

VOICES

THE FALL ISSUE



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Letter from the Editor

BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

One of the most satisfying feelings is when your professional life intersects with your personal passions. That's why I was so excited when I saw the opening for the Newsletter Editor here at the Women's Center. As a senior majoring in English, I have lots of experience in editing and publishing, and it happens to be what I would like to pursue professionally, too. But what made me really want to apply for this job was the fact that it was for the Women's Center, specifically. Feminism and civil equality have always been at the center of who I am and something I have been passionate about ever since I could remember. Growing up, I was surrounded by incredible, strong women. I lived with my single mother, her sister, and her mother; all of whom were intelligent, liberal women. In fact, my great grandmother was the founder of one of the first Democratic Women's clubs in the state. My mother also had a series of strong, female friends that acted as caretakers and babysitters when needed. Some of these women were women of color or queer, and learning about how different, varied, and beautiful women could be at such a young age was extremely formative for me. I was incredibly lucky to grow up with that experience and feminist perspective.

My unconventional and unique childhood experiences made me the woman I am today, and I'm so excited to continue to grow and explore personally and professionally here at the Women's Center. I think it's vital to showcase what this hub does; it's some of the most important work on this campus. From the events and speakers they host, to body-positive workshops, to creating safe spaces for those who identify as women to feel welcome. The Center also does a fantastic job at tackling gender-based violence that's often prevalent on college campuses, whether it's through the Men's Project, the Violence Against Women Prevention Program, or Greeks Against Sexual Assault.

This semester, working on the Newsletter has challenged me in ways I couldn't have imagined. While writing and editing have always been something I've excelled at, tackling a larger project like this came with its ups and downs. It has taught me a lot about my strengths and weaknesses as a writer and an editor and how I can improve professionally. It has also made me think a lot about what I would like to do after graduation. While I've always wanted to work in the publishing industry, I've realized that I don't think I would be best suited as an editorial assistant, someone who proofreads manuscripts. Instead, I think I've learned that I would rather work as a literary agent or in the marketing department of a larger publishing house. One of my strengths definitely lies in being able to see the big picture and turn something previously conceptualized into a tangible product.

While we initially intended for this edition to encapsulate the first half of the semester, it has become more reflective of our work throughout the semester as a whole. This is why many of the articles written by our staff read from the perspective of having just started the semester.

Overall, I am honored and humbled to be the Newsletter Editor of **Voices** for the 2019-2020 school year. I hope that the newsletters I oversee will both be informative and educational and touch on topics relevant to UConn specifically, but also out in the world. To end this letter, I will leave you with the Center's definition of feminism, something that I hope is echoed throughout this issue: "Feminism is the belief that all women have the right to control their bodies and destinies; the right to live a life free of violence and abuse; the right to equal protection under the law, including equal access to education, employment, and power."



(IMAGE COURTESY OF BRIGHTWORD COMMUNICATIONS)

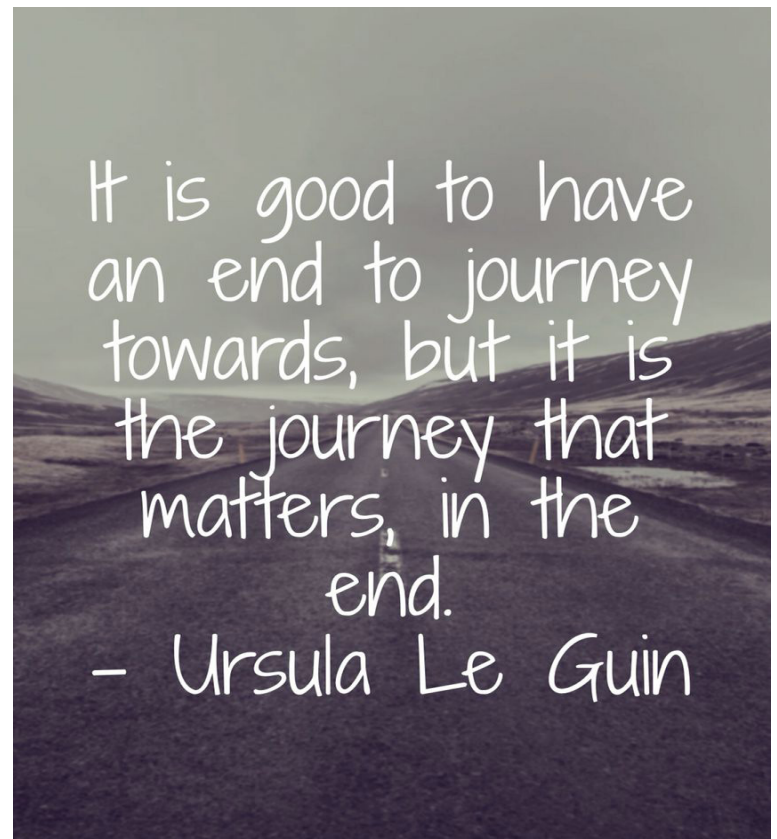
Letter from the Director

BY: KATHLEEN HOLGERSON

I just completed our end of the semester evaluation process with our student staff. This is an opportunity for us to give feedback on their work and to get feedback on what the Center is doing well and what we could be doing better to support their personal, academic, and professional development and achievement. There are several themes that I have noted from these conversations.

First, power matters. As much as we work to flatten the hierarchy and to dismantle systems of oppression within the Center, both still have a significant impact on our staff. Evaluation meetings are often approached as “being called to the Principal’s Office” as opposed to being embraced as a space for constructive and mutual feedback. Even the term “constructive feedback” is almost always repeated back as “negative feedback.” New staff are more often than not intimidated by returning staff and underestimate the skills and knowledge they bring to their positions. White students and men students continue to have to navigate their space-taking – a function of how privilege and identity have shaped their sense of their place in the world.

Second, the journey matters. Obviously we all have a job to do, and there is an expectation of work getting done. Our dance is to maintain our commitment to high quality programs and services with the risks and failures that go along with student development. Almost all of the student staff report increases in their confidence levels, which also extends to their engagement in the classroom and with their peers. They are able to try new things, forge new paths, and let go of old assumptions and strategies that no longer serve them. They practice empathy. They learn to give themselves the same grace and compassion that they are the first to show to others. They change their minds about their future plans because they learn of new options or they recognize their true talents.



(IMAGE COURTESY OF PINTEREST)

As many of you know, there have been several very public incidents of racism on campus. These have prompted some painful, challenging, and illuminating discussions at the Center, in public town halls and dialogues, and in private peer groups. Many students, staff, and faculty of color have shared their experiences with racism on campus, which have been happening well before this Fall and are ongoing. Many white students, staff, and faculty are learning about the experiences of their peers and colleagues and are shocked by the pervasive nature of racism in our community. As a Center, we are committed to a multi-level approach to our anti-racist, feminist practice. We create space for those who are new to these conversations to learn about the impact of power, privilege, and oppression. We strive to hold space for those that have been directly impacted by racism and other forms of oppression to seek support and healing. We hold ourselves accountable for the ways in which we perpetuate racism and work to dismantle how whiteness manifests in our space. We ask “What would it look like if we got it right?” in order to envision the possibilities of a more welcoming and inclusive campus. The students, staff, and faculty that we have the honor to know and collaborate with are the agents of change who are designing and building a campus, and a world, of less harm and more possibility for all.

