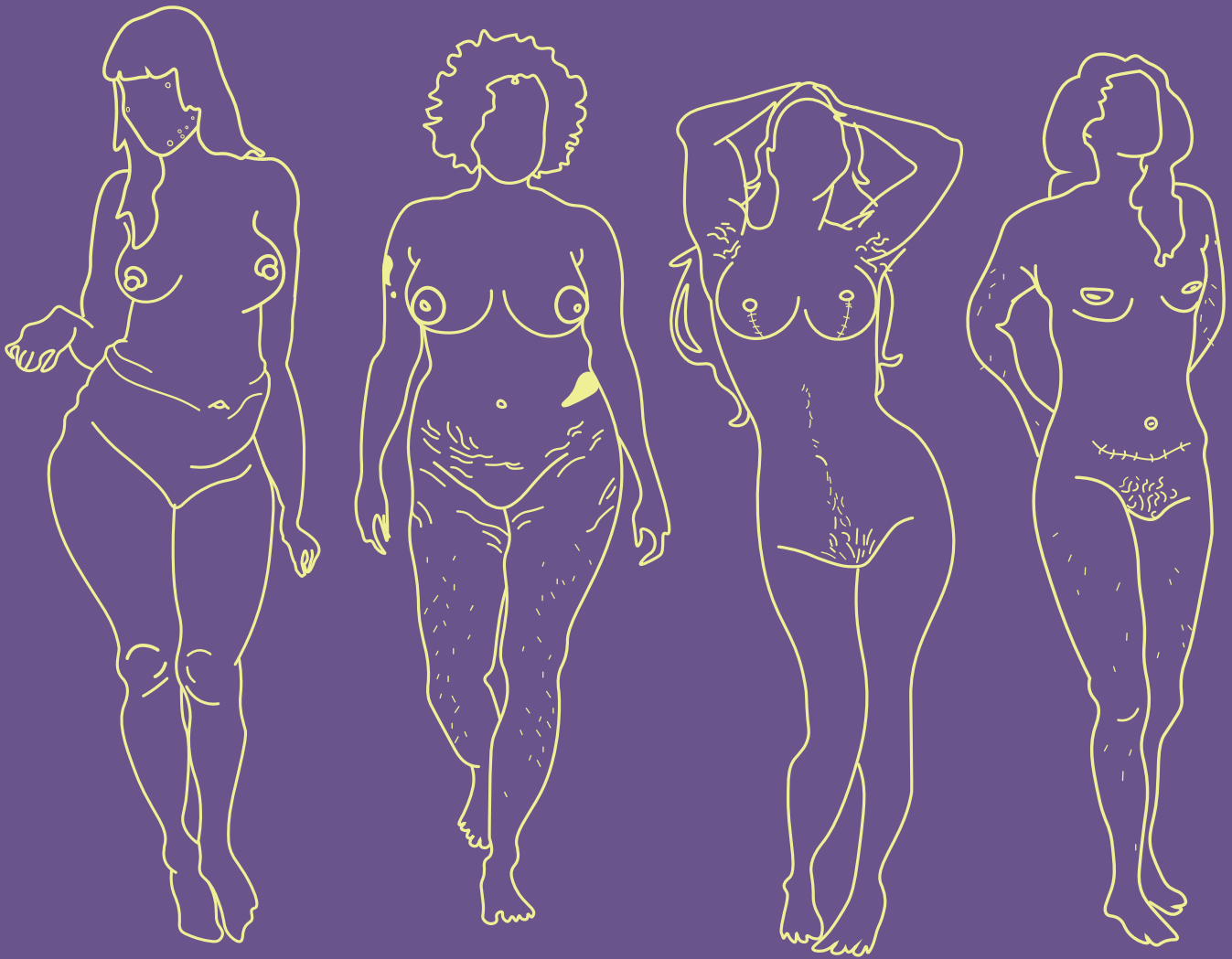


# VOICES

THE SPRING ISSUE



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# Meet Our New Staff



Ara Huynh (she/her), Class of 2024  
*Writing Intern*  
Major in English  
Beloved Activist: Roxanne Gay

“As a writing intern, I am most excited to use my skills to educate and empower the student body. I believe that education is the key to change and that it can foster a better future for everyone. I work on the Women’s Center Newsletter and other writing projects. Through them, I look to further develop my writing while tackling much bigger issues, like race and gender inequality and discrimination.”

Ruth Mahoney (she/her), Class of 2022  
*Accessibility Intern*  
Major in allied health  
Beloved Activist: Angela Davis

Working to improve accessibility, Ruth says, “I hope to work towards making the Women’s Center as accessible as it can be. I believe that access to a Center like this is a right for every student at UConn, and that one’s ability should not be a barrier to entry into safety and community. I’m most excited to be part of a community that promotes the empowerment of women and works to fight oppression and violence towards women through education, policy, and honesty.”



