



Society for Menstrual Cycle Research

Newsletter Winter, 2009

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### **President's Remarks**

By Jerilynn Prior

Greetings!

I'm happy to welcome 2009—a year of possibility and positives, despite the economic difficulties and the wars in our world. (Perhaps those of you in the U.S.A. are unaware of the wave of optimism that is sweeping Canada and the rest of the world because of your new, bright, conscientious, and international President.)

I'm looking forward to seeing each of you at our conference in Spokane in June. It is not only a time to renew and deepen old acquaintanceships, but also an opportunity to meet and network with the new people we attract to attend for the first time. Let us, each of us, reach out, and try to get as many of our colleagues and interested friends to this conference as we can. The conference theme is an important one. Media influences much of our lives, what we know and what we believe. Furthermore, menstruation and women's reproduction are almost universally negatively slanted in these venues.

The virtue of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research is primarily *that we exist*. We, as individual women (with a few men) working in the area of women's menstruation, may often feel as though we are hanging on by our fingernails. Not only is menstruation largely considered *not interesting*, it is widely considered to be an impolitic and unwise area of study, distasteful at best, and really downright yucky. Yet we persist in individually and collectively saying "Menstruation Matters!" Those of us who are health care providers feel that knowing more about menstrual cycles will improve women's health, both individually and collectively. Those of us who are psychologists, sociologists or philosophers believe menstrual cycle research is important in equity, in understanding individual feelings and reframing societal ideas and institutions.

Sometimes, some of us may experience a feeling of insecurity about our work individually and with the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research. Although we go to the conferences, if we can, because of the social support as well as academic inspiration we gain, we may fear that our group is fragile. I certainly know that there was apprehension before we, here

at CeMCOR in Vancouver, ran the conference in 2007 because we'd not organized such an event before. That year there was an international border to cross, two currencies to negotiate, new passport restrictions and the adoption of an on-line payment system to contend with. Each year will have its challenges. But we who value menstrual cycles and appreciate the complexity of biology, genetics, and gender in framing reproductive experiences will continue work towards a more woman honouring and accepting world. Fear not, my friends.

My perspective is that, no matter if we feel insignificant in a world that is overwhelmingly controlled by those who do not menstruate—our importance is that we are. By continuing into our third decade, by publishing papers from our conferences in peer-reviewed journals, by being present and visible on the Web—thanks to the hard work of our media committee (gratitude especially to Drs. Elizabeth Kissling and Christine Hitchcock)—our influence is growing. Media are asking us to comment, and reviewers are seeking our collective and individual responses to the new pronouncements from research or big pharma. As a sign of the times, a consortium of legal minds are gathering data to begin a class action lawsuit against the makers of Premarin for undue influence on the scientific process (from funding to research, to review, to publication).

We who are part of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research are standing on the frail but brave shoulders of many women who have come before. That work is beginning to bear fruit. Finally, I believe, the world is ready to hear about

physiology, and the complex interactions among culture and women's life cycle and biology. There are increasing numbers who are curious to learn how incredibly intricate, relevant and durable the normal, menstrual cycle truly is.

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2009 SMCR Conference

By Elizabeth Kissling,
Conference Coordinator

Greetings from snowbound Spokane!

I hope everyone's new year is off to a good start. For me, 2009 looks like just 2008 so far; Spokane's December snowfall was a record-setting 60+ inches, more than we normally receive in an entire winter. But I promise it will all be gone by the time you arrive in June.

In fact, it is typically about 70° and sunny every day in early June, and the Red Lion Hotel at the Park is just a couple of blocks from the downtown area, through the beautiful Riverfront Park. June is a great time of year to enjoy the best of Spokane. If you have some extra time, you may want to stay and enjoy the hiking, boating, mountain biking, and other outdoor activities the area has to offer.