**The one thing that I and my main characters never do
when contemplating the future is to give up hope.**

—Octavia E. Butler

(IMAGE COURTESY OF JODI BAKER BOOKS)

Letter from the Writing Intern

BY: MARIELIS CRUZ

Sandra Cisneros, a famous Latina poet and writer said, "I am obsessed with becoming a woman comfortable in her skin." I resonate with this quote because I have never fit into my own body. Before working at the Women's Center, I have never had a space to express my writing in conjunction with my experiences as a woman. A woman's role in society has many expectations, and we are often told to be quiet and not share our voice. This semester, I am excited to break down these barriers and redefine what a woman can be instead of what a woman should be. I am a woman obsessed with becoming comfortable in her skin.

My internship at the Women's Center has been the most profound and beautiful educational experience that I could have at the University of Connecticut. This role has gifted me with the chance to witness great change and progress towards a better tomorrow. I have learned how to be an ally, an advocate, and a feminist-in-progress. It has been a great opportunity to watch the staff members here at the Center educate others on gender equity and advocate for those who do not have the means to speak out. From marching at the March to End Victim Blaming to discussions on relevant issues, we have accomplished so much this semester, and I am proud to be a part of something that marks our advocacy and educational purpose here on campus.



I AM OBSESSED
with becoming a
WOMAN
comfortable in
HER SKIN
- SANDRA CISNEROS
@HIJADETUMADRE

I hope through my writing and partnership with Lauren, the Newsletter Editor, we can create an outlet where society's expectations will not impede learning about feminism and about the experiences of women in the Fall 2019 edition of **Voices**. I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter and hear from voices who have long been silenced.

(IMAGE COURTESY OF @HIJADETUMADRE ON INSTAGRAM)

Meet the New Staff



Aboli Ghatpande - Graphic Designer

My name is Aboli, and I'm a senior in Pharmacy School and also completing a Digital Arts minor. I'm the Graphic Designer at the Women's Center, and I am so excited to be part of this amazing team! I create graphics for pretty much anything related to the Center and work closely with the Marketing Committee. I love that not only do I get to design, but also learn about various interesting social issues through the job. I'm looking forward to learning and getting to know everyone at the Center better!

Ariela Reiter - VAWPP Facilitator

I am currently a Facilitator for the VAWPP program. At VAWPP the goal is to prevent sexual harassment on our UConn campus. We do this by visiting FYE courses and hosting a consent workshop. I love the Women's Center because of its mission, but also because of the amazing staff. Everyone working at the Center is so welcoming and inspiring. This semester, I am looking forward to getting more involved at the Women's Center and getting to know all the people who spend their time there. I also hope to gain a feeling of fulfillment while doing my job as a part of VAWPP.



Brielle Berkowitz - Special Projects Coordinator

I oversee and organize special projects and events at the Women's Center. This includes things like Lunafest and the Body Project. I work with full time staff to help coordinate their events and plan things out. My favorite thing about working at the Women's Center so far is that it is a warm and welcoming work environment. I'm really excited about my work with Lunafest and hope everyone can attend next spring.



Katie Kwochka - WiSTEM Co-Coordinator

Hi! My name is Katie Kwochka, and I am a senior Pathobiology major with a minor in Medical Anthropology, and I am the Program Co-ordinator for the Women in STEM mentoring program! Along with my Co-Coordinator, Angel, we recruit, organize, and match undergraduate women in STEM majors to help women gain a support system and form connections for guidance and advice. I love how open and welcoming everyone in the Women's Center has been so far, and I look forward to working with everyone!



Marielis Cruz - Writing Intern

Hello, my name is Marielis Cruz. I am the Writing Intern for the Fall 2019 Newsletter and in charge of the Women's Center Weekly Digest for our staff. I love the Women's Center environment and mission. It is important to educate and advocate for gender equity and make the world a better place. I am looking forward to making new friends, crafting the Fall Newsletter Edition with Lauren, and learning more about feminism and advocacy!

Kamya Trivedi - Programming Co-Chair

My name is Kamya, and I'm a junior Finance and Political Science double major. My role at the Women's Center is to Co-Chair the Programming Committee which plans events that promote and facilitate conversations about women's rights all around campus! Our weekly meetings are open to all students so they can provide input and ideas for the kind of programming they would like to see. Before becoming Co-Chair of the committee, I attended these meetings as a student interested in feminism and gender equity. I'm incredibly excited to have a more involved role in programming this semester, and I hope that we can continue hosting events that students find both enjoyable and interesting!



Gladi Suero - VAWPP Facilitator

At VAWPP we do workshops with first-year students to talk about consent and ways to prevent gender-based violence. The Women's Center has been such a great place for me, and I've met so many amazing people. I've never been in an environment where everyone is so accepting and understanding of social issues, and it really is just a great place to be. I'm looking forward to getting closer to everyone else at the Center and working hard to give the best VAWPP workshops I can give.

Kelly Flannery - VAWPP Graduate Intern

My name is Kelly Flannery, and I am the VAWPP Graduate Intern for this academic year. I am a current MPA student with the Department of Public Policy. During my time here, I will be scheduling and coordinating the FYE Consent 201 workshops and assisting fellow staff members, Bruna Basso and Frankie Anile-Santiago, with Greeks Against Sexual Assault (GASA). I started my time with the Women's Center as a sophomore in GASA. I learned so much about myself and really developed skills in leadership and facilitation. I am so happy to be back and cannot wait to continue working with the wonderful people on staff. I am looking forward to spreading the message of the Women's Center throughout campus. I want to let everyone know that, regardless of how they identify, we are here to support them.

Ethan Werstler - VAWPP Facilitator

I am a part of the Women's Center because I am a feminist, and I want to remind other self-identifying men that they can and should be feminists too. I am super excited to begin my work educating this year's incredible freshmen class as a VAWPP facilitator. I will be presenting 50-minute workshops on the definition and importance of consent.

Isabel Alvarez Diaz - In-Power Co-Facilitator

Hi, I'm Isabel! I'm going into my third year here at UConn. I am currently a double major in Human Development and Family Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with a minor in Psychology. I am a Co-Facilitator for In-Power, which is a student-led group dedicated to creating a gender inclusive community. I joined the Women's Center because I wanted to be that individual to support anyone on their journey of healing and helping those become informed of the issues going on that affect us.





Abeer Mohammed - VAWPP Intern

I'm working here at the Women's Center as a VAWPP Intern through my Human Rights internship. I am going to be working on the Clothesline Project for this semester and planning one additional VAWPP-related program. I am also assisting with marketing and recruitment for the Student Health Adjustment and Relationship Experiences (SHARE) study. I love the Women's Center so far because it means a lot to me to be part of a team that is working to directly impact the student body and make a difference. I also appreciate the fact that the Women's Center is so welcoming to diverse students and is a safe space for everyone. I am looking forward to supporting VAWPP and sharing my VAWPP experiences with my Human Rights class.



Daniella Angulo - VAWPP Facilitator

Hi everyone! I'm Daniella, and I'm a Facilitator with VAWPP! We work to create healthy, meaningful discussions about consent and examine the norms that facilitate gender-based violence. I'm so excited to be working at the Women's Center. The amazing people I took the VAWPP class with and the welcoming environment of the Center make it a great place to be! I'm looking forward to getting to know everyone better and becoming a better Facilitator as the academic year goes on.