# Intro to This Issue

By Ara Huynh

Being a woman is hard.

*Of course* it's because of the patriarchy and oppression and societal factors; that's a given—that's hard on everybody of every possible identity. But physically and mentally being a woman, in a woman's body, is hard. And this includes women with and without ovaries. That's what I'm trying to get at.

And what better way to talk about how hard it is living in a woman's body than in this newsletter?

My goal for these pages is that it sparks a conversation; brings something new to the table and for everyone to think about, discuss—maybe even argue. To disagree, to agree, and most importantly, to think critically about the way we view, understand, and interact with women and their bodies.

*This* is what changes minds, brings new perspectives, and pushes minds forward. Isn't it boring to continue life as it is, without progress?

The Women's Center is the best place to facilitate these conversations and even more so with the events this semester. Caitlin and I wanted to bring these to light, showing others that there are people out there talking about these traditionally uncomfortable topics and pulling away from the conversational stigma and bias against them. It makes being a woman a little easier, if everyone

else acknowledges that it's hard—as ironic as that sounds.

If every woman talked about what being a woman was like and was open about it instead of hiding certain topics, being a woman would feel so much more normal. I know I would personally feel more supported in some of my harder times to know that I wasn't the only one with a weird body. I personally struggle with a multitude of things: premenstrual dysphoric disorders and recurring UTIs. I thought I was the only one for a really, really long time, until I started the conversation and learned that (rather unfortunately) these were pretty common among women. I wish I had known that sooner. It would have made getting through the difficult days a lot easier.

So I wanted this newsletter to be something like that for someone else. For someone else to pick this up, flip through it, and feel a little less alone in their endeavors of being a woman. And, if they had any experiences that incurs the feeling that they're facing it alone, to be able to debunk that myth and bring fourth a new feeling of empowerment in their bodies and whatever that may look like.

Send me an [email](#), and let me know if this newsletter managed to do that for you.





# A Note on Language

By Caitlin Rich

Many words are used to describe a woman's body for what they do with their bodies and what is done to their bodies or what they look like. At a macro level, the structure of language, those who know the structure well and those who can feel free within that structure, indicates who has power. Until you speak, your experience—the feelings and facts—will be falsely narrated by others. But speaking is not easy. Needing to learn, or not innately having, the words to describe yourself and your life turns the right to self-determination into a privilege. You might live in an identity but have not yet been in an environment that has allowed you to change the structure of language. Not knowing the language of a group can further bar you from feeling accepted within certain communities, even if you use the language you have with best intentions.


As we compiled and edited this edition of *Voices*, Ara and I struggled with our desire to include writing that speaks to an audience whose life experiences we cannot actually relate to. Specifically given this edition is focused on women's bodies, we struggled with how to include women with a trans identity. Can we be inclusive without speaking to their experiences? Even if I do not feel any dissonance between my gender identity and how my body is perceived, we felt it was important to keep a broader focus on what we wrote. We started by challenging words that are exclusive to describing cisgender women.

As an example, we discussed the use of "female." When used as a noun, "female" is obviously offensive, as it almost dehumanizes women. However, as an adjective, like in the case of "female writers," it almost feels smooth and automatic... or at least to my cisgender self. Some might say doctors or any other title does not have to be specified as woman-identifying while others

would say that verbal representation is important given women and men are not yet an equitable stance in many fields. But there's a larger issue. In the world of women's, gender, and sexuality studies that I proudly inhabit, I have heard again and again how female creates a linear relationship between gender and biological sex. It's automatic to question that relationship and then move beyond to challenge the validity of biological sex distinctions in westernized medicine. Outdated ideas like gender essentialism and biological determinism are easy targets to critique, but we can all recognize they still have a large influence on daily life.

Our execution of this issue, in our attempts at inclusivity and depth, is most definitely not perfect, but it was a learning process. This is where language, intention, and accountability comes back in. Quoting adrienne maree brown (a beloved activist amongst WC folk) who was quoting Maurice Moe Mitchell, "we have to have a low bar for entry and a high standard for conduct" (*We Will Not Cancel Us*). I'd like to stress the latter part of this. An issue we had when discussing whether or not to include a separate article about trans women is that such an identity has not been a sole or obvious focus of any of our Center's efforts this semester. A perpetual question is who feels welcomed here.

After reading this issue, we welcome your feedback on what felt helpful or relatable, or what felt tight in scope. Beyond this, we welcome feedback on any of the Center's programs, events, or publications to improve our efforts at inclusivity.