More importantly, of course, I'm working on putting together an exciting 30th anniversary conference for you. Our theme this year is "Menstrual Moments: Media Messages About Menstruation", which I have defined very broadly to include a variety of media. This could mean film, television, print, internet, advertising, news, or entertainment media; it can include educational materials, public health campaigns, interview research, and

sociocultural perceptions and interpretations of these representations. David Linton, member of the Society and Professor of Communication Arts at Marymount College in Manhattan, will be a keynote speaker. Giovanna Chesler, also a Society member and an Assistant Professor in Communication Arts at Marymount Manhattan College, is putting together a screening of several new films about menstruation. As I write this article in January, other proposals are trickling in, including one for another new film and another for an art exhibit. I anticipate a flood of proposals at the end of the month as the deadline approaches.

The Red Lion Hotel is holding rooms for us at the discount conference rate of \$99 for single occupancy and \$109 for triple/quad occupancy for reservations made by May 14, 2009. It's never too early to make your reservation. Make sure to identify yourself as a member of our group when you call, 509-326-8000.

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**Members' News**

Justisse-Healthworks for Women is holding a fertility awareness conference: *Body Literacy and Fertility Awareness: Building Community & Envisioning the Future Conference*, May 14 to May 17, 2009 in Edmonton, Alberta. Holistic Reproductive Health Practitioner graduates and students, fertility awareness instructors, and other holistic well-woman care providers are invited to come together and share their interests and expertise in the field of fertility awareness education, body literacy, and holistic reproductive health care. Sessions will include topics such as: use of the menstrual cycle chart in clinical

practice and as diagnostic tool; the intersection of advocacy, community, media and fertility awareness; radical menstrual, holistic healing paradigms and feminist science studies; the cosmology of the menstrual cycle in Traditional Chinese Medicine; and nutrition for healthy cycles and healthy bodies.

After six years working with the Canadian Women's Health Network (CWHN), Kathleen O'Grady is moving to a new job with the Conference Board of Canada (an independent, non-partisan think tank) in Ottawa, ON, Canada. She will be working on health programs within their social and public policy section. She remains a Research Associate at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec.

Web References:  
<http://www.kathleenogrady.com/>  
CWHN: <http://www.cwhn.ca/>

Paula Derry, Ph.D., and Greg Derry, Ph.D., have completed the first phase of their research demonstrating that the menstrual cycle is a nonlinear dynamical system, and look forward to explaining and disseminating their findings.

From Kathleen B. Lustyk: For those interested in the scientific study of women's health issues, we invite you to visit the Lustyk Women's Health Lab at [www.spu.edu/Lustyklab](http://www.spu.edu/Lustyklab). Housed within the Department of Psychology at Seattle Pacific University (SPU) the Lustyk Women's Health Lab has several active members including graduate students, undergraduate students, and also post-baccalaureate volunteers. The Primary Investigator, Kathleen B. Lustyk, PhD,

is Professor of Psychology at SPU and Affiliate Associate Professor at the University of Washington School of Nursing. To date, much of her research has focused on stress, quality of life, and premenstrual symptom reporting. Most recently Dr. Lustyk has begun a series of collaborative projects investigating the effects of mindfulness meditation on various health-related outcomes. She and her colleague Dr. Alan Marlatt, who is Professor of Psychology at the University of Washington, have begun to develop a mindfulness-based meditation approach that is designed specifically for women. She is actively investigating effects of mindfulness meditation on neuroendocrine and psychophysiological stress reactivity and specifically on symptom severity in women diagnosed with premenstrual syndrome and/or premenstrual dysphoric disorder. Her other interests related to premenstrual issues include understanding inter-relationships among trait mindfulness, body awareness, and premenstrual symptomatology, and study of menstrual cycle phase and stressor type on the psychophysiological and neuroendocrine stress reactivity and recovery in women. The Lustyk Women's Health Lab is equipped to measure cardiorespiratory reactivity and recovery to a variety of laboratory stressors including physiological stressors such as the cold pressor test and psychological or cognitive stressors such as the Paced Serial Addition Test. The high-tech online chart recorder allows for several continuous measures of physiological responses such as heart rate, respiratory rate, and skin conductance. Moreover, the Lustyk Women's Health Lab is designed for the secure and safe collection and storage of samples for hormone analyses.

In 2002, Dr. Lustyk received the Outstanding Research Article Award from the Society of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates for her work in women's health. She has served as an expert consultant for drug company research on issues of premenstrual symptomatology and quality of life in women.

