

# Students celebrate their bodies

## Fashion show and film promote a healthy body image

By Sara Black  
STAFF WRITER

Too many people were crowded into the hot, dark subterranean space but no one seemed to mind. All eyes were transfixed by the hypnotic images that flowed onto the silvery projection screen as words poured forth from a larger-than-life pair of lips belonging to an unidentified Middlebury student.

"There's a moth on the window, and it's spreading its wings, I am wondering how it sees, all these ugly things./Can it see my kilos? My back-side of doom?/Can it see my sickness? My empty room?"

The spellbinding words were those of poet Georgina McKerrow, a recovering victim of an eating disorder. Her pain and frustration, clearly expressed in the verses of her poem "Looking at Me," captivated the room at the third annual "I Love My Body" fashion show and screening sponsored by Feminist Action at Middlebury (FAM).

"The poetry was extraordinarily moving and made the film work," said Jyoti Daniere, the director of Health and Wellness Education. "I was almost brought to tears. The simple, direct prose that the director used was very powerful."

FAM introduced this edgy event, featuring a student-produced documentary followed by a feel-good fashion show, to promote awareness of the body image issues on campus. With a rising number of students — male and female — suffering from negative body image at the College and throughout the country, this year's screening spoke to a larger audience and addressed other issues such as gender violence and homosexuality.

Ryan Tauriainen '08, co-president of the Middlebury Open Queer Alliance, has directed and produced all of the documentaries since the event's inception.

"I think Western society is placing an incredible amount of pressure on young people to fit in a small box of what beauty is," Tauriainen said. "This is done through the importance placed on being incredibly thin or fit — it exists for both men and women."

In this year's "Love Your Body" documentary, there were not any pin-thin bodies with

skeletal arms and legs or alarming statistics intended to scare the audience or leave them hopeless. To make the viewing experience less dispiriting, Tauriainen even brought in the individual stories of students fighting eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa and Body Dimorphic Disorder.

"Last year the documentary was focused around only anorexia and bulimia, statistics and shocking images," Tauriainen said. "This year, I broadened the subject to body image in general and used interviews of people in our own community to make the video unique to Middlebury."

These personal accounts were complemented by excerpts from "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou, "Subtle Sister" by Alix Olson and moving poetry from other outspoken authors, as read by students.

"People struggle and can't deal with eating disorders or gender violence," said Morgane Richardson '08, secretary on the FAM Board. "The poetry and art are part of the process of overcoming these disorders and violence."

Tauriainen made the artistic decision to focus on the lips of the readers instead of their bodies, emphasizing the importance of the words they were saying. These poems served to refute the unrealistic ideals set by the media and strengthened the film's overall message — to love your body.

Involvement in the event was not limited to students. Sujata Moorti, professor of Women's and Gender Studies, was interviewed in the documentary about the relationship between perfectionism and body image in both academic and athletic pursuits.

"Since Middlebury cannot be isolated from the larger society these larger messages also continue to shape female students' and male students' perceptions of their bodies," Moorti said.

Adding to the approachable aura of the event, the film was followed by an energetic display of positive self-acceptance that included participants of all ages. With Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" playing in the background, 25 proud students and faculty paraded through the Gamut Room in personalized t-shirts. The front of each shirt



Nichole Wyndham

Laurie Essig, assistant professor of Sociology and Anthropology, poses on Friday night.

was emblazoned with the phrase, "I love my-body because," and all models were asked to complete that thought with their own personal affirmations.

Some highlights included "I love my body because it's bipedal and has opposable thumbs," and "I love my body because my mama gave it to me."

But the evening did not end there. With food and drink provided by Brainerd Commons, FAM members held an after-show discussion focusing on topics like pornography, masculinity and body image.

"In years past, the fashion show and documentary have been powerful, emotional events, and then when they're over, they're over," said Kristen Ward '08, a member of the FAM board. "The discussions this year provided a great opportunity for reflection and conversation about both the show itself and the broader issues that it dealt with."

Caroline Birsky '10.5, a FAM board member, agreed. "Loving your body is important," Birsky said. "If you can learn to do that, you can do anything."