



# VOICES

*TOGETHERNESS, CHANGES, HAPPINESS, FEMINIST*

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

As finals week waned, we finished up our routine of end of the semester activities. The student staff submitted their self-evaluations; we celebrated the accomplishments of the graduating seniors; and full-time staff finished up the letters of recommendations for current and former students. I am reminded during this time of how much the Women's Center impacts those who are, or have been, connected with our programs and services. We consistently hear about how the Center provides a space for individuals who are committed to learning about and making a difference on issues of gender inequity and other forms of oppression. We read about how students' experiences at the Center enhances their confidence to speak out against injustice; positions them to persist when faced with resistance; and gives them the tools to be active stewards of their own education. And because we value our commitment to being a Community of Practice, we are always in the process of teaching and learning from each other.

Related to students, that means we ask for feedback about where we need to do better or when students feel their voices aren't being heard. We set high expectations for their participation at the Center, and in turn they set high expectations for the quality of their experience at the Center. They expect to engage in difficult discussions around power, privilege, and intersectionality, and are encouraged to do so from a place of respect and commitment to learning. And they challenge us as administrators to examine our blindspots around power and oppression and our role as advocates within an institution.

We are so fortunate to have bright, enthusiastic, and inquisitive students who choose to share their time and talents with the University community, including through their work at the Center. In this edition, students who are learning to facilitate workshops on issues of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and intimate partner violence talk about their experience as peer educators in our Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP). A participant from our Greeks Against Sexual Assault program discusses what she has gained through being a part of this group. You will hear how our Elect Her training is an opportunity to build campaign skills for students who are interested in increasing the representation of women in elected office.

As we close out 2013, I would like to take a moment to reflect on how much the contributions of our collaborators, allies, and supporters has added to work of the Women's Center. The staff and faculty who volunteer to serve on the event planning committees of our Advisory Board are responsible for several of our signature programs such as the Women of Color Luncheon and the Women's Advance Conference. Those events resonate with the attendees because our volunteers are committed to creating meaningful opportunities to network and for professional development. So as we embark on the journey that will be 2014, I would ask you to consider [making a donation](#) to sustain our work throughout this coming year. Your gift tells those students, staff, and faculty who are connected with the Center that their work matters and that they are not alone in their commitment to promoting gender equity.

—Kathleen Holgerson

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## SAVE THE DATES!

*We have a host of programs already in place for Spring 2014! Take a look through the upcoming dates of different programs and mark your calendar to join us for a semester packed with a variety of different events!*

### January:

31st - Elect Her Discussion, Friday, 2pm, Women's Center

### February:

24th-28th - Eating Disorders Awareness Week

26th - *Body Drama* with Nancy Redd, Wednesday, 7pm, Student Union Theatre

### March: Women's Herstory Month

Women and Mental Health — Panel Discussion, TBD

4th - Lakota Harden, Tuesday, 6pm, Student Union Theatre

### April: Sexual Assault Awareness Month

8th - *\$tart \$mart* Training, Tuesday, 6-9pm. Registration required by 4/4/14

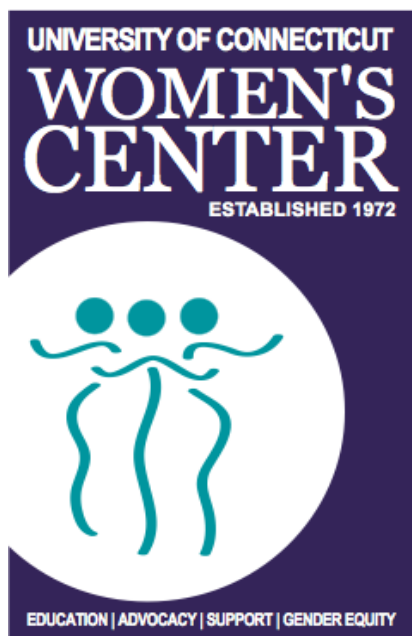
15th - *Lunafest*, Tuesday, 5:30pm, Student Union Theatre