Submit comments  
[here](#), or come to  
the Center

# Stand Up to Beauty Standards

By Jordan Connolly

As an extension of The Body Project, the Women's Center will be collaborating with UConn SHAPE to create a more casual and inclusive space for body acceptance dialogues. This new discussion group will be known as Stand Up to Beauty Standards (SUBS). The objective of the SUBS group is to create a safe space for UConn students to participate in activities pertaining to body image and self-esteem. Together, we will self-reflect and challenge existing appearance ideals from a feminist and culturally competent perspective.

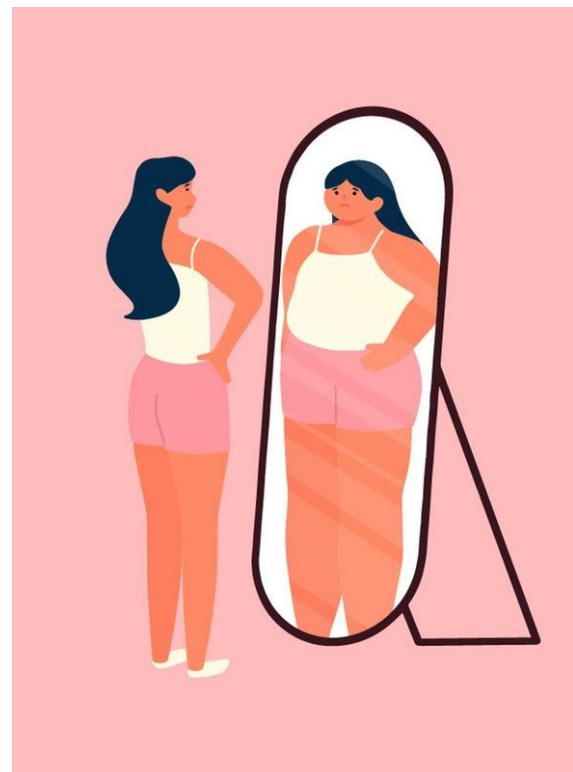
**When? Wednesdays  
from 6 to 8 PM,  
beginning March 30th**

**Where? The Women's  
Center Multi-Purpose  
Room**

Although the traditional Body Project sessions have been described by participants as both empowering and welcoming, the time commitment involved with a two-hour, two-part workshop can feel discouraging for students who are already overwhelmed with homework or other extracurricular commitments. Conversely, a mere two sessions feels gravely inadequate for participants who have developed a passion for promoting positive self-esteem in our community and seek more involvement.

The SUBS model of discussion seeks to fill the "in between" niche that is missing from the current Body Project workshop structure. The group is expected to meet weekly for five weeks this spring and will expand to a semester-long program in the future. The continued meeting slots allow for a greater breadth of topics to be covered, while the lack of an attendance requirement can mitigate the stress of adding another time commitment for participants. With the non-binding weekly meetings offered by SUBS, interested students can test the waters, show up when they are able, and skip sessions as needed.

It is important to note that SUBS is a peer-led discussion group that may feel supportive to participants, but it is not a therapeutic or clinical service. The first session of SUBS will be dedicated to creating group expectations among participants and to exploring appropriate boundaries for discussion. SUBS will be led by both The Body Project Coordinator and a SHAPE member who can direct students who have clinical concerns to the applicable resources on campus.



*Courtesy of Adobe Stock Photos*

# Food and Mental Health

By Natalie Plebanek

Several years ago, Students Helping to Achieve Positive Esteem (SHAPE) started holding a Q&A Panel in collaboration with Walden Behavioral Care, co-sponsored with the Women's Center and UConn Active Minds. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this panel discussion was lost. To rekindle the conversation this year and promote awareness of eating disorders, the Women's Center and SHAPE hosted a WebEx panel discussion and Q&A on April 5th. Our panelists included Women's Center Graduate Assistant, Tania Flores; Body Project Coordinator, Jordan Connolly; SHAW Registered Dietitian and Graduate Student, Jaclyn Lerner; and a SHAW staff member.

It is critical to make space for these conversations not only to destigmatize mental health, but also to talk more easily about preventative measures we can take and how to check-in with ourselves and each other. Through this panel, we hoped to fuel activism and promote discussions challenging the everyday content, images, and associations we make with "diet culture" and what a "real" body looks like.

Upon holding the event, we had an amazing turnout of nearly 20 people. We gained amazing insights from our panelists and bonded upon similar experiences, showing we are not alone in our struggles with balancing positive self-image and one's mental health. Something that from the talk that still sticks with me comes from Jordan Connolly who said, "we can't just 'body positivity' away self-image issues." Rather than emphasizing how body positivity is the be-all-end-all cure to body image struggles, we can still feel comfortable and confident in our bodies even if that means being body neutral. The connection between body image and mental health is deeply rooted in our

own internal biases, which come from generational stressors as well as societal norm and pressures.