OUR OTHER NEW STAFF MEMBERS INCLUDE RACHEL SANTOSTEFANO, GEORGINA DENG, YINYIN TONG, EVELYN JOHNSON, NATHAN-CRAIG MACHADO, XINGRU CHEN, MISHA JETHWA, AND FATUMATA SHERRIF. THEY ARE ALL EXCITED TO BE A PART OF THE WOMEN'S CENTER STAFF!

Lauren Ablondi Olivo - Newsletter Editor

Hi there! I'm Lauren, and I'm the Editor for our newsletter, **Voices**, here at the Women's Center. My job is to write about all that goes on here: from VAWPP to GASA and everything in between. Given its title, I want the newsletter to reflect the voices of everyone here at the Center, so that's why, for this edition, you'll get to read many articles written by staff themselves on what they do here. During my time at the Women's Center, I hope to curate newsletters that not only encompass all of the amazing work that is done at this organization, but that send a message, too. I hope **Voices** is a space for people to feel recognized and included.

Meet the New Staff - Judy Lopez

BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

This fall, the Women's Center was excited to welcome a new member of our staff, Judy Lopez. Judy is our new full time Women's Center Assistant, as well as a UConn student herself. Before coming to UConn four years ago, Judy "worked in the corporate sector for over twenty years." She started her career here at UConn at the Office of the Controller in Finance Systems and eventually moved over to ITS in the Project Management Office.

Judy says that she wanted to join the Women's Center because she enjoys and respects the space provided at the Center for both students and staff. Her favorite part of the Women's Center is interacting with the student staff and learning about their involvement within the Center and the campus community. As a mom of three young adults (two UConn alum and one current UConn student), it's no wonder she believes "students are a true inspiration" and enjoys their "innovative style".

While she considers herself to be "a strong independent woman who likes to empower and be empowered", Judy is also "looking forward to continue my growth and learning about all of the wonderful things that take place at the Center."

Judy will be graduating with her Bachelor of General Studies with a minor in Human Development and Family Studies and Latin Studies in May 2020.

Welcome to the team, Judy!



(IMAGE COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS)

2019 Staff Retreat

BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

This year, the Women's Center met for their 2019 Staff Retreat on September 14th. The retreat was led by Director Kathleen Holgerson, Associate Director Kathy Fischer, and Graduate Assistant Yasmine Taha.

The retreat was mainly focused on coming together as a community and a group to talk about the importance of what we do here at the Women's Center and to further educate ourselves on topics such as feminism, privilege, etc.

Personally, my favorite part of the day was when we watched a video of Roxane Gay's "Bad Feminist" Ted Talk. Roxanne Gay is an author and outspoken activist who wrote a book of the same name, **Bad Feminist**. The book and her Ted Talk focus on what it means to be a "bad feminist", essentially, someone who is putting in the work and the effort to further educate themselves on feminist issues, especially intersectional ones, while also being aware of the fact that no one is perfect. The idea of putting people on pedestals and labeling them as the "perfect" feminist often sets us up for disappointment. Take, for example, certain celebrities and their feminist stances. In this day and age, while it's important for us to support public figures who represent our ideals and values, it's also important to know that they aren't the experts on those topics and neither are we. We are students of life who are committed to this practice and this identity, but who must also acknowledge that we aren't going to be the best at every point of the day. Instead, it's important to be okay with our fear of failure; to realize when we've made a mistake, and instead of beating ourselves up about it, try and correct the behavior or situation instead.

I spoke to Kathy Fischer, who led the majority of the retreat, to ask her why it's so important for all of the employees to come together each year:

"At the beginning of every fall semester, the Women's Center holds both a New Staff Orientation and an all Staff Retreat. Both are connected and serve to create the foundations in which we will do our work. New staff learn the herstory and mission of the Women's Center, our learning objectives for student staff, and the frameworks we use as guides to accomplish our mission. These frameworks include our Community of Practice, understanding of levels of oppression, and what it means to work from an anti-racist feminist perspective.

The student staff retreat serves to provide opportunities to reflect and build on the foundations set forth in the orientation. Our goals for this day include building community and connections, developing and furthering our self-awareness, exploring issues of power and privilege, and skill building to apply our knowledge to become effective change agents."

To Write Love on Her Arms

BY: MARIELIS CRUZ

Based on a true story, the film **To Write Love on Her Arms** follows Renee, the protagonist, on her journey towards recovery and gives hope to those who suffer with mental health issues. Renee battles with depression, drug addiction, self-harm and is a survivor of sexual assault. With the help of her friends, Renee starts to find herself and fight against the stigma towards mental health. Jamie Tworkowski, the founder of the non-profit organization To Write Love on Her Arms, says "The stigma begins to go away when we talk about [mental health]." (Talkspace.com)

After the film screening, the discussion was led by Kathy Fischer, the Associate Director of the Women's Center and Anne Thompson Heller, L.M.F.T., a Psychiatric Social Worker in Student Health & Wellness. We began discussing the secrets kept within us. These secrets keep us sick. We should be able to talk about the hidden things within ourselves and keep these conversations ongoing. Creating a space for us to express ourselves and belong to a community helps us get better. If we "listen louder", which was this year's theme for Suicide Prevention Week, and hear others when they are trying to reach out, we can then begin to build an open dialogue where we can share our feelings without shame.

Renee's story allowed the audience to understand that the healing process is life-long. It is a constant fight. Kathy Fischer said, "Healing is a process and journey. It is not linear and has its ups and downs." In order to be accepting and understanding of those who are dealing with their mental health, we need to create an accepting, loving, and compassionate community to help support those who are struggling with their mental health. It is okay to not know the answer, but providing a listening ear is crucial; we need to be willing to aid in other's recovery. By creating this space for them and removing the stigma on mental health, society as a whole can contribute to this change and move towards a better future.

Overall, this film screening and discussion, hosted by the Women's Center, was very educational and informational and helped me better understand how we can all help those struggling with mental illness more.



(IMAGE COURTESY OF TO WRITE LOVE ON HER ARMS FOUNDATION)

March to End Victim Blaming

BY: MARIELIS CRUZ

The March to End Victim Blaming is an annual event hosted by UConn's Revolution Against Rape (RAR). The march signifies the fight against gender-based violence and supports the victims/survivors who have experienced sexual assault. This year, our very own In-Power, a peer run group for victims/survivors of sexual assault, was one of the co-sponsors for the event. In-Power facilitators Sara DeFazio and Isabel Alvarez-Diaz took the stage during the event to empower and inform others about their group's mission to support victims/survivors in their journey to healing. Here are a few words from Sara and Isabel:

"The March to End Victim Blaming is essential to this campus. It tells victims/survivors at UConn that it was not their fault, and they are not alone. It also serves as a reminder to all that we will be heard. The march itself provided a space for people to express their emotions freely, without the pressure of silence. The March made me feel validated, not only as a victim/survivor myself, but also as a UConn student. I am grateful to RAR for their efforts and for the ability to give a speech promoting In-Power!" - Sara DeFazio

"The March to End Victim Blaming is a critical event for the UConn community. It's an event that provides a space for victims/survivors to voluntarily share their stories, receive reassurance that they aren't alone, and hold conversations about victim blaming and how it's not their fault. To me, this march made me feel empowered, not only for myself, but for the individuals who went and shared their stories. It provided a message for those who are afraid/don't believe they should speak up to be aware of a community that is here to support and hear their stories at any point of their healing process. This is essentially what Sara and I want to accomplish for In-Power. It felt empowering to be able to speak at the march about In-Power and how Sara and I want to be able to give that space for individuals. I'd like to thank RAR for giving us this opportunity and for their efforts in spreading awareness on a national concern like this." - Isabel Alvarez-Diaz

Victim-blaming is a serious phenomenon that places blame on the victim and frees the perpetrator of all fault. As a society, it is crucial to be aware of gender-based violence and spread awareness. This march gives victims/survivors a chance to stand with others who have experienced gender-based violence and gives hope for justice. Allies are encouraged to stand with survivors in their healing process and create a space for their voices to be heard. Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont has signed a new law, and as of the first of October, the 'Time's Up Act' has been in effect. This act has expanded the Connecticut employment laws, specifically the sexual harassment prevention law. There are new training requirements, notice and posting requirements, and protection for employees in regards to sexual harassment.