23rd - Take Back the Night, Wednesday, 7pm, Student Union Ballroom

### May:

9th - Annual Outstanding Academic Achievement Awards Ceremony, Friday

15th - UConn Women's Advance Conference, Thursday, 8:30am-4:30pm, Storrs Campus



## UNESCO CONFERENCE

On Tuesday, October 22, 2013, Professor Omara-Otunnu, holder of the UNESCO Chair in Humans Rights in the United States, and several other speakers (professors, social justice advocates, and legal professionals) stood in front of high school students, college students, teachers, and professors to talk about a devastating social issue that has plagued the world for centuries: violence against women. The [14<sup>th</sup> Annual UNESCO Conference](#) held at UConn was an all-day affair in the Student Union that incorporated speeches, presentations, and group workshops (facilitated by UConn's VAWPP) all revolving around educating students about this issue and discussing it.

The conference stressed that violence against women is the most pressing human rights issue in today's, and even yesterday's, world. Many speakers addressed the fact that in both developing and developed nations, women are consistently at a high risk for rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and, subsequently, murder. One speaker, Mrs. Zainab Hawa Bangura, who has worked rigorously with the United Nations regarding sexual violence, stated that violence against women is "history's greatest silence."



*First they came for the  
Socialists,  
and I did not speak up  
because I was not a  
Socialist.  
Then they came for the  
Trade Unionists,  
and I did not speak up  
because I was not a  
Trade Unionist.  
Then they came for the  
Communists,  
and I did not speak up,  
because I was not a  
Communist.  
Then they came for the  
Jews,  
and I did not speak up,  
because I was not a Jew.  
Then they came for the  
Catholics,  
and I did not speak up,  
because I was Protestant.  
Then they came for me,  
and by that time there  
was no one  
left to speak for me.*

*- Reverend Martin  
Niemöller*

She talked about her experiences working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with rape victims as young as five years old; and that even though women are an integral part of society, they are treated like objects and forced to carry the burden of violence themselves because of many cultural and political issues. The violence is often silenced because people dismiss victims or demand too much money from victims for them to effectively incarcerate their perpetrators. Plus, the victims are often stricken with crippling shame for what happened to them. Mrs. Bangura explained to the audience that the world needs to become a place where women are valued and not made to carry the weight of their assault.

Several other speakers stood on stage and explained their relationship with violence against women, including the Women Center's Director, Kathleen Holgerson, who gave a slide show presentation about different ways that pop culture, television, advertising, etc. perpetuates harmful notions about male and female interaction and sexual harassment.

Going back to the poem that Professor Omara-Otunnu read during his address [quoted on the left], one of the points of the conference was that men and women alike should both speak out against violence against women. The poem is a manifestation of this idea, the idea that every issue needs the help of every voice. Professor Omara-Otunnu stated that violence against women affects everyone, but most people do not initially realize that fact. So, the way to best combat this problem is to tackle it head on with education, leading to informed empathy. He urged the audience, specifically the men in the crowd, to consider how they would feel if their mother, girlfriend, sister, etc. was the victim of rape or abuse and to remember that every potential victim is someone special to another person.

Having conventions like this at UConn is an effective step in generating new ways of thinking that will help to combat violence against women. It is this sort of education and advocacy that chips away at cultural norms that perpetuate the acceptance or ignorance surrounding such violence.

For more information about UNESCO, visit <http://en.unesco.org/>.

—Julie Kronick

## ALUMN/AE ENGAGEMENT

*This year, Kathy Fischer, our Associate Director, is working to engage Women's Center alumni/ae in a different way, in order to connect their ideas with the current work we do here at the Women's Center. She is conducting surveys with alumni/ae to understand the things they would like to happen in the future, what would be most beneficial to them, and suggestions for opportunities to participate in programming. Many alumni/ae have already participated, giving valuable feedback, in order for us to better to serve those who have contributed to the Women's Center in the past and to keep them engaged in the future.*