## Your Resources

Speaking of eating disorder awareness and mental health resources, please take a peep below:

UConn SHAW offers **Free Nutrition Counseling Services** where students meet with a Registered Dietitian (RD) or Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN). Go [here](#) to make an appointment and learn more.

If you or someone you know is struggling with one's mental health and/or an eating disorder please refer to these resources below for help and guidance. You do not have to go through this alone.

**In Crisis/Danger:** Call 911

**UConn Confidential and Free Crisis Counselor:** Call 860-486-4705, available 24/7

**National Eating Disorders Awareness Hotline:**

Call (800)931-2237, open Monday-Thursday 11am-9pm and Friday 11am-5pm

Text (800)931-2237, open Monday-Thursday 3pm-6pm and Friday 1pm-5pm

**Crisis Textline:** Text HOME to 741741

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255



# Trauma in the Body

By Kiara Gambuzza & Heidi Pienda

In-Power is a group focused on empowerment, autonomy, and helping participants claim agency over their stories and experiences. As facilitators, we believe that by educating the dynamics of trauma to the UConn community, we can empower those in our space to heal in ways that they choose. Our framework for our upcoming session about trauma comes from the [article](#), "Toward a Radical Understanding of Trauma and Trauma Work" by Bonnie Burstow who explains, "even when there is no explicit assault on the body, people become alienated from their bodies in some respect." Trauma can manifest in many ways—physically, cognitively, and spiritually—and many victim-survivors process trauma differently.



@transcending-trauma\_with-yoga artwork: @embody.create.heal

Trauma can have several negative effects on mental health. [Unprocessed](#), it can actually change the brain, leading to malfunctions in our memory system. Trauma can lead to [flashbacks](#), panic attacks, and dissociation and can significantly impact a survivor's day-to-day life. But when a traumatic memory is processed, the brain can begin to heal. Sexual assault and intimate partner violence can

also have negative impacts on a victim-survivor's connection to their body.

Often following sexual trauma, there is a shift in implicit feelings, as even if a victim-survivor does not have cognitive awareness of the experience, their bodies can retain the memory. Many reactions are subconscious and can trigger responses characteristic of a life-threatening situation. Some [studies](#) have found evidence of cellular memory, which is when our body's cells hold an imprint of past traumatic events. For some, trauma can lead to dissociation, which involves feelings of detachment from one's surroundings or one's own body. Long-term storage of trauma can also lead to increased vulnerability to developing physical health problems and chronic illness.

Meditation and physical activity, such as yoga, can be used to release trauma stored in the body and help the healing process. Therefore, we had a specific session this March focused on storage in the body through a trauma-informed yoga session. The instructor, Nikki Adams, is a trauma-informed yoga teacher whose work has helped survivors of sexual abuse to empower themselves and heal their bodies. Adams uses invitational language and focuses on empowerment to calm the nervous system and create a safe space. Our aim is to provide avenues to help victim-survivors in our group be able to release trauma in a supportive environment.



take back the night.

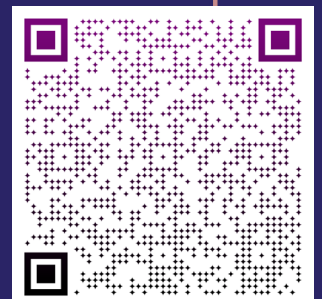
April 20th, 7 - 10 PM



sign up now to  
speak or perform!

**Speak Out &  
Candlelight Ceremony**

Meet at Union  
Ballroom 3rd Floor



A night to honor victim-survivors of sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, stalking, and harassment through poetry, stories, songs, and open mic.

*Free food & drink provided. Gender inclusive!*

\* If you require an accommodation to participate in this event, please contact the Women's Center at 860-486-4738 or womenscenter@uconn.edu at least 5 days in advance.

**50** YEARS  
UConn  
WOMEN'S  
CENTER



# Changing Stereotypes

By Nathan-Craig Machado

The Men's Project is a program in which students who identify as men gather to talk about masculinity and gendered socialization. Within these discussions, we not only talk about what it means to be a man and what we have been told men look like, but also what we have been taught about women as a part of our own learning on gender.



*Courtesy of CBC News*

This semester, many of the students involved in the project joined because of their concerns surrounding the protests against sexual assault on campus; they were looking for ways in which to be educated on preventative efforts and techniques. In our conversations, we have talked about how women's bodies are viewed and how we came to those opinions. We realized that a lot of our premature thoughts surrounding gender are instilled in us at a young age when the genders of girls and boys are treated as opposites. We are taught that men are strong, decisive, logical, and dominant and that women are at the opposite end, being weak, emotional, and submissive.

