I signed up for a WGSS class this semester called Gender and Science (WGSS 2105W), taking the advice of my adviser. She told me that this class is recommended to healthcare professionals so I enrolled with reservations. I had never taken a class like this before. I had never ventured so far outside the world of ‘hard science.’ I literally had no idea what to expect.

On the first day of class when my professor said, “I’m going to make you better doctors by making you better people.” I rolled my eyes. I expected to learn a lot from this class, but I didn’t expect it to change me on that kind of level. Early on in the class, I was preparing for a presentation on intersexuality. I had heard the term once before, out of the mouth of my little brother, a double major in WGSS and HDFS. He told me that intersex people are mutilated by doctors and that they are very successfully silenced in society. When he used the word “mutilated,” I flinched internally and the first thing that crossed my mind was that there must be something he didn’t understand about these procedures, especially since he isn’t a science major after all. But the more research I did, the more I realized that he was right…

Intersex people are those who don’t fall into either of the polarized gender categories society offers: male or female. Their internal and external sexual characteristics fall somewhere along the spectrum between the two. This condition has no negative effects on their health. However, because their physical differences are seen as ‘abnormal’ by doctors, they undergo countless surgeries and hormone therapies, which are often traumatic and humiliating, all intended to put them into boxes that society recognizes as ‘normal.’ These horrible, shaming, ‘corrective’ surgeries are performed by doctors worldwide. These are doctors I had always believed had their patients’ best interests at heart—doctors who I had once believed were closer to angels than us mere mortals, bringing people back from the brink of death with their skill, knowledge, and grace. I quickly realized how romantic, how naive, how shallow, and how narrow my views were. Who decided that it was a doctor’s responsibility to make someone ‘normal’? Why do they get to decide what ‘normal’ means? I realized that the medical field, fueled by the production of science—a process that I loved—could be impersonal and cold, a breeding ground for monsters if used incorrectly. I couldn’t believe that I had never heard about intersexuality in any of my classes as a pre-medical student who has devoted entire semesters on learning about the human body in all forms.
The status of intersex people wasn’t the only time I was horrified by what the fields of science and medicine allowed people to do in this country. My eyes have been opened to the systematic oppression of women and the disabled, the sterilization of female prisoners, the medicalization of childbirth and motherhood, and countless others.

It’s sometimes hard to see the fields of medicine and science cast in such a negative light, but as I said to a classmate, “It’s like getting a vaccine: it hurts, but I know it’s good for me.” It’s important for me to hear what my professor has to say about topics like the ones I’ve mentioned. Science itself is all about progress and if we don’t think critically about what we’re doing in health and science fields, we’ll never be in a position to make them better. It’s important for me to look at science from ‘the cheap seats.’ I can see now that the knowledge that I’ve received will fundamentally change the way I practice by taking into account the concerns of my patients with a new found knowledge, sense of understanding, and respect. I’ll have my ear to the ground listening to voices—the narratives that too often are drowned out by conventional society. I’ll actively look for areas where my medical knowledge and insight of science and technology studies can work together to solve a problem, and I’ll never disregard what my little brother says with such immediacy again. Taking this class has opened up a window into a world that I never knew existed. Next semester, I’m signed up another WGSS class: Femi nist Disability Studies (WGSS 3251). I thought this class would be relevant to my future work in the field and I feel that Dr. Mauldin has so much more to teach me about the trials of the disregarded, the misunderstood, and the forgotten. I will listen with my elbows on the sill.

I couldn’t believe that I had never heard about intersexuality in any of my classes as a pre-medical student who has devoted entire semesters on learning about the human body in all forms.

Letter from the Editor

To the past, current, and future supporters of WGSS,

I hope this newsletter will not only update, but I hope it will educate. This year, my intention is to include content that will inform and expand every reader’s mind. This is the WGSS Program’s ultimate goal: to make us fuller, more-enlightened human beings. My other intention is to magnify identities, perspectives, and experiences that have been diminished by society and even mainstream Feminist discourses. You will read articles and view art that explore diverse issues such as the mutilation of intersex individuals, general lack of transgender awareness, the burdens of conflicting identity categories, and challenges to the radical nature of change. The writers themselves are also diverse. At least three of them are women of color and several others self-identify as biracial, transgender, and pansexual. Some people will ask themselves, “Why does this matter?” It matters because these kinds of issues and labels tend to lack visibility, hence my previous language of magnification. I guarantee that some readers will have never seen them before and will be seeking the counsel of Uncle Google to determine what they mean. I want to emphasize that this is perfectly acceptable because we are all continuously learning and growing, but I also want to emphasize that by making diversity an essential habit, we can become more familiar and understanding of every kind of person’s needs, concerns, and experiences. We cannot know what we do not know. I hope that you will know something new today.