Social media has consistently proven to be a very effective tool on many fronts for people near and far. Facebook and LinkedIn were among the top contenders for social media platforms alumni/ae are interested in using to engage and communicate with the Women's Center. Email lists were also suggested methods of communication in the survey, among virtual professional development options and webinars. Since networking is so vital in all that we do, the opportunities to do it online is convenient, and nowadays, essential. Social media platforms, webinars and other online sites also allow for current students to connect with alumni/ae from years past, and for alumni/ae to reconnect with each other. These relationships are important to building our community of practice and having strong supporters of our mission. Together we can reach a common goal that everyone who has been a part of the Women's Center has reached for. Alumni/ae suggested regional meet-ups, formal and informal. Many were interested in a mentoring program or even speaking at future events. We always welcome the interest, assistance, and opinions of those who helped make the Women's Center what it is today. If you have not yet participated, we invite you to do so [here](#).



UCONN  
ALUMNI  
ASSOCIATION

—Takina Pollock

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PREVENTION PROGRAM

*Thalia Mangan and Reema Malhotra, two students enrolled in the Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP) course this semester, discuss their experience and what they've gained from VAWPP. Many students learn a variety of different things from the course, from self-exploration to epiphanies about the world around them.*

I find VAWPP to be very informative and relevant. This class brings healing to survivors because it allows me to understand why things like [sexual assault] happen and why it happened to me. I never knew there was such a thing as a rape culture and it makes me feel "better" and "safer" to know that this is culture that I am growing/developing in and to know that I am more aware of my surroundings. It also helps me understand that what was done to me was a horrible thing, and I finally have the necessary language to help me, and others, to understand what has happened to me and others. This class should be recommended to everyone because rape is not just a "women's issue," it is a human issue. These victims are your wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, nieces, friends, brothers, fathers, uncles, nephews, and they are humans and these are their issues. So how could you not be informed about these issues?

—Thalia Mangan

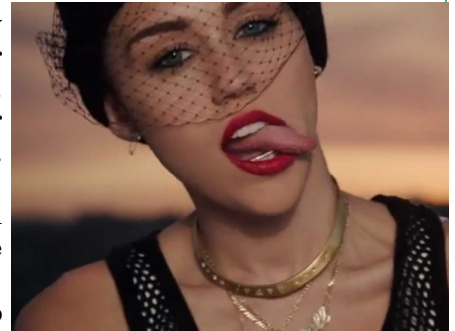


My experience in the VAWPP class has been extremely positive. Before taking this class, I thought I was informed about rape culture, but now I see that there was a lot I didn't know about. While it's a really difficult class to sit through sometimes due to the nature of the topics, I think this is the most important class I have ever taken at UConn. I have been positively affecting the people around me in ways I never knew were possible, and that is the biggest step in starting to end the negativity that comes with rape culture.

—Reema Malhotra

## A GLIMPSE INTO A WOMEN'S CENTER CONVERSATION

**Julie:** There's been a lot of talk about Miley's new makeover and personality since her performance at this year's Video Music Awards (VMAs). During her VMA performance, she was dancing wildly all around the stage, nearly naked, trying to keep things upbeat and fun, which most female artists do; but her performance was raunchy, spastic, and, given her previous starlet identity, potentially detrimental to young fans everywhere. The issue Miley presents is, in part, age-old and, in part, a frustration of modern society. She exclaimed on her Saturday Night Live debut that "Hannah Montana is dead!" because she feels she needs to break completely away from her "good girl" identity. And yet, most of her current die-hard fans are probably the prepubescent girls who bought Hannah Montana Barbie dolls and who are now in high school. What



Miley is showing them is that a "good girl" persona can never coexist with being sexual, and this idea is why slut-shaming is such a dominant form of criticism. Celebrities such as Sinéad O'Connor have addressed Miley telling her that what she does is not female sex-positive, and is, in fact, allowing herself to be "prostituted." But her makeover doesn't stop at offending based on gender only. In fact, many internet bloggers have spoken out on how they feel Miley's new image contains negative racial elements. She's adopted "twerking" and, for the VMA performance, hired an entire cast of Black backup dancers only to fondle their bodies on stage, making Miley's image "[cultural appropriation at its worst](#)" to many. This is exaggerated by Miley consistently making claims that she feels like Lil' Kim inside and wants music that "[feels Black](#)." It's not bad for Miley to embrace another culture, but she does so while reinforcing negative stereotypes and images of Black womanhood, especially considering that the song "We Can't Stop" was initially crafted for Rihanna. Would anyone have said anything if Rihanna jumped up on stage and put on the same performance as Miley? Probably not, as over-sexualizing Black women has been historically approved and promoted. Miley "twerking" to "feel Black" is problematic to me.

