

# Announcements et cetera

The Y.W.C.A. Domestic Violence Program needs empathic concerned women to volunteer to answer crisis calls from women who are in abusive situations. The phone training will take place Saturdays, May 12 and 19 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Katie Griffith at 297-8833.

Iris Glen Feminist Camp, is a women's retreat on the South River, Annapolis, Maryland. The 10th annual Iris Glen Feminist Camp sponsored by The Feminist Institute will be held there on July 20-30, 1990. The camp provides women of all ages, races, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual preferences a chance to live in a women's community for a few days and to discuss feminist issues in a relaxed outdoor atmosphere. You may register for all or part of the ten day session. A complete brochure and registration form is available at the Women's Center.

**Your Rights in a Divorce.** If you are interested in knowing what you may expect in a divorce and what your rights are, come to this seminar. Areas discussed will include how the law can protect you from harassment or abuse during and after divorce, the grounds for divorce, costs of divorce, length of time the process takes, child custody, child support, alimony and property division. This

one-hour seminar will be available the first Thursday night of each month as part of the Legal Clinic program of the YWCA. Next seminar is May 3 at 6:00 p.m. Fee \$3.00. Instructor is Pat Harris, Attorney. Call 269-9922 for an appointment.

## Minor in Women's Studies approved

Approval for a minor in Women's Studies came from the faculty of the College of Arts and Science on March 27. As proposed by the Women's Studies Committee, the minor requires eighteen hours. Of these, nine hours are specified: WS 150/HUM 156: Images of Women, WS 151/SOC 151: Women and Public Policy, and either WS 286/HIST 286 or WS 287/HIST 287: Women's Experience in America. The remaining nine hours are electives selected from courses in English, History, Political Science, Anthropology, and Economics.

Senior Lagenia Belcher is the first student to declare the new minor. Nancy Walker, Director of Women's Studies, signed Belcher's declaration card on April 2. Belcher has completed the requirements and will graduate in May.

The minor will appear in the 1990-91 Vanderbilt Undergraduate Catalogue.



Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

## Programs

For more information call 322-4843.

**Book Group** will discuss *Crimes of the Heart* by Beth Henley on Monday May 14 from 5:15 p.m. until 6:15 p.m. at the Women's Center. Elaine Golecki, Project Manager, Library Annex, will lead the discussion. New members are always welcome. Light refreshments.

**Take Charge of Your Financial Future!** Katrin Bean, Certified Financial Planner, will lead a workshop on planning for retirement including these topics: estimating amount of money needed for your support in retirement, what to expect from Social Security, employer retirement savings opportunities, sound investment choices, and why you should start planning for retirement regardless of *how young* you are. Tuesday, May 15, 4:30 p.m. until 6:00 p.m., Psychology 112.

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Edited by JUDITH T. HELFER

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