With my sincerest gratitude, I want to thank Maxine Marcy for her fabulous graphics, her patience, her creativity, and most of all, her dedication to the project. She is the reason why this newsletter looks so refined and why all of our jaws are on the floor at the WGSS office. I would also like to thank Barbara Gurr and Sherry Zane for submitting hordes of materials and for their impeccable writings. Both of you do yourselves every year and keep my stress levels to a minimum. Without you two, there wouldn’t be a substantial newsletter. Also, I would like to thank Coleen Spurlock for her advice and editing contributions. A second pair of eyes always makes an effort so much more efficient and easier. Finally, I would like to thank everyone else who submitted materials: Deborah Galat, Lauren Rosewarne, Melina Canter, Castella Copeland, and Matthew Brush. It was a both a pleasure and an honor working with all of you to create a meaningful project together that, at best, gives a snapshot of the 2015/2016 WGSS academic year.

We did it,

Austin Heffernan

Dr. Lauren Rosewarne is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Melbourne, Australia. She is the author of eight books and many articles and book chapters on the topics of gender, sexuality and popular culture. She is a frequent commentator in the press and regularly writes opinion pieces for a general audience. More information can be found on her website: www.laurenrosewarne.com.
Six Months in Storrs
By Lauren Rosewarne PhD

Between June and December 2015, I traded in cosmopolitan Melbourne with its population hovering around the 4 million mark, for life in Storrs, Connecticut. It was not my first time living in New England – I’d lived and worked in Amherst previously. I was treated, once again, to a spectacular fall that truly compares to nowhere else in the world, along with the quiet, slight creepiness of the area, encapsulated convincingly by the books of Stephen King and the photography of Gregory Crewdson.

While I happily got the opportunity to teach two subjects in the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program, I also had a hefty research agenda while in town. Perhaps over-ambitiously, I gifted myself the burden of completing two manuscripts.

Regardless of what I’m working on, I write from the position that popular culture is simultaneously fascinating and a treasure trove of social and political insight. I write from the position that media – no matter how trashy or ridiculous, and regardless of how many Kardashians are involved – is incredibly revealing about a multitude of topics. For my own purposes, I’m interested in revelations centered on gender, on sexuality and on the body. Outside of being a popular culture junkie, and thus simply enjoying the opportunity to think critically about the material I consume, I write from the position that popular media serves an inadequately acknowledged educative function. There are a deluge of topics that, for many reasons, formal education shies away from. Film and television, therefore, often plugs our knowledge gaps. The fact that such gaps are plugged by an entertainment media rather than a textbook means we’re often more receptive to the ideas put forward, but equally are perhaps being blindly misinformed by a media that has no actual remit to educate, and rather exists largely to make a profit.

In previous works, I have examined topics like how taboos such as masturbation, menstruation and heterosexual anal sex are portrayed by film and television and what such depictions reveal about society (and the individual’s) relationship with our bodies, with sexuality, and with gender. While working at UConn, my research centered on the Internet: on how film and television depict new(-ish) technologies.

The first book I completed, *Cyberbullies, Cyberactivists, Cyberpredators: Film, TV, and Internet Stereotypes*, published in the US recently by Praeger, was premised on the idea of Internet users invariably being portrayed in stereotypical ways as nerds and geeks, for example, alternatively as villains or perverts. Rather than reflecting the highly normal, real-life use of the Internet that we’re each involved with, instead, entertainment media presumes that users are male, nefarious, socially isolated and socially awkward. Such presentations correlate with the way technology has long been portrayed in popular media as masculine, dehumanizing, impersonal and, ultimately, as dangerous if not even out of control.