**Takina:** Speaking as a Black woman I have a hard time accepting "twerking" as something reserved for Black people or something inherently a part of my culture... but I do understand the comparison and the idea of cultural appropriation. Miley Cyrus is taking things that are stereotypically "Black" and making a mockery of them. From the way that she dances to her choice of dress, Miley is trying very hard to be something she's obviously not. "Twerking" is something that originated in the southern states a long time ago. And years later there's a resurgence with extreme popularity, and a Whiteness about it, especially since Oxford Dictionary decided to add "twerk" as an [actual word](#). I just can't help but roll my eyes at the idea, since this existed among Black people for such a long time, but since Miley did it, it becomes "legitimate." My issue with Miley Cyrus is that she's reaching into a culture she knows nothing about and exploiting it in all the ways that she can, using her privilege as a White woman. Unfortunately this is just the frame that we operate within as a society. Black people are already hyper-sexualized, so Rihanna gyrating and being equally as raunchy as Miley is expected, although Rihanna went through a similar (though much slower) evolution as an artist.

**Julie:** A mid-October [Huffington Post article](#) revealed Gloria Steinem's opinion on the Miley Cyrus debate and all of the Miley-bashing that's been circulating the internet. "I wish we didn't have to be nude to be noticed," Steinem says, "But given the game as it exists, women make decisions...I think that we need to change the culture, not blame the people that are playing the only game that exists." But is this really enough to absolve Miley of her inappropriate actions? It's more (to me at least) than "being nude to be noticed." Besides what I mentioned already, her actions definitely encourage women and young girls to keep playing the game rather than change it.

**Takina:** I don't think Gloria Steinem was absolving Miley of any guilt in the situation, but explaining why she could possibly think this is okay. She's not the first to do it, but perhaps she's the Whitest there's been in awhile, which is why the world is taking notice of her transformation. I think the combination of her emerging from her previous identity as Hannah Montana and diving into this Lil' Kim facade is just a lot for the world to handle at once. She comes off as "damaged," reinforcing the idea that there is always some alternative motive behind a woman expressing her sexuality.

## GREEKS AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

*Greeks Against Sexual Assault (GASA) is a program run by the Women's Center and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life where students who are a part of Greek Life can join together and discuss different issues affecting the UConn community and how they can use their organizations to better serve the community and combat rape culture and sexual assault. GASA helps to eradicate stereotypes about fraternity and sorority life and creates outreach opportunities for members of Greek Life to participate in and bring back a wide breadth of knowledge to their organization.*

Walking up to the UConn Women's Center before my first Greeks Against Sexual Assault (GASA) meeting I was completely unsure of what to expect, and never could have imagined how incredibly eye-opening my experience in this program would actually be. From the first exchange of introductions among Greeks, I knew students who are passionate and ready to make a difference in our community surrounded me.

Before GASA, I was entirely unaware of the complexity of the issues relating to sexual assault. But one layer at a time, we began breaking down all of the factors that contribute to this problem on our campus. Beginning with gender norms and stereotypes, we moved on to topics such as the bystander effect, and the multifaceted debate of privilege. Each topic carried with it intense deliberations, stimulating debates, and emotional reflections as each of us related to the experiences we were discoursing; some of us just discovering how prevalent the issue of sexual assault actually is.

Due to the fact that sexual assault is not a topic that is normally talked about, many students are oblivious to its prevalence on campus. I know that before GASA, I was naïve to the fact that sexual assault occurred at UConn, leaving me powerless to prevent or combat a problem that was transpiring around me. It has become our goal in GASA to raise awareness of sexual assault with a preventative approach, because along with awareness comes the power to stop future offenders. By sharing the techniques we have learned together, while spreading awareness to our organizations and the UConn community as a whole, we have the power to better our campus.