**(SARA DEFAZIO AND ISABEL ALVAREZ-DIAZ AT THE MARCH TO END VICTIM BLAMING.
IMAGE COURTESY OF MARIELIS CRUZ)**

Our Programs

The programs at the Women's Center are always hard at work to make sure we are providing ample resources and opportunities to our student body. Keep reading to hear an update from our programs and why they matter so much for the people involved.

WiSTEM: BY: KATIE KWOCHKA AND ANGEL WEI

Women in STEM Mentoring Program (WiSTEM) is an initiative designed to support underclass women pursuing STEM degrees through the mentorship of upperclass women peers. In a nutshell, mentees will be matched with a mentor who can provide personal support, academic advice, and knowledge about career development. WiSTEM hopes to prepare our mentees for a successful outcome in STEM at UConn by addressing possible obstacles. We aim to help them form strong support systems and give them someone to go to for advice, as well as help them make friends with other pairs, which will hopefully strengthen their confidence in their choice of a future career. As a program, we hope to inspire confidence in girls and make them feel welcome and empowered in their chosen academic paths. Ultimately, we want to enhance the role of women in STEM at UConn through discussion and education about women's issues, gender equity and stereotypes, and allow these women to form connections with each other.

BETWEEN WOMEN: RACHEL SANTOSTEFANO

Between Women is a discussion group for LGBT+ and questioning women. It is a safe space where we can share our interests and experiences. It is vitally important to have a space specifically for LGBT+ women on campus, because even within supposedly "diverse" spaces, homophobia, misogyny, and racism remains an issue. Between Women also functions as a space for closeted queer women to be themselves without the fear of being outed.

My goals for the group as a new facilitator are to expand both our services and membership. There is no shortage of LGBT+ women on campus, and I would like to make our group as accessible for them as possible. Whether it be a place to hang out, share stories, or to simply remind these women that they're not alone, I hope all feel welcome. I encourage all LGBT+ women to come, even if only for one meeting, because there's nothing more important that we do than act as a safe space for people to be themselves.

VAWPP: BY: MIRANDA GARCIA

The Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP) is a peer-education program, which serves the campus community by aiming to put an end to gender-based violence through education, outreach, and advocacy. Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and stalking. In VAWPP workshops, usually two peer educators or a full time staff member visit First Year Experience (FYE) or UNIV classes to discuss some of the structural and interpersonal drivers of gender-based violence. The workshops focus on the role of power, delve deeper into gender norms that influence communication patterns, and use skits and written scenarios to increase empathy for victims/survivors of gender based violence.

I chose to be a part of VAWPP my first semester at the University of Connecticut after participating myself in the first of many, many workshops I would come to experience. The facilitators who visited my class were passionate and interesting and were talking about something important that so often gets swept under the rug, especially in a classroom. The class session was fun at times and eye opening at others. I had never thought about the question, "Does gender matter?" After the workshop, students in my UNIV class were talking about structural inequity, Title IX, and, most importantly, what they could do to put an end to gender-based violence. I knew I had to be a part of something so influential and am now in my third year of being a peer facilitator.

So far, being a part of VAWPP has been the best decision I've made in college. I've made great friends at the Women's Center and found a home on the fourth floor of the Student Union. Every day I come to work, I learn something new. I feel so lucky to have the opportunity to pass some of that knowledge along to the participants in my workshops, as well as my family, friends, and peers. We call it "planting seeds." A true community of practice, the Women's Center has helped me grow as a facilitator and a person. Every week, the VAWPP cohort meets to discuss the triumphs and pitfalls of the week's workshops, and every one of these collective debrief sessions has helped me understand where I can improve my facilitation skills, as well as my feminism as a whole.

If you would like to be a part of VAWPP in the future, please check out the VAWPP involvement page on the Women's Center website. If you take WGSS 3271 in the spring semester, you are eligible to apply for a peer facilitator position for the following fall. You can also become a peer facilitator by participating in the Men's Project or Greeks Against Sexual Assault (GASA) in the Spring semester.

MEN'S PROJECT: TOMMY JACOBSEN

The Men's Project is a group of individuals who identify as men looking to positively influence their peers by challenging social norms and understanding their connection to survivors of gender-based violence. The group meets weekly and covers a variety of topics related to masculinity and how it is formed by our interactions with our families, friends, and the media. Past participants have said the program was transformative, challenging, and that after its conclusion they were much better at implementing bystander intervention strategies. The Men's Project will begin in the spring semester. For more information, email mensproject@uconn.edu.

IN-POWER: SARA DEFazio

The idea for In-Power was started by Women's Center alum Kyle Harrington. They wrote a proposal for a gender inclusive and student led support group for victims/survivors of sexual violence after noticing that students often times looked for opportunities to connect with other individuals who had gone through similar experiences. The inspiration also came from the Women's Center's annual Coffee House that had been held after the speak-out portion of the Take Back the Night event. Many victims/survivors use the Coffee House to connect with others who have experienced sexual violence. In-Power aims to provide this type of space regularly throughout the year.

The group aims to be gender inclusive because sexual violence does not only affect people that identify as women; those who are victims/survivors can identify as any gender. The gender inclusivity of In-Power allows for victims/survivors to feel more comfortable with individuals of different identities within the community.

The group also operates on a student-led basis. There are two facilitators that are both undergraduate students; myself, Sara DeFazio, and my Co-Facilitator, Isabel Diaz. This helps to ensure a level of equity and privacy within the group. The student-led aspect of the group can also help students feel more comfortable since they are disclosing to their peers rather than someone they view as an authority figure.

People who have experienced sexual violence are not a monolith; individuals experience and heal differently, regardless of what they've been through. This means that the more options for victims/survivors to find community in their healing, the better. This group is one of a few support services on campus, such as the counseling services offered by Student Health and Wellness, which can be found on the fourth floor of the Arjona building.

The group had its first meeting in April of 2019 and has helped create a community for many students since then. The group aims to be a space for victims/survivors of sexualized violence to create a community, regardless of where they are in their journey. We meet weekly and discuss a variety of topics such as media, mental health, self-confidence, and coping mechanisms. The group is flexible and responds to the feedback of its members. Meeting topics are agreed upon by the members prior to the planning in order to ensure that participants' voices are heard. Part of creating a safe space for victims/survivors to own their story is giving them the opportunity to control the direction of the group.

All victim/survivors are welcome to join. If interested in learning more, feel free to email us at in-power@uconn.edu.