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A Tribute to Alice Dan

By Peggy Stubbs

I am humbled to offer these comments in tribute to Alice Dan on behalf of all SMCR members. As our first conference coordinator in 1977, she and other activist researchers went on to found our Society as a formal non-profit organization in 1979. Ever since, Alice's continued commitment to our organization has served us well. When Alice and others formed the Society, menstruation was an even more taboo topic than it is today. There were no advertisements for tampons on television; women were told that cramps would disappear after they had a baby or accepted their feminine role. And there was no focus on menstruation apart from its role in reproduction. Alice and her colleagues insisted on looking at the menstrual cycle more broadly. For example, as she explained to a Chicago reporter in publicity for our 20th anniversary conference, "as a biorhythm ...it provides a very interesting way to study body-mind relationships" [and] "gives us a perspective on ebb and flow, the notion that things go around and you don't always have to act like you're always the same. That is an important insight." Thus, Alice and our other founders can be credited with guiding

our research work to explore women's experiences of the menstrual cycle from a variety of different perspectives in order to better understand the role that the cycle plays in women's lives.

An impeccable scholar with national recognition, Alice has impressive career accomplishments. Currently, she is a Professor Emerita at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and an American Psychological Association Fellow. Until 2002, she was founding director of UIC's Center for Research on Women and Gender, and professor in the College of Nursing and the School of Public Health. She also developed and directed UIC's National Center of Excellence on Women's Health. She was also a charter member of National Academy of Women's Health Medical Education, and served as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Council for Research on Women, on the editorial board of the *Journal of Women's Health*, and on the Standing Committee on Diversity for Sigma Xi, The Scientific Research Society. She has published numerous articles on premenstrual symptoms, effects of stress on menstrual functioning, physical activity in midlife women, and health consequences of menopause. Edited books featuring the work of Society colleagues include *The Menstrual Cycle, Vol. 1: A Synthesis of Interdisciplinary Research* (New York, Springer, 1980) and *Menstrual Health in Women's Lives* (Champaign, IL, University of Illinois Press, 1992). Her own research, her activism on behalf of enhancing women's health, and her efforts on behalf of gaining more visibility for other menstrual cycle scholars has been important, and inspirational to many.

Personally, I must add that Alice has had a huge impact on my own career as a menstrual cycle researcher, as I expect is the case for others. A senior scholar with impressive credentials, Alice was nevertheless always accessible and encouraging to students and new researchers. This kind of mentoring helped to create what I have valued most about SMCR – a community of scholars whose work is welcomed, valued, and critiqued with rigor as well as respect.

It is hard to imagine that Alice is no longer on the Board of SMCR. That said, I have no doubt that she will continue to be an active SMCR member and that her work and way of working will continue to influence our collective efforts. We have the benefit of Alice's reflections on nearly 30 years of SMCR work in her article "What have We Learned: An Historical View of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research" (*National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 16 (3) Fall, 2004). We are indeed fortunate to have rubbed shoulders and brains with her over the years! Thank you, Alice, most sincerely.

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**Menstrual Goings On Down Under Or A Menstrual Flare Up in Australia**

By David Linton

In 1994 there arose in Southern Australia a controversy over plans to build a bridge to an island in the Murray River estuary for purposes of developing a recreational area. The resulting conflict, which came to be known as the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Affair, centered on claims by a group of Abori-

ginal women that the island was the site of traditional rituals, "secret women's business," and was, therefore, protected by the Aboriginal Heritage Act against development.

An SMCR member, David Linton, Professor of Communication Arts at Marymount Manhattan College, recently published an analysis of the story that delves into the ways that varied cultural constructions of menstruation lay at the heart of the controversy. Linton's article demonstrates how menstrual ecology is an ever-changing, dynamic phenomenon that influences, and is influenced by, economic, political and, particularly media conditions. The women making claims about the ritual significance of the site wrote down their reasons that the grounds should be protected, sealed them in an envelope, and wrote across it, "Secret Women's Business – to be read only by women." One had to surmise just what the secrets were about and the developers were left to rely on anthropological records and conflicting claims by other women to figure out if, in fact, the grounds were actually deserving of protected status. The debate led to a lengthy series of court suits and counter suits as well as to a specially appointed Royal Commission. Eventually, the claims were rejected and, nearly ten years later, the bridge was built.