Throughout the past month, after much discussion, reflection, and the tools I have gained to handle any potential situation I might encounter, I am empowered to make a difference. Knowing that I have the support of all my peers who I have experienced GASA with, as well as the students before me, and the students in coming semesters, I am truly excited to see all that we can accomplish together. GASA has been a remarkable and enlightening experience, which I am more than grateful to have been apart of. It has opened my eyes and given me the knowledge and strength to help make a difference; empowerment I intend to share.

—Kelly Harrigan

## FALL 2013 GRADUATE



When I came to UConn in the Fall of 2010, I never expected all that was in store for me in the following 4 years. I never thought I would meet so many amazing people, form so many bonds, and experience the fun, eye-opening events that UConn had to offer.

I chose to be a Human Development and Family Studies & Sociology double major. I have always enjoyed helping others and want to continue helping others in my career path. My biggest hope is for a career in Social Work working with adolescents who are facing issues that your "average" adolescent wouldn't necessarily face. Working at the Women's Center has helped me to shape this dream. Having the many bonds and connections that I have formed with so many of the staff members, both student and full time, helped me realize how necessary support is, and that if I can lend support to someone, like I have been lent here, I should do it. Having the privilege to work at the Center for my entire college career

has made me a stronger woman, feminist, and overall person. I couldn't have become the woman I am today without the experiences I gained here over the past four years.

—Christina Caron

## WOMEN OF COLOR LUNCHEON

*The Women of Color Luncheon is an annual event at which women of color from across all professions at the University of Connecticut are invited to attend. Oftentimes, people find themselves disconnected interdepartmentally, so the ability to network with women from similar backgrounds and/or experiences in a safe space is valuable and necessary to building a strong foundation. Events like this are an excellent way to support those who are working at the University who can make an impact on students of color. Karen DeMeola, the Assistant Dean of Students at the UConn Law School has been attending the Women of Color Luncheon for 5 years. She would love to see more events like this, more attendees, and believes there is a message to be relayed throughout all facets of the University.*



### *What is your heritage?*

My family is Italian, and I was raised with all of the culture and heritage of an Italian. Though I knew that I did not look like the rest of my family (many adoptees do not), and I was always assumed to be African American or Latina, I did not learn my actual racial background until I was 18. This was a difficult coming out process. My identity as an Italian felt immediately fraudulent. I spent a lot of time learning about who I was and how this changed me. It certainly explained and validated what I felt and how I was treated by outsiders but I struggled with immediately feeling like I belonged to a historical racial discourse about which I knew little. The power of privilege is that you do not have to pay attention to what you do not, cannot or refuse to see. The problem was I that I did see it and I felt it but I did not have the knowledge, experience or words to understand. So, I immersed myself into a new culture. I studied race, slavery and the civil rights movement. I read everything by Martin Luther King, Jr., James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Langston Hughes and any Black author I could find. I studied feminism, critical race studies, queer theory and privilege. I continued this through law school and continue today.

### *Why do you find this event important?*

The event is the only time in the year when as an institution we celebrate women of color as a community. It breaks down the perceived or actual silos that exist within any organization. We come together, regardless of title or identity, to celebrate and honor the important contributions we make to UConn and the surrounding communities.

### *What are your thoughts on the correlation between having faculty of color and students of color? Does this affect performance/attendance/retention in your opinion?*

My previous role was Assistant Dean for Admissions and Student Finance. In that role I was responsible for bringing in each new class. I spoke with students, recruited students, participated on panels on diversity and engaged in pipeline programs set to increase the number of minorities in higher education generally and law school specifically. So, yes, there is in my opinion a correlation between having a diverse faculty and staff of color and whether a student attends (i.e., whether or not a student chooses) UConn, remains at UConn and performs well while here. Institutional racism still exists, the systems of privilege exist. We should see more people who look like us in all manner of professions and positions within the university. It is hard to be the only one or one of few. It is true that the Women's Center, and all of the cultural and affinity Centers, provide tremendous support and networking for students, but that is not enough.