GASA: BRUNA BASSO AND FRANKIE ANILE-SANTIAGO

GASA, the Greeks Against Sexual Assault Program, operates under the wing of the UConn Women's Center and the UConn Center for Fraternity and Sorority Development. The goal of GASA is to educate members of the UConn Greek community so that they can positively influence their peers by challenging social and cultural norms that promote gender-based violence on campus. Throughout the workshops in the Greek community and the GASA cohort (meetings held in the Spring), dialogue will be created around issues of privilege, gender, intersectionality, sexual assault, and interpersonal violence, focusing on the Greek community.

A program like GASA is important in the college environment, as gender-based violence is more present within the Greek community in comparison to other college populations. According to relevant statistics, sorority women and fraternity men are more likely than other students to be survivors and perpetrators of sexual assault, respectively. (Bannon, et al, 2013) In addition, women in collegiate sororities are more at risk for violence within the context of dating relationships than the general population of college women. (Anderson & Danis, 2007) GASA helps the fight against gender-based violence in the college environment by working with these target populations and implementing education, prevention, and advocacy in their work.

GASA is run by two Co-Facilitators: Bruna Basso and Frankie Anile-Santiago. Basso is a junior majoring in Allied Health Sciences with a Health Sciences Concentration and on a Pre-Med track. Basso is also a sister of Gamma Phi Beta at UConn. Anile-Santiago is a junior majoring in Secondary Education in History, and is a brother of Alpha Kappa Lambda at UConn. They say that, "to us, GASA is a program dear to our hearts. It is something that allowed us to understand a problem that occurs in the UConn Community, as well as the Fraternity and Sorority life, and allows us to advocate for positive change around the topic."

This semester, GASA is focusing on preparing for the spring semester cohort and giving a variety of workshops to the UConn fraternities and sororities on issues related to Title IX and Safety and Wellness, such as sexual assault and domestic violence.



(CO-FACILITATOR BRUNA BASSO WITH UCONN PRESIDENT THOMAS KATSOULEAS.
IMAGE COURTESY OF @UCONNWOMENSCENTER ON INSTAGRAM)

Clothesline Project

BY: ABEER MOHAMED

The Clothesline Project, a visual display of t-shirts created by survivors and secondary survivors of gender-based violence, took place this year from Oct. 14th to Oct. 18th, 2019. Since its creation by the Cape Cod Women's Agenda in 1990, the Clothesline Project has continued to spread awareness about gender-based violence to college campuses around the country. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, so the project was held during this month in order to honor survivors and raise their voices. It was displayed on Fairfield Way, outside of Husky Village, Northwest dorms, and outside of Werth Tower. We wanted to be able to reach the general campus population as well as first-year students, Greek life students, and students in learning communities. Shirts were hung from clotheslines in these locations, bearing various messages such as, "Healing is possible" and "No more violence, but more love". During the week before the event, survivors and supporters came to the Women's Center to create shirts of their own in a private space. Blue shirts represented survivors of child abuse or incest. Yellow shirts represented survivors of sexual harassment or physical assault/battery. Red shirts represented survivors of rape or sexual assault. Purple shirts represented survivors of assault based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Black shirts represented survivors of assault based on race or ethnicity. White shirts represented those who have passed away as a result of sexual or domestic violence. Students who did not create shirts were able to write messages on paper t-shirts to be taped to a display board during the week of the display.

Unfortunately, gender-based violence is still very much a prevalent issue on college campuses. According to UConn's 2018 Clery Report, 23 incidents of sexual assault were reported in Storrs for 2018, up from 16 incidents in 2017. College-aged women are three times more likely to experience sexual violence than women of other age ranges. A 2013 study found that students in sororities and fraternities are also more likely than other students to be survivors and perpetrators of sexual assault, respectively (Bannon et al. 2013). With the recent rise of the #MeToo movement, the conversation surrounding gender-based violence has been amplified, and people are beginning to become more aware of how common it is to be a survivor of gender-based violence.

This increased cultural awareness of the pervasiveness of gender-based violence demonstrates the importance of the Clothesline Project. Students need to know that survivors should not be hidden. They are among them in their classes, clubs, and communities. Sexual and domestic violence are issues that have impacted many people both directly and indirectly, which highlights the necessity of these yearly awareness projects. I am grateful that I was able to lead the Clothesline Project, which has continued to be a supportive and positive initiative that VAWPP has taken to uplift survivors.

Suicide Prevention

Week Keynote

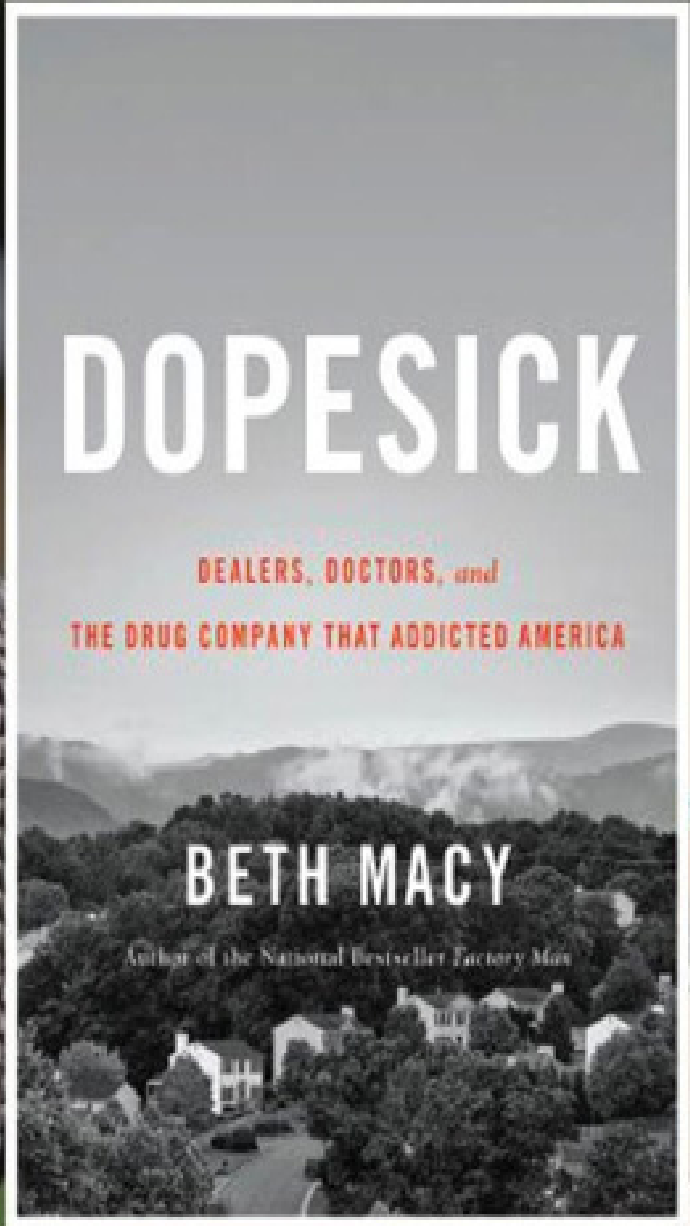
BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

On September 26th, I was lucky enough to be able to attend the annual Suicide Prevention Week's Keynote Speaker event. This year, the speaker was Beth Macy, an acclaimed journalist and author of the **New York Times** best-selling book, **Dopesick**. **Dopesick** explores the current opioid epidemic in America, spotlighting three specific towns in Virginia, where Macy is from. To begin her talk, Macy simply started with telling the crowd, "I'm sorry." She explains that she says this at the beginning of each talk she gives because over 70,000 Americans were lost to overdoses in 2017 alone, and a third of these deaths were opioid related. Therefore, it's likely that people in her audiences have been affected by this crisis.