Dr. Linton's article explores the issue in the context of how modern media have changed society's concepts of privacy, secrecy and the taboos that have traditionally surrounded the menstrual cycle, and how modern practices conflict with those of traditional oral cultures such as the Australian Aboriginals. Along the way he reviews other aspects of the Australian menstrual ecology

including the publication of the Prince Charles tampon scandal which first appeared in an Australian journal, an image in a novel by David Malouf, and a recent award-winning TV commercial for a menstrual product depicting how a group of male construction workers would behave if men menstruated.

One of the more provocative conclusions reached in Dr. Linton's essay is that menstruation is often such a delicate topic and occupies such highly contested space that other topics arise to substitute for it when the special place it occupies is challenged. The necessity of keeping the menstrual practices of ancient Aboriginal tribes secret from the prying eyes of non-Aboriginal people and from all men led to a number of evasions that ended up sowing dissension within the Aboriginal women's community and even destroyed the political careers of some white men who got caught up in the fray. Furthermore, although it sometimes seems that contemporary societies have abandoned all traditional taboos regarding the body and its processes, the menstrual taboo still retains much of its power to evoke strong emotions about how to manage this basic biological phenomenon. Yet the impact of modern media, especially image-based media, has steadily eroded that taboo as well thereby accelerating the conflict with those who would cling to the ways of ancient times.

The article, "Keeping Secrets" appears in the *Griffith REVIEW*, Vol. 22, Summer, 2008-2009, available at [www3.griffith.edu.au/01/griffithreview/toc.php](http://www3.griffith.edu.au/01/griffithreview/toc.php)

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2008 Dues Now Due

Please note that SMCR member dues are due in January of each year. If you have already sent in your dues, or if you have paid in advance for future years, thank you! If not, please send your check for \$50 for one year, or \$125 for 3 years, made out to SMCR, to Peggy Moloney, 2351 Doreen Ct., N.E., Atlanta, GA 30345. Please also send me any changes in your snail mail or e-mail address. Thanks.

Peggy Moloney
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### **From the Editor: Last Paper Copy of Newsletter**

This is the last time that a paper copy of the newsletter will be routinely sent to members. The newsletter is posted electronically on the SMCR website; all members on the SMCR listserv receive an e-mail notice to let them know when the newsletter has been posted. Any member who still wants to receive a paper copy is welcome to do so but must request this by contacting either me or Peggy Moloney. I am assuming that anyone who requested receiving a paper copy at any time in the past will continue to want one; if you are getting a paper copy and no longer want one, please let either me or Peggy know.

Submissions to the newsletter are always welcome. Please send news about your publications, presentations, activities; news of members; commentaries on topics of interest; book reviews; any announcements of conferences; queries about whether to write an article. Please send material in the body of an e-mail or

in a Word attachment or via snail mail on a diskette. I am also looking for someone interested in writing a book review for the newsletter of *Estrogen errors—why progesterone is better for women's health* by Jerilynn Prior and Susan Baxter, PhD. Please contact me if interested.

My e-mail is paula.derry@gmail.com and my snail-mail is 4811 Crowson Ave. Baltimore, MD 21212, USA.

Paula Derry  
Editor, SMCR Newsletter

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Errata

In the Spring/Summer 2008 issue of the newsletter, in the President's Remarks, the statement was printed in error that during perimenopause there are "erratic sometimes higher estradiol...levels." The statement should have read "erratic, higher estradiol... levels."

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### **Disclaimer**

All articles in the newsletter are the opinions of the authors and not the official position of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research.

**Dues Payment and/or Newsletter Preference**

Enclosed are my dues for 2009 for SMCR (\$50) or for three years (\$125).

Name:

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Changes in current address:

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Please continue to send a paper copy of the newsletter: \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

Send to Peggy Moloney or Paula Derry.

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