### *What are three words you would use to describe the Women of Color Luncheon?*

Empower. Pride. Community. When we go through our daily lives at work, it is easy to forget that we are part of a larger Community. As women of color it is even easier to forget depending on your office, department, or programs that you are not one out of few or simply alone. To be in that space on that day is empowering to all who attend. Whether we are celebrating someone who provides direct support to students in their living environment, or someone who has written on human rights violations, we all contribute to the story of women of color at UConn. To be one of many is very powerful.

—Takina Pollock

## HUSKYTOWN

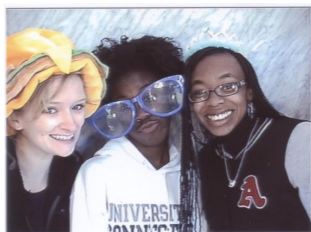
*HuskyTown is a UConn tradition where tailgaters can get a chance to view the different organizations on campus and get involved, or show their support as alumni/ae at the Homecoming game. Three of our Women's Center employees (Jovonne Pullen, Fern Formel, and Vincenza Brantle) volunteered to attend HuskyTown and spread the word about the Women's Center and all of the great work that we do here. They both attended for the first time and had great experiences to share!*

It was my first time being involved at HuskyTown, but hopefully it won't be my last. Though it was cold and early in the morning, I can say that I truly enjoyed myself while I was helping spread the word about the Women's Center. I was able to discuss all that happens in the Center, while at HuskyTown for Homecoming. Being able to be creative and come up with games that would draw in the attention of the crowd was kind of hard because I didn't know what type of crowd I would be dealing with, but it was fun to plan while at work. To be honest, I wasn't sure if any of the activities that were created were going to be liked or even tried out at the event. However, they were played – many times! And it looked like a lot of people, of all ages, enjoyed the activities. Also, to see alumni/ae come back to support Homecoming and the Women's Center, and even to get the chance to walk around to the other tents were all good experiences, too. I got to learn more about some things going on around campus and even got free stuff (including hot chocolate to keep me warm). Overall it was a good experience, and I am more than happy that I got to be a part of the entire event. I'm happy to be one of the reasons why individuals know just a little bit more about the Women's Center.

—Jovonne Alicia Pullen

Initially, I thought the HuskyTown experience would be a bit overwhelming, but mainly because I am only a first-year, and it would be my first time attending. The interaction with the kids and alumni/ae surged a great deal of excitement, and left me wanting to come back in future years. Also, I can honestly say that I've taught both younger and older people a thing or two about women's issues and the purpose of the Women's Center. I can only imagine how things could be as we continue.

—Vincenza Brantle





## ELECT HER

*Elect Her is a national program, established by the American Association for University Women (AAUW), geared toward empowering and enabling women to run for political office. This program works at the level of undergraduate women, which encourages them to run for their student government offices, increasing the representation of women at universities nationwide. Elect Her at UConn has given many women the opportunity to learn about what it takes to run for office and give them a new lens on their ability to campaign and get elected. For more information about Elect Her and how to get involved, visit the AAUW website [here!](#)*



*“Elect Her: UConn Women Win,”* is a truly unique program on campus, and one I’ve been lucky enough not only to attend as a first-year, but also to help coordinate my Junior year. First and foremost, the *Elect Her* event is about empowerment and encouraging women to see themselves as political and community leaders. Uniquely, *Elect Her* doesn’t simply end with an encouraging message. The day-long conference, featuring young female political leaders and campaign experts from around the state, continues to lay out a detailed and comprehensive roadmap for seeking elected office.