Along with those values, we learned untimely lessons about sexuality from media and more specifically, porn, which is too easily consumed at a

young age. Through this unhealthy lens of sex, we are shown another person's fantasy where women are used as vessels to please men, and consent is not even an afterthought. The hyper-sexualization and extremeness of the portrayed acts set unrealistic expectations that cannot be met, but are still wanted by many growing boys and men.



Many of us feel that the only way to unlearn this is to be educated in the fact that women are just as much people as men and that women have a great range of wants, personalities, and capabilities that cannot be explained as merely the opposite of or as being for the service of men. The participants of the project believe that through programs like ours, folks who identify as men can facilitate and take part in difficult conversations, finding comfort in the fact we all have so much to learn from and about each other. We know these conversations will create change not only in the way cohorts think, but also in how they create change with their friends, families, and within the campus community.





# Voices Within Voices

By Mackenzie Doss



I am a third year MFA graduate student in the UConn Puppet Arts program. One of those mythical folk who haunts the depot campus, concocting everything from shadow puppets to stop motion, masks to marionettes. It's even said that if you say 'depot bus' three times in a mirror alone with the lights off, a puppetry student will come and kidnap you.

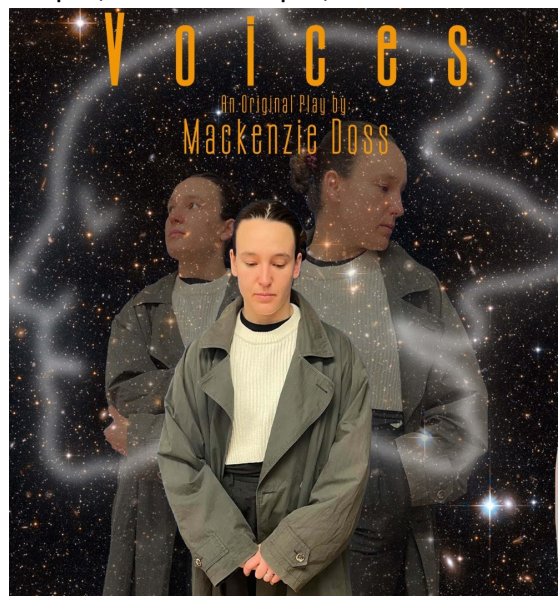
Rumors aside, my time at UConn is concluding with an original production: *Voices*. The production explores how the stories we tell ourselves often become our reality and one woman's journey to take control of her inner narrator and breathe life into new identities. *Voices* incorporates puppetry that represents how we can speak to ourselves in ways both gentle and violent and how that language colors how we live. The main character, Sarah, is a down-on-her-luck journalist who finds herself alone with her thoughts in a mic night venue she's supposed to be writing about in a few hours' time. Cue the "voices" in Sarah's mind. The first puppet Sarah interacts with is a result of her self-esteem—an almost parasitic being that is stereotypically achievement-driven, ignoring kinder more nuanced interpretations of success. The second puppet is a fluid and constantly shifting being that represents Sarah's growing sense of self-compassion, a creature of curiosity, exploration, and self-transformation. I wanted my final project to engage with concepts of hybridity and duality while also exploring the nature of storytelling as an act of self-creation.

I started out with a strong desire to conclude my MFA at UConn with a professional level theatrical performance, engage myself as a leader, and develop my theatrical skillset while offering an enriching educational opportunity to my peers. What ended up happening was much more fulfilling and humbling: I was enveloped in a dynamic and supportive network of creatives. This isn't the first play I've written, but it is the first

theatrical production I've built from the ground up. My actors, my design team, and my fabrication help are all predominantly women. This process has brought me into a strong network of women who, like myself, are entering into fields dominated by men. Experiencing first-hand the power of women supporting women in the arts fills me with such gratitude. Fist bumps, facing looming deadlines together, editing sessions, building puppets, and just building a comfortable rehearsal space together— I have been sustained by my network both throughout the pandemic and my MFA process. Now, we want to extend our efforts a bit further by supporting the UConn Women's Center Scholarship Fund.

To that end, [tickets](#) for *Voices* will be pay-what-you-can, with all proceeds to be given to the 100 Years of Women Scholarship Fund, supporting an incoming UConn student, or current student who, as a role model or advocate, has advanced the role and contributions of women in society. What better way to spend a night out than entertainment and enrichment? We lift each other in our own ways as best we can. I hope you'll join us for a night of abstract theatre in support of a deserving student's continued education.

*Voices* premieres Thursday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, in the UConn Mobius Theatre Space. Performances will run the 14<sup>th</sup> at 7pm, the 15<sup>th</sup> at 7pm, and the 16<sup>th</sup> at 2pm.