The second book, *Intimacy on the Internet: Media Representations of Online Connections*, scheduled to be published by Routledge in May, 2016, continues the theme of media representations of the Internet, but focuses on the depictions related to intimacy. The Internet has thoroughly revolutionized the way we connect with one another for love, sex and pleasure, although popular media’s depiction of these changes is in line with cyberphobia clichés rather than reflective of reality. The men and women who go online to find love, for example, are invariably considered losers. They’re unattractive, they’re undesirable and they have social shortcomings that make meeting people offline difficult. For the few appealing characters who go online for love, they’ll be forced to meet a handful of weirdos before finally finding love offline, which, apparently, is the natural order. Equally, while my findings indicated that if you’re a gay character going online to hook-up, the experience will leave you relatively unscathed. For most other intimacy seekers, the Internet is an unregulated Wild West where you’re far more likely to come in contact with someone wanting to steal your kidney and raid your bank account. Obviously, this is a stark difference to the increasingly normal role of online dating to offline intimacy seeking!

I write this post from my office in Melbourne. Our first semester is into its second week and Summer is still in full blaze. With a full agenda of administrative meetings, I’m really starting to miss my uninterrupted research time in Storrs!

“...The Internet has thoroughly revolutionized the way we connect with one another for love, sex & pleasure...”
WGSS and related faculty offer life-altering courses to students. Students enter lectures expecting to read, write, and take a few tests, but they leave feeling transformed in ways that they did not initially anticipate. To celebrate our faculty for their overall impact and influence, we decided to revive the Rate My Professor piece from the 2014/2015 newsletter. What better way to show the value of our faculty by sharing the feedback of previous students who have been shaped by their legacies? Rate My Professor is a nationwide student tool used to share personal classroom experiences. The tool is unsolicited and social in nature. In other words, these responses were posted in students’ free time simply for the purpose of wanting to share how great these professors are. These particular professors were selected due to their top ratings of 4/5 and the positive, meaningful content of their responses. These professors have also taught WGSS courses in Fall and/or Spring 2015/2016 academic semesters. Congratulations for making a difference!

**Rate My Professor Returns to Celebrate WGSS Faculty Influence**

**Rate My Professor**

**INSTRUCTOR: Nikki McGary**
**WOMEN AND VIOLENCE (WGSS 2263)**

Nikki was the best professor I’ve ever had. She made everything so interesting and you could tell she was passionate about everything she taught. She is very sweet and understanding if you had questions. I refused to miss classes because I enjoyed it so much.

**Rate My Professor**

**INSTRUCTOR: Vanessa Lovelace**
**GENDER IN EVERYDAY LIFE (WGSS 1105)**

Vanessa is great. Currently taking her class for WGSS 1105. Take some notes on the main ideas for the readings and you’ll be fine for the quizzes. Her lectures require you to speak your mind on topics, but it’s very interesting and enjoyable. I highly recommend.

**Rate My Professor**

**INSTRUCTOR: Penny Brandt**
**WOMEN AND MUSIC (WGSS 3998)**

Penny is better than all of the music professors, and she’s a grad student, incredibly well-versed in social justice and feminism, and refreshingly provides these viewpoints to the music history curriculum, which has traditionally been taught by and about old white men. She’s inspiring and has a great sense of humor. I learned so much in her class.

**Rate My Professor**

**INSTRUCTOR: Thomas Long**
**GENDER AND SCIENCE (WGSS 2105)**

His enthusiasm helped make this course a great experience. The man is a genius, no denying it. He really works hard to keep things interesting and encourage participation. Extremely friendly and pleasant, built up to a great conclusion at the end of the course that culminated everything we covered. Lots of work at times but highly recommended.

**Rate My Professor**

**INSTRUCTOR: Sherry Zane**
**GENDER IN US POP CULTURE (WGSS 3253W)**

Best professor at UConn, hands down. Really connects with the students, and understands you have other work in classes so doesn’t totally swamp you with work. The material covered is absolutely so interesting for our age group, a lot of critical thinking and discussion in class. You will look forward to going to Sherry Zane’s class every week.
Two film students investigated Hollywood films in order to determine if patterns exist in how gender is portrayed. They explored various themes such as representation of women in different roles, how sexuality varies with gender, the negative perceptions of age when gender is a factor, and how gender norms affect men. Their findings indicated that there is a severe lack of representation for women in film, there is a prevalence of sexualization and ageism directed at women, male characters are subjected to masculine stereotypes, and there are double standards for male and female behavior. For more details on the study, the students created an interactive Prezi to share their ideas. The link is available for more information, statistics, videos, and images. The students even recreated scenes from popular movies reversing gender roles at the end of the presentation. Their satirical role reversals show the absurdity of sexualization if men are placed in classic sexual roles that women ‘naturally’ embody.