Before attending *Elect Her* as a first-year student in college, I had always written off running my own campaign as an impossibly complicated and skill-intensive endeavor. Even the election processes for on-campus positions seemed daunting. Yet after just a half-day at the *Elect Her* event for the first time, I walked away with not only a hard copy of several candidate declaration forms for on-campus positions, but also a detailed, step-by-step understanding of what campaigning actually entails. *Elect Her* demystified the entire process for me, and helped me break it down into manageable, attainable steps. I left with a stump speech already written, a decent grasp of UConn’s campaigning rules and regulations, and much better understanding of my options. I even gained the confidence to run as a candidate for Board of Education myself this year, in my hometown of Somers, Connecticut. After experiencing such a shift in my views of campaigning and politics, I was excited to return two years later and contribute to the execution *Elect Her 2013*.



This year the Conference was just as thought-provoking and educational as I remembered, if not more so. With an audience of mostly young college women, we discussed why women frequently refrain from running for office, especially early in their careers. After discussion, we heard from a variety of speakers and experts, including Representative Mae Flexer, and a panel of current women in elected positions on campus. Even returning as a coordinator, it was still incredibly moving to hear the stories of my college-age peers, especially as they discussed what initially motivated them to seek office. Representative Flexer’s address was also personal and nuanced, offering a first hand account of running a political campaign beyond college as a young woman. The *Elect Her* conference not only encourages young women to see themselves as leaders, it also equips

them with all the tools, skills, and camaraderie they need to go out and make it happen.

—Molly Rockett

*P.S. Molly Rockett was elected to the Somers Board of Education this November.*

## FALL 2013 GRADUATE

As I prepare to graduate UConn, I am incredibly grateful for my involvement in the Women Center, specifically in the Violence Against Women Prevention Program. My activism both in the VAWPP class and as a VAWPP teaching assistant has given me a critical lens through which to view the world and its structures. VAWPP has been a huge part of the feminist education I received at UConn, and it has given me a foundation of education from which to speak on my own experience and connect the personal with the political. My involvement in organizing and activism throughout my time at UConn has also reinforced my belief in the importance of understanding the diversity of lived experiences and identities that each woman and person uniquely possesses. As Adrienne Rich stated, "The connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the most potentially transforming force on the planet." I would change "women" to those committed to feminist change, and I am forever grateful for the connections I have made with my inspirational fellow student activists, and all the critical minds I have met along the way who also seek to transform the world.



—Carolyn Luby

## LETTER FROM THE WRITING INTERN

I knew coming into my internship here at the Women's Center that I would have a good opportunity to bolster my writing skills while working with important topics; however, I never imagined the personal impact would be so drastic.

Working here has led me to events around campus that I might never have attended otherwise. I always knew about SlutWalk and the fact that UConn hosted several awareness campaigns, for example, but I never felt comfortable attending, mostly because I didn't know if I had a place there. My being at the Center for several days of the week, though, really helped me feel like I did play more than a miniscule part in campus culture. After sitting in the VAWPP office and talking with two students that work at the Women's Center while I made my shirt for The Clothesline Project, I realized that I could play a very important role: support.

I think too many times people shy away from things they might be interested in because they feel out of place, or maybe even like they won't be missed if they aren't there. But after taking part in SlutWalk and finding myself in the midst of the Title IX Coalition rally, I see now that even my singular presence is important, because I am acting as a body who cares and who supports; and the more the merrier, so to speak.



Writing for the Women's Center has also given me more courage to talk about social issues and to stir the pot via social media platforms to get people thinking about important topics, like domestic violence or rape culture. I spend a lot of time researching current events or articles to write about for the [Women's Center blog](#) so I accumulate a lot of valuable stories, facts, and anecdotes to share. In fact, a lot of my friends now expect me to be up-to-date on social issues and talk to them about it because I spend time at the Women's Center, go to rallies, and post so much online now.

I will walk away from my experience at the Women's Center feeling like a tool for social change. I realize now how much of a difference I can make, even if I'm acting on my own or changing one person's mind.