Personal Anecdote: Semen Allergy

*"The first time I realized something might be wrong with my bodily reaction to semen was when I came in contact with it, and my hands started to inflame. I developed a rash almost instantly. Thinking this was a one off occurrence, I had... further contact with it, which led to some complications downstairs, where my vagina lives and breathes. Lo and behold, it began to not breathe, and inflame after some time. I also bled an entire day after this. It was pretty terrifying. I found out a bit later that I'm actually part of a really rare group of individuals that are allergic to semen. Hard knock life, considering that I like men."*

By Ara Huynh

**"The vagina is permanently stretched during childbirth."**

Know This Isn't True

The vaginal muscles are made to stretch! After delivering a baby, it can take some time and physical therapy to recover back to its original strength. A [study](#) found that the pelvic floor muscles that are involved with the birthing process can stretch more than three times the normal length. Despite this, women report experiencing something called the "[husband stitch](#)" which doctors have used to tighten the vaginal opening by adding an extra stitch at the perineum. Sometimes it is done with or without consent, and it can lead to painful sex for the receiving partner.

Personal Anecdote: Catholic Combustion

*"Because I went to a Catholic school for thirteen years, I thought I would die—like, physically die—if I masturbated. I figured out a few years later that... it's not true."*

Personal Anecdote: Tampons and Virginty

*"I wasn't allowed to use tampons when I was younger. It was because of this idea that this would somehow deflower me. I rode horses and I danced, so by the time I was 12, my hymen was probably already gone if I had one to begin with. By the time I wanted to use tampons, I had recognized that virginity wasn't tied to using or not using a tampon."*

The hymen (a tissue that exists in the opening of the vagina) is rumored to be torn upon first penetrative experience. But as there are people with hymens, there are people born without hymens! The harmful part of this myth is virginity can be verified. This places an unrealistic and uninformed expectation of a person's body, leading some to feel ashamed when their hymen is not newly torn upon their first sexual experience. For those who do have a hymen, things as simple as using a tampon or even exercising can tear it before sex does, and some can have vaginal sex without tearing an existing hymen. However, that doesn't mean someone with a hymen will not bleed during their first time; hymen tearing certainly can happen. It just doesn't happen to *everybody*.

**"All virgin women have hymens."**

Know This Isn't True



A researcher by the name of Martha McClintok conducted a preliminary **study** about this in January of 1971. Women were divided into cohabitating groups, and after tracking their periods, McClintok discovered their cycles were indeed syncing. She theorized the concept of menstrual synchrony, believing that the pheromones of menstruating individuals cause their monthly cycles to align. Unfortunately, there have been some other **studies** disproving Martha McClintok's theory, leaving knowledge up to your personal experience. It is a fact, however, that *something is going on with our bodies!*

**"Cis-women's menstrual cycles can sync."**

Who Knows?

Personal Anecdote: PMSing

*"Every month, I would experience a week of the worst possible mood swings I could get. I was irritated and angry about everything, and I cried all the time and felt so depressed. And then my period would come the next morning, and I would flip one-eighty. I thought it was completely normal—the mood swings and the crying—up until it landed me in a hospital when I was 16 where a psychiatrist finally saw me, and I was diagnosed with premenstrual dysphoric disorder. I've been working with a therapist to manage it. Individuals with premenstrual dysphoric disorder experience extreme mood swings because the chemistry of their brain is significantly different before their period than at any other point in their cycle."*

**"Gender affirming hormone therapy is NOT a step that is required for someone to identify as a woman."**

Know This Is True

What makes a woman isn't her body parts. A woman is just as much of a woman no matter the physical appearance of her body. Everyone's journey is different, and gender affirming hormone therapy needs to be understood as an optional choice. In some cases, it can be helpful in relieving body dysmorphia, whereas in others, the prospect of hormone therapy makes little to no difference. In addition, some trans-women may not have the resources to medically transition. To measure one's gender against the appearance of their body is harmful not only for trans-woman but also cis-women who have many different looking body-types.

Personal Anecdote: Discharge

*"I feel like people don't talk about vaginal discharge enough. When I was younger, I was so prepared for my period—I'd bought everything I could—but when I started having discharge, I immediately thought something was wrong. I first thought it was an infection, and I went to the doctor. They ran me for tests, and everything turned out normal. I did some more research and learned that discharge itself was actually a healthy process of the body. I really feel like I should have known about this earlier."*

# What Fresh Hell Is This

By Caitlin Rich

Menopausal mystery: seen by others as a dash of sweat, rage in the eye, or maybe as nothing at all. Is the experience of menopause also something that if you know, you know? Sex educator, Heather Corinna, shouts the whispers of menopause in their novel, *What Fresh Hell Is This? Perimenopause, Menopause, Other Indignities, and You*. They offer real anecdotes, practical tips, and feminist thinking on the western medical industry to anyone with a uterus, writing, "I'd first like to extend my deepest sympathies, an ice pack, and some of these very helpful edibles... you likely want those more than a book." After talking to the members and guest visitors of the Women's Affinity Group on their book discussion, I bought a copy for myself and my lovely mother (who was not at all my inspiration for my opening line).