You might be wondering what drugs have to do with suicide in America, or what they even have to do with women. But Macy gets into this. She explains that while multiple diseases are causes of death for many addicted people, suicide is a leading cause, too. Abusers attempt suicide six times more often than those who don't abuse substances. She explains that there is a strong correlation between mental illness and addiction, and that those with parents or relatives who have struggled with addiction are fifty percent more likely to struggle, too.

While I was listening to Macy speak, I was trying to think how this connected back to the Women's Center and the work that we do here. That's when Macy started to share the story of a woman named Tess Henry. Tess started abusing drugs in her late teens and even went to jail for drug related offenses. While in prison, she learned that she was pregnant and gave birth to her son shortly after. Once she was out of jail, Tess was in and out of rehabs and intensive outpatient therapy with the support of her mother. However, after her mother sent her to Las Vegas for a rehab program located there, Tess soon checked herself out and ended up on the streets. Eventually, she began to prostitute herself for money or for drugs and found herself in an even worse situation than before. However, she made plans to return to her hometown in order to be closer to her son, and even sought out rehab programs she could enroll in. Unfortunately, a few days before Christmas, Tess was murdered while she was still living on the streets. Tess's story relates back to our belief at the Center, which is that all women have "the right to control their bodies and destinies; the right to live a life free of violence and abuse; the right to equal protection under the law, including equal access to education, employment, and power." Tess's life reminds us to continue to help and empower women wherever they may be in life, and that people who struggle with addiction aren't moral failures; they are human beings with a disease that deserves medical attention like any other illness.

Overall, the talk was informative and educational, and Macy's passion for her work shines through in her speech. Her book, **Dopesick**, is still available for purchase, and a podcast about Tess Henry's life will be coming soon.



(IMAGE COURTESY OF DEADLINE)

Fat Talk Free Week

BY: GRACE MANDY

This semester, the Women's Center has been hard at work creating programs for Fat Talk Free Week, as well as increasing the extent to which we talk about healthy body image year round. Being accepting of the body you have is a struggle that many young women in college face, and the Women's Center hopes that by increasing the amount of programs we have surrounding positivity and educating young women about the harmful effects of negative body image, we can create a campus with more healthy, happy, confident young women. During Fat Talk Free Week, we hosted and partook in a variety of events to help promote our cause. However, we didn't want the self-love to end there, so the Women's Center has been working hard to provide the Body Project here on campus, where we will provide workshops year round for women to learn more about self-love and self-acceptance.

To start off Fat Talk Free Week, the Women's Center tabled in the Student Union. We encouraged students to write both positive and negative comments about their own bodies that they have said before. By having students do this, we hoped that they would recognize how important language is in defining their confidence. One girl, when writing down a negative comment about her body, said, "Oh, this is so mean. I really need to stop saying this to myself." Through this exercise, we hope that students are more aware of the ways in which they talk about their body and hopefully, will try to correct harmful behaviors.

At the table, we also handed out mirror stickers with the message: "Warning: Reflections in this mirror may be distorted by socially constructed ideas of beauty," as well as handed out flyers for the Body Project in case anyone wanted to sign up.

The Women's Center also hosted a screening of the documentary **The Illusionists** during Fat Talk Free Week. This documentary analyzed the ways in which the media sells an ideal body image to women. It also highlighted the contradictions in beauty standards. For example, women in Asia are often sold skin whitening products because they are told that is the Western ideal of beauty that they need to live up to. However, women in the Western Hemisphere, particularly the USA, are told we need to have perfectly tanned, glowing skin all year round. It just goes to show that beauty ideals are incredibly superficial and made up by companies who just want to exploit women's insecurities and profit off of it. During the post-film discussion, we asked others to discuss the ways they have personally seen body image ideals being sold. The discussion centered largely on social media and the ways in which body "trends" have been reinforced through Instagram, Twitter, etc. This discussion was a way for UConn students to see that they are not alone in their struggles and to hopefully see that they can learn to ignore these beauty ideals and love their bodies no matter what.

We also hosted an event known as Tough Tea Time. During Tough Tea Time, we served tea, hot chocolate, and munchkins, and tried to create a cozy and comforting atmosphere. This is because we discuss heavy topics during this event, and for Fat Talk Free Week, we focused on body image. We asked students to describe their own insecurities, where they came from, and why they may still be taking the time and effort to conform to unrealistic beauty ideals. It can be hard to open up to strangers to talk about the insecurities we have, but when you start to engage in conversation, you realize that everyone has similar insecurities. It can be empowering to see that you're not alone in your struggle for self-love. By talking about the ways in which you try and conform to beauty standards, you quickly start to realize how harmful it can be to both your mental and physical health.

The Body Project is a fairly new program on campus that works to unpack the reasons why we struggle to accept our bodies and how we can learn self-love. It works to stress the difference between the appearance ideal, what a "perfect woman" looks like, and the healthy ideal, what a physically and mentally healthy woman looks like. The Body Project involves two sessions, both two hours long. During these sessions, students work to first identify what the "perfect woman" looks like in our society. The list could go on forever, but some of the biggest things include being skinny but also curvy, toned but not too muscular, having long legs, clear skin, a summer tan all year round, etc. From there, we go on to discuss the costs of pursuing this appearance in an effort to look like the "perfect woman." These costs can be both literal, in terms of buying makeup or even getting plastic surgery, and metaphorical, regarding the harmful effects towards women's quality of life. After that, we discuss how to combat this appearance ideal and stop negative body talk, both as an individual and as a community. The workshop is extremely empowering to young women, allowing them to recognize why they may have trouble accepting their body and how they can learn to embrace the body they have, rather than trying to change it. For every 100 women who do the workshop, 9 will be less likely to develop an eating disorder in the future. This project has the potential to save lives, and the Women's Center is proud to be a part of it.



Know My Name Review

BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

Books, film, and television often tackle timely and important topics relevant to us here at the Women's Center. Multiple sources of media focused around victims/survivors of sexual assault this year, including the Netflix television series "Unbelievable" and the Hulu documentary based around the Harvey Weinstein scandal, "Untouchables". While both of these projects talk about important issues, the Women's Center wanted to highlight a different source in this edition of the newsletter. **Know My Name**, the debut memoir from Chanel Miller, ultimately gives a voice to the previously voiceless, and seeing as how our newsletter title is aptly named **Voices**, it felt as if it was meant to be.

She used to be known around the world as Emily Doe, the anonymous victim/survivor of the Stanford University sexual assault case. However, in her memoir, Chanel Miller publicly identifies herself and tells her side of the story.