—Julie Kronick

*\*Editor's Note: I would like to thank Julie for all of her help this semester, and for being so open to working with me, helping to meet deadlines, and being a new voice and a different perspective in the newsletter. Collaboration across campus is so important to us here at the Women's Center, and Julie's openness to learning, and ability to navigate her job and educate herself simultaneously is a valuable skill. I'm excited to see all of the amazing things she'll do in the future. Great job, Julie!*

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I come from a growing line of family members who date (and marry) interracially. I have an aunt from Pakistani descent, one from Puerto Rican descent, and an aunt from Poland. They've all made some really cute kids with my uncles, if I do say so myself. Aside from my sister who recently started to date a Puerto Rican guy, I can't think of any women in my immediate or extended family who are seeing/have ever seen someone who's not Black.



So I've recently started to go on casual dates with this guy. He's very smart, well-versed in social justice, a gentleman, a feminist (a unicorn...). I tell my friends those things and they all laugh (read: roll their eyes) and say he sounds great. Then they ask me what he looks like, at which point in the description I tell them "he's White," and everybody, all of a sudden, is twice as intrigued beyond the habitual "aw, that's nice." All of my Black girlfriends talk about him as some sort of uncharted territory, and they're so interested in knowing *what it's like dating a White guy*. We've been on a few dates thus far, and it's been great between the two of us, but there have been small quips of weirdness with the generalizable population. At times I feel like I'm part of an exhibit at a museum. To onlookers, the intersection of our races and genders don't seem to make sense. It's something people aren't used to seeing, and being in an interracial relationship has made me begin to unpack this notion and not take idle glances and stares offensively, but understand there is a lot to be uncovered and understood about society and the way we view other people.

I feel like many Black women are reluctant to date outside of their race, because there are so many Black men born of Black mothers, and have Black sisters, who openly condemn and reject Black women. So there's this idea that if our own people dehumanize and devalue us, how can we be expected to be desired by someone completely opposite? Black women continue to have the [lowest statistics](#) in the likelihood of being married, and among the highest for being divorced. Black women are constantly fighting against physical, sexual and personality stereotyping. While a Black man being with a White woman still has undertones of sexual taboo, at this point it seems more acceptable for a Black man to date a White (or Latino, or Asian, or any other) woman instead of a Black woman. Black women have been stereotyped so negatively and consistently throughout history that at this point we've been equated with undesirability, and made out to be a group that should be avoided at all costs, unless there are only sexual motivations behind the attraction. So the idea of a White man, considered to be of the most privileged group, dating a Black woman, draws attention. My own opinion is that Black men have privilege in being a man, and White women have privilege in being White, so there is some sense of balance in their social stigmas in the eyes of society. Being White, and a man, gives the guy I'm seeing immense amounts of privilege, and me being Black, and a woman, obviously makes me the largely marginalized one at a glance; a harder contrast for other people to grasp. Society's perception is very much black and white, ignoring invisible privileges and marginalizations and resting solely on skin color and gender expression. It's obvious we're different, but beneath the surface we're so similar; our color doesn't make us incompatible. Society acts like Black women dating White men are traitors, and White men dating Black women just have a sexual fetish to fulfill. But, as with most things, one can't be consumed by what outsiders think and what society believes about your individual choices. I know there are going to be more cultural, personal, and social obstacles to navigate in choosing to date outside of my race as an adult. So for a lot of Black women I guess it just isn't worth the effort to look beyond the rigid walls of their own phenotype when the statistics don't favor us anyway. We're expected to sit and wait for some Black knight in shining armor to validate us, because we're conditioned to think no one else will.

One of my friends asked me if it bothers me that people keep commenting on his race. It doesn't bother me at all (yet), given that the comments have been coming from people I know will support and tease me about whoever I'm interested in, regardless of what he looks like. We're all well aware of the social pressures that exist in interracial dating. And I think that very idea contributes to Black women not bothering to deal with White men in general because that's just *one more thing*. *One more* problem to add to a growing list of things Black women have to deal with already. It's *one more thing* we shouldn't have to explain but somehow find ourselves doing anyway. It's *one more thing* to be judged on, and have our "Blackness" come into question. I understand why there is a hesitation, because I've seen the social pressures with my own eyes. But really, what's wrong with adding *one more thing* if it means I'm happy?

—Takina Pollock

# WOMEN'S CENTER



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