For some of the women we talked to, this content was not at all new while others—even those who would have considered themselves quite knowledgeable—felt more enlightened after reading. However, one sentiment resounded: we need to normalize conversations about taboo phases of life and feel empowered by such discussions with friends, parents, children, and even our health practitioners. It was a pleasure to hear their thoughts on this book and their experiences. I wish I could attach all that they said, but see below for some highlights.

"I have a couple of friends who are having a really hard time, and it's been good to be like, 'Hey, you should read this book and feel more supported and like you're not alone.'" - **Pam Bedore, Associate English professor and WGSS Affiliate**

"I think something I appreciated from the author was in all of life's messiness, whatever period of life you're in, it's okay to be you in the context of that messiness and then in other contexts as well like gender rigidity. The author was talking about that has been challenging for them, and they're aware it's something people navigate" - **Paula Wilmot, Assistant Dean of Students and the Dean of Students Office**

"Many folks had not actually talked to their medical providers about this. The book actually talks about like how medical providers are not routinely trained around menopause and perimenopause... So what does that mean when you're searching for medical providers and often you end up with somebody early on in your life and sort of stick with them. I don't know that I would have known to ask at 20 something, 'Hey, what do you know about menopause'" - **Kathleen Holgerson, Director of the Women's Center**

"There never was any conversation about all of that. It was just sort of like hush hush in a way that women are meant to feel kind of embarrassed about their bodies changing. I think in society we put such an emphasis on youth and being health and young and beautiful, and if you are anything outside of that... getting older is no longer the sexy desirable thing" - **Jen O'Neill, Housing Assignments Specialist in Residential Life**



# MORE BODY READS

*Courtesy of AK Press*

Author and editor adrienne maree brown seeks an antidote to burnout in social justice work through a collection of essays and conversations with other feminist thinkers on something she calls, "pleasure activism," a politics of healing and happiness.

*Courtesy of Boston Women's Health Collective*

First published in 1970, *Our Bodies Ourselves* was written to inform women on a variety of taboo topics including anatomy, abortion, childbirth, masturbation, sexually transmitted infections, aging, and sexuality.

*Courtesy of Simon & Schuster*

In *Come As You Are*, sex educator Dr. Emily Nagoski uses scientific research to demystify women's sexuality, arguing feelings such as stress and trust and attitudes towards body image are more important to sexual wellbeing than a person's physical know-how.

*Courtesy of HarperCollins Publishers*

Psychology professor, Dr. Laurie Mintz, approaches the often neglected clitoris, providing a perspective on the political and personal factors of society's pleasure gap.



# Letter from Kathleen Holgerson

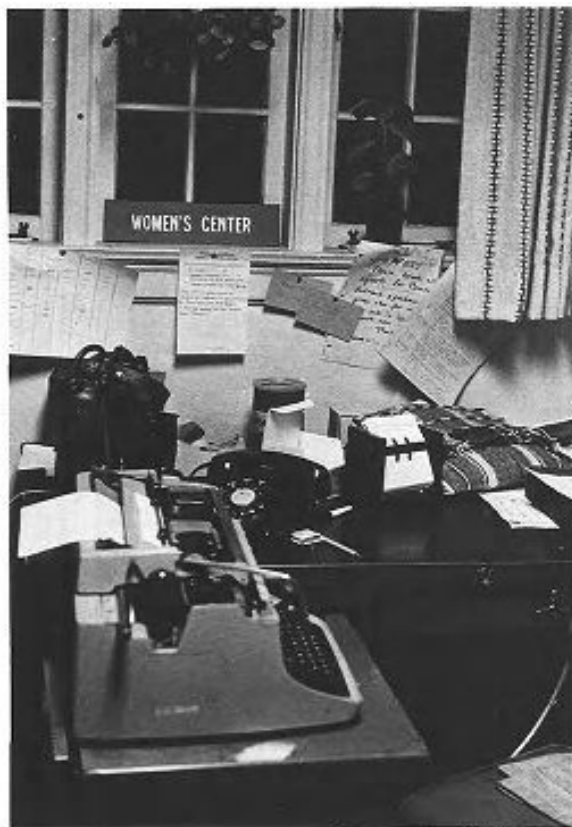
As I noted in my last letter, the Women's Center will be celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary during 2022. To kick off our celebration, we hosted a visit to campus by author and cultural critic, Roxane Gay. I wanted to include here a few thoughts I shared that evening to help set the stage for this year. As Ara and Caitlin reflected in their letters, the Women's Center—and all of us who are co-creating its future herstory—have a responsibility to continue to explore how gender matters, engage in the difficult conversations, and embody our aspiration to be a place for all who share a commitment to a future informed by anti-racist feminist ideals.