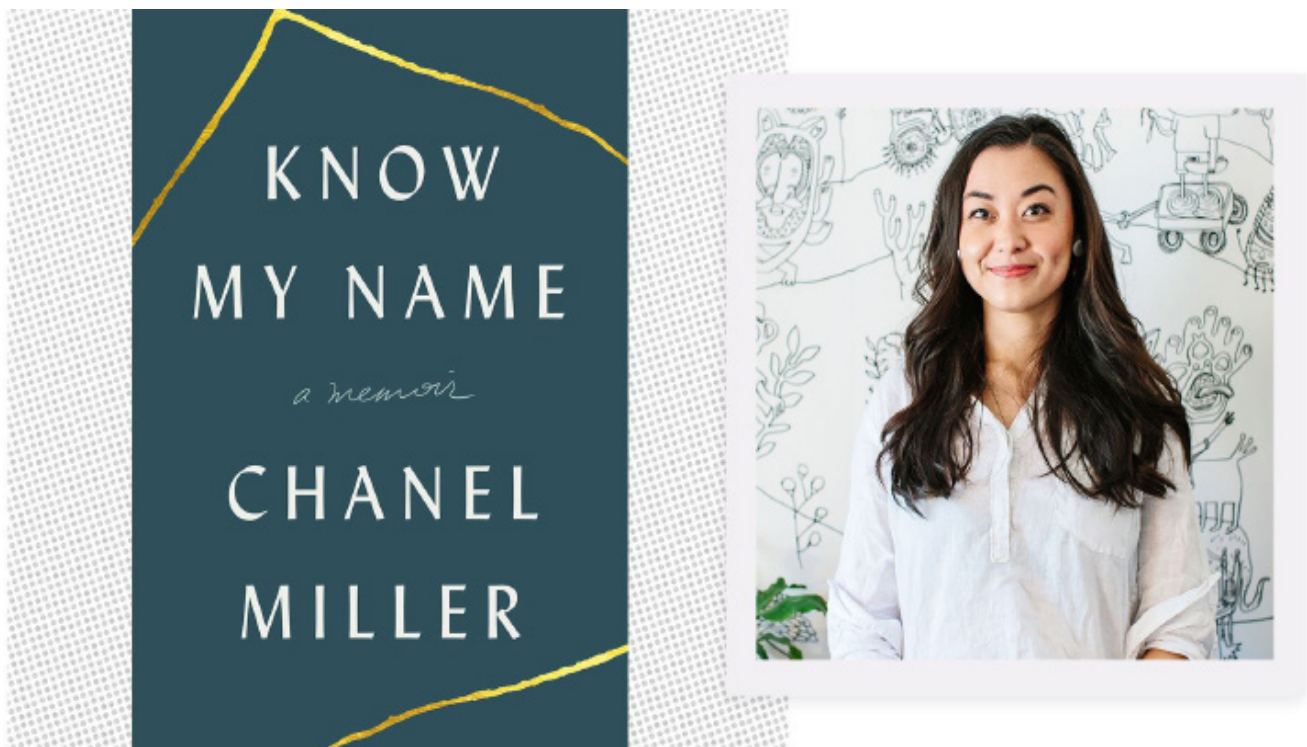
After her victim impact statement went viral back in 2016, Miller decided to stay anonymous until this year. She would even hide an award "Emily Doe" was honored with from her friends when they would come over to her apartment. After everything that she went through, she wanted to keep some semblance of normalcy. However, she realized that in order to understand and process everything that had happened to her, she needed to write about, and eventually share, her experience.

The memoir opens with the words "I am shy." She continues to characterize herself as a quiet child, who grew up into a quiet young woman. "I introduce myself here," she says, "because in the story I'm about to tell, I begin with no name or identity. No character traits or behaviors assigned to me. I was found as a half-naked body, alone and unconscious. No wallet, no ID. Policemen were summoned, a Stanford dean was awakened to come see if he could recognize me, witnesses asked around; nobody knew who I belonged to, where I'd come from, who I was."

From there, the memoir goes into detail of her account of that night and what happened to her afterwards: the grueling physical exam, pulling pine needles out of her hair from the night before, being questioned countless by police, how she tried to wait as long as possible to tell her parents, and most importantly, how she realized the extreme injustices that victims and survivors face throughout the process of a trial. Before she agreed to press charges, she writes, "I didn't know that money could make the cell doors swing open. I didn't know that if a woman was drunk when the violence occurred, she wouldn't be taken seriously. I didn't know that if he was drunk when the violence occurred, people would offer him sympathy. I didn't know that my loss of memory would become his opportunity. I didn't know that being a victim was synonymous with not being believed."

She describes the trial in extreme detail, acknowledging how she was tirelessly grilled by the defendant's attorneys, and how she was made out to seem untrustworthy because she had been drunk when she was assaulted and couldn't remember what had happened to her. She chronicles the extreme depression and anxiety she suffered during and after the trial and how the case and what happened to her affected her and her relationships with family and friends. Miller gives an honest, non-sugar coated account of what it's like to be a survivor, but she leaves room for hope, too. In one of the most moving sections of the book, she writes, "You have to hold out to see how your life unfolds, because it is most likely beyond what you can imagine. It is not a question of if you will survive this, but what beautiful things await you when you do."

In the final pages of her memoir, she talks about how even though the initial sentencing was not just or fair, she realized that along the way those who had wronged her fell from grace. Her assailant spent time in jail, and his reputation is forever ruined. The judge who gave him a meager sentence of six months will never be in a courtroom again. She says to other survivors, "The journey will be longer than you imagined, trauma will find you again and again. Do not become the ones who hurt you. Stay tender with your power. Never fight to injure, fight to uplift. Fight because you know that in this life, you deserve safety, joy, and freedom. Fight because it is your life. Not anyone else's. I did it, I am here. Looking back, all the ones who doubted or hurt or nearly conquered me faded away, and I am the only one standing. So now, the time has come. I dust myself off, and go on."



(IMAGE COURTESY OF ELLE MAGAZINE)

Women and Puppetry

BY: MARIELIS CRUZ

The Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry hosted an event for their 2019 Fall Puppet Forum Series called “Women and Puppetry: Critical and Historical Investigations”, co-sponsored by the Women’s Center. The forum had the powerful presence of three women who contributed to the book **Women and Puppetry: Critical and Historical Investigations**. Claudia Orenstein and Alissa Mello are the editors of the book, and Theodora Skipitares is a New York based puppeteer who shared her Western perspective on women in puppetry during the event.

The book focuses on the different perspectives of women in puppetry globally, as well as their personal narrative as women in the field. The book largely does not focus on Western perspectives because the speakers wanted to shift the conversation to global narratives around puppetry due to the lack of research and personal stories of female puppeteers from other parts of the world. Skipitares is the only puppeteer who shares a Western perspective within the book.

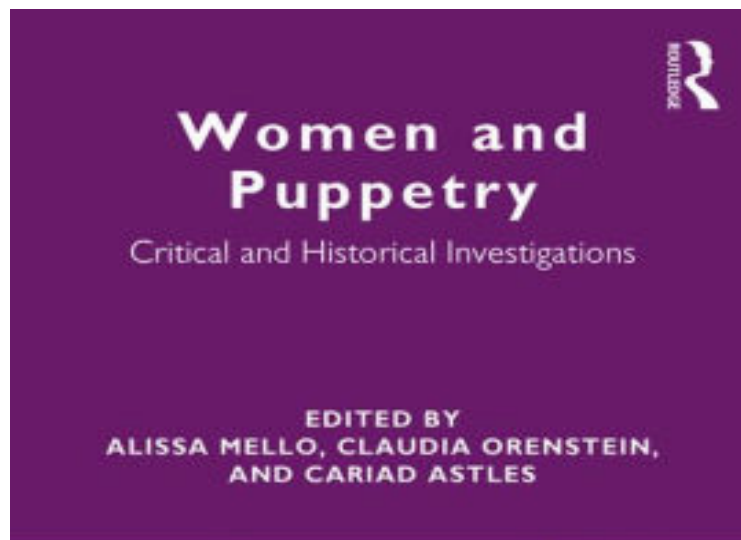
The speakers began their discussion with the seven contributors of the critical and personal approach to the research of women in puppetry on a global scale. Ana Alvarado is an Argentinian puppeteer who places an emphasis on aesthetics and focuses on manual object theater. Norwegian puppeteer Yngvild Aspeli says there is a need for other narrators and new perspectives in the field. Chia-Yin Chen, from Taiwan, uses her puppetry to speak out about the political and social tensions in her culture. A group in Kenya comments on the difficulties of being a female artist, the importance of HIV and gender equity, and the overall need for social change in their country. The Indonesia Puppet Moon experiments with taboo topics in their culture within their art, such as the 1965 Indonesian government shutdown. They consistently express the ability to resist these pressures of their society. Janni Young is a South African Puppeteer who makes wonderful large scale productions. Skipitares, one of the speakers, is the only American puppeteer of those discussed. She focuses on individualistic slant through her performance.

In the making of this book, editors Orenstein and Mello received death threats and letters demanding that they halt the publication of the book. As a result, they pushed forward to investigate women’s roles in puppetry through a theoretical and operational approach to women in a cultural context. Feminist theory is used throughout the text and places a focus on the performance of gender on stage. The construction of gender is blurred through the male and female characters designed by the women puppeteers. Since puppetry is an artistic choice and a world of design, gender is stripped away. The idea of playing with gender roles and exploring outside of the binary is intriguing and tempting to artists across the world.

Puppetry is a way to create your own art and the vision is crucial to women who seek out to create their space within puppetry. Many women have taken a stance and made this space from nothing to something all over the world. Here are a few examples of women reinventing and critiquing their culture's gender norms: A Turkish woman creates dialogue and comments on the sexuality of women in Turkey, a conversation that does not normally take place in puppetry. In Korea, a woman's place is often critiqued by male puppeteers. Indian puppetry uses forbidden practices that were traditionally only for men and presents them in a new light. West African theater borrows and mimics traditions associated with men, but gives it a feminine twist. A Japanese puppeteer reinvents a tradition that is allowed only for men and transcends new forms of art.

Overall, the book advocates for, and highlights, women making their mark in puppetry. Audre Lorde once said, "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence." For these women, puppetry is their necessity.

If you are interested in learning more about puppetry, here are three new artists in the field to look out for: Manuela Infante, a Chilean artist; Narcissister, a visual dancer; and Wile Bore, a trio from America, the United Kingdom, and Australia.



(IMAGE COURTESY OF AMAZON)

The Wolves Review

BY: LAUREN ABLONDI-OLIVO

This fall, the Connecticut Reperatory Theater continued its 2019-2020 season with a performance of Sarah DeLappe's "The Wolves", directed by Julie Foh.

The play focuses on a girl's high school level soccer team, The Wolves, who are trying to maintain their undefeated record. However, challenges both on and off the field threaten their ability to stay united as a team. The story highlights the struggle of coming of age in our current society; throughout the show, the girls have both serious and silly discussions about identity, politics, fitting in, health, sex, drugs, death, and more.

DeLappe's gripping story truly comes to life under the lights of the CRT. Foh's directing chops shine throughout, and the actor's performances make the characters even more enjoyable. The entire cast was incredible, but Jamie Feidner, Eilis Garcia, Elizabeth Jebra and Betty Smith all had standout performances filled with both humor and heartbreak.

The Women's Center was interested in including a highlight of this play for multiple reasons. For one, the play is entirely made up of women. While men may be mentioned, we never see them throughout the show. It is very much under the "female gaze"; the girls are not sexualized at all. They are regular sixteen and seventeen year olds who are portrayed as strong and athletic. The themes and topics discussed throughout the play concern the work we do here at the Center as well. Abortion, Plan B, and the idea of teenage pregnancy are all discussed multiple times. Additionally, it's heavily implied that one of the girls has an eating disorder: she mentions trying to eat as much protein as possible; multiple girls comment on her thinness; and there is even a scene in which she binge eats a bag of orange slices. The girls also constantly discuss politics and current events, from the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia to the current deportation crisis going on in America. A few of the characters also deal with mental illness, and a very realistic anxiety attack is shown on stage. And finally, a few of the characters deal with the pressure and consequences of sex, and it is implied that one girl was coerced into sexual activity she didn't want to partake in.

In an online video posted to the CRT's website, Alexandra Brokowski, who plays #25, says that she believes people should see the show because "it's important to see women who are driven by something besides a romantic interest or falling into the norm of what teenage girls should do or what we think teenage girls do all the time."

We here at the Women's Center were excited and proud that a play that openly and honestly explores such important subjects was being produced right in our backyard. We applaud the CRT's commitment to showcasing women's voices, as well as women directors, and found DeLappe's story moving and culturally important.



(IMAGE OF THE WOLVES CAST, COURTESY OF BROADWAY WORLD, CONNECTICUT)

WiSTEM Reflections

BY: KATIE KWOCKA AND ANGEL WEI

Last year, the Women's Center was approached by the University of Connecticut Communications team and asked to brainstorm ideas for a video for Women's History Month. We landed on filming a project for our Women in STEM Mentoring Program. Our hope was that this video would be used as an outreach tool for our program, as well as let the UConn community know about the resource. Participation in the video was not required, and filming was done during a time that most students had class. The final video was titled, "This Is What Women in Stem Look Like," implying that those featured in the video were a representative and acceptable sample of women STEM students at UConn. This is, and was, obviously not the case. Specifically, there were no black students in the video. No matter the intentions or restrictions, this does not negate the impact it had on the community as a whole. These details are not excuses. We as a program, and as a student body as a whole, have to do better in our attempt to support and stand in solidarity with our black students.

As the current Co-Coordinator of the program, one of the things we have struggled with is how to do better. What are our next steps? How can we make this misstep a learning opportunity and take the time to reexamine ourselves? How do we show solidarity to the entirety of the UConn community? How we can move forward with our intentions without it appearing as though we are just trying to save face? As for our current answers: We don't know. What we do know, however, is that moving forward, we need to be more mindful about inclusion and diversity in the program. This looks like: a wider outreach in advertising our program to potential members; a more holistic application process; and speakers that address the challenges faced by some marginalized populations that are not universal. Making sure that everyone in WiSTEM feels represented and supported is our goal, along with academic support and guidance. This cannot be accomplished by failing to recognize the unique challenges present to some communities that are not present in others. To the best of our ability, we need to bridge that gap between what we have done in the past and what needs to be done to form a sense of support.

There is no point that we can surpass that will finally give us the title of a "good feminist". There is no threshold that we can reach that will make us "good" allies, and that label of "good" ally or feminist is not necessarily for us to decide. It is an ongoing process; there is no true stopping point, and it involves continual education. As university students, we are constantly learning and striving to form a truly inclusive, empowering group. We know that we have to improve our methods and frames of thought to form the network of support we are trying to present, and we will try our best to do so in the future.



THANK YOU FOR READING FROM THE WOMEN'S CENTER STAFF! ENJOY YOUR WINTER BREAK!