This year marks the beginning of our yearlong recognition of the Women's Center's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, which we share with our sister center, the Puerto Rican/Latin American Cultural Center. At the beginning of each academic year, during our New Student Staff Orientation, we tell the herstory of the Women's Center. This is also part of the larger UConn herstory given activists on campus were organizing as part of the national civil rights and women's liberation movements in the late 60's and 70's.

There are three stories that we pass down. First, before there was a Women's Center, there were several collectives on campus, or what we might now refer to as affinity groups. They included the Black Women's Collective, the Child Care Collective, the Counseling Collective, the Lesbian Collective, the Library Collective, the Writers' Collective, and the Rape Crisis Collective, which later spun off to become the Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut. The Free Women's Collective, a group of students, staff, and faculty, was instrumental in working on the concerns of women at the time—organizing to make barriers to access for women visible and to create a safe space to be in community with each other. Back then, there were restrictions on what women could wear

to class and where they could go at certain times of the day. Students like Bessy Reyna engaged in protests over sexism and gender discrimination and demanded:

- Equal access to athletic facilities and funds for athletic programs
- Non-sexist treatment from faculty and health center personnel
- The establishment of a Women's Studies program
- Equal hiring and promotion opportunities
- Space for childcare facilities
- Permanent and adequate facilities for the Women's Center



Second, Gail Shea was named Assistant Vice Provost to plan out strategies to equalize the status of women at UConn. This came on the heels of a report about the discrimination of women at UConn, which was done by the organization of UConn faculty and professional women. Shea's contract was later not renewed, and many thought it was because of her work to address equal employment opportunities on campus.

Third, Marcia Lieberman, a professor of English, advocated for changing facilities for women at the Recreation Center and was part of the group that prepared the report I mentioned earlier. Lieberman was later denied tenure, and many believed it was due to her scholarship focusing on what then was known as Women's Studies and her activism on campus.

We also acknowledge the role of Betty Roper, the director of Continuing Education at the time, who provided the first space (a 10' by 28' room) for the Free Women's Collective and then for the



Demonstrators present a petition to Acting President Edward V. Gant in 1973, in a case of a female faculty member denied tenure. The petition is one example of the climate of activism on women's issues in the early 1970s that lead to the establishment of the Women's Center, 30 years ago.

Photo from the Nutmeg Yearbook, 1975

Women's Center. We also honor the role of Cathy Havens, the first full-time director of the Center who later went on to become the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and MSW Program Director at the School of Social Work.

You may not have heard of these women, and you may not remember their names. But we tell these stories because it was

their activism and leadership that made it even possible for us all to be here tonight to begin this year of celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup>. It is their legacies and that of the many who came before them and the many who came after who have also contributed to UConn's herstory and the movement for gender equity on our campuses.

We have made progress. The Women's Center has space in the Student Union, along with the other cultural centers and programs, and we collaborate with and support students, staff, and faculty who are working to make a difference and dismantle oppression in their spheres of influence. Just recently, we borrowed yoga mats from the Rec Center for a trauma informed yoga practice. And days later, we hosted, with the Provost's Office, the inaugural Women's Leadership Forum for women in academic and administrative leadership positions.

We also continue to face similar struggles from those in 1972: war, racism, xenophobia, tremendous gaps in economic prosperity, and disparate amounts of emotional and intellectual labor expected and required from those most directly impacted by inequity and injustice. Our goals for the 50<sup>th</sup> are to focus on:

**Impact** – the impact of the Center on UConn during the past 50 years

**Presence** – telling the story of the Women's Center, who we are, and what we do today

**Future** – what still needs to be done and what are our aspirations for the next 50 years

This year, we hope you will join us in celebrating the accomplishments of those whose legacies brought us to 2022 and to consider what piece of the solution you hold as we envision the world as we hope it will be in 2072.

# NCCWSL 2022!

AAUW's National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (NCCWSL) brings together hundreds of college women from around the country for three days of leadership training, inspiration, and networking!

**Who:** Woman-identifying UConn students (including graduate students!)

**When:** May 24th-26th

**Where:** NCCWSL will be held virtually this year

**Cost:** No cost to participants thanks to the generous scholarships provided by the Women's Center and Student Activities

Apply Today!



"I applied to NCCWSL hoping to connect with similarly passionate and inspired women; I left having become part of a community—though we were physically separate, I still felt a sense of togetherness with these women, connected by our shared experiences."

*-Kathryn Atkinson*