Feminism/s and Future/s: Social Justice in the Arts and Humanities Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program  By Dr. Barbara Gurr

In the Fall 2015 semester, Dr. Alexis Boylan organized a panel discussion to encourage consideration of the role of feminism and the future, and to honor the academic work of WGSS faculty. This panel featured WGSS Director Dr. Nancy Naples, Assistant Professor in Residence Dr. Barbara Gurr, and affiliated feminist scholars Dr. Francoise Dussart and Dr. Claire Eby, who shared stories from their own feminist scholar-activist work. Over 40 people attended this panel, and Dr. Gurr, Dr. Sherry Zane, and WGSS Instructor Nikki McGary were so inspired by the work discussed, particularly questions regarding the role of art and literature in feminist praxis, that they decided to continue this consideration the following semester.

During the Spring 2016 semester, several classes in the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program focused on the theme of “Art and Activism in the Humanities,” using a feminist perspective to examine the uses and meaning of art and literature as activism through a close examination of utopias, dystopias, and the social justice imagination. For example, our capstone course for WGSS majors, taught by Dr. Alexis Boylan, analyzed Kindred by Octavia Butler to consider the legacy of the raced and sexed body in the Antebellum South as a contested site of futurism. The WGSS course “Feminism and Science Fiction,” taught by Dr. Barbara Gurr, focused more closely on Octavia Butler’s work and legacy, predominantly through two texts. The first was her novel Dawn, which brings questions of human “rights” directly into consideration through an examination of captivity and forced migration, forced miscegenation and family formation, survival, and other salient concerns. The second book was Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements. Both Senior Seminar and Feminism in Science Fiction also featured Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel to consider art, community, and free expression as basic human rights and interrogate the meanings of art within a variety of human conditions.

As part of our “Feminism/s and Future/s” theme, the WGSS program took education out of the classroom by hosting several events across campus, beginning with a salon featuring Dr. Barbara Gurr, editor of Race, Gender and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film (Palgrave MacMillan 2015), with two contributors to that volume, Dr. Stacy Missari (Quinnipiac University) and Dr. Mary Burke (University of Vermont). This was followed by a second salon and workshop featuring Walida Imarisha, co-editor of Octavia’s Brood. Imarisha spoke about science fiction as an engine for social change, and facilitated a direct action workshop for students from across the university which focused on using the science fiction imagination as a structure for the possible. These events were co-sponsored by some of our partners at the university, including the University of Connecticut Libraries, the Humanities Institute, the UConn Reads Program, the Department of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages, the UConn Women’s Center, the Africana Studies Institute, and the English Department.

Additional events included wide participation in the Annual Art and Feminism Wiki Edit-a-thon organized by Dr. Alex-

Feminism/s and Future/s culminated in the week of April 14th to the 21st with a series of actions organized by WGSS students from Women’s Movements (taught by Dr. Sherry Zane), Gender and Globalization (taught by Nikki McGary), and Feminism and Science Fiction and the Internship Seminar (taught by Dr. Barbara Gurr). Students used their social justice imagination to develop safe sexuality advertisements, perform a live reading of Octavia Butler’s Bloodchild, and other actions that reflected student concerns about the future as well as how they imagine the role of feminism in that future. As a part of Feminism/s and Future/s Week, on April 18 the Homer Babbidge Library hosted the opening of an art exhibit for which students chose to create and submit collaborative art pieces including paintings, body maps, and photo essays.

By the end of the Spring 2016 semester, an estimated 350 WGSS and other students actively participated in this semester’s theme through their research and writing, their art, their activism, and their attendance at events. Together, we explored art and literature as feminist praxis now and in the future. This would not have been possible without the partnership of our co-sponsors, the hard work of our faculty, and, most importantly, the commitment of our students to exploring feminism and the future.
Examining Experiences of Undergraduate Transgender Students on Storrs Campus

A study in the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at the University of Connecticut, under Dr. Barbara Gurr, seeks to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of undergraduate transgender, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming students on the University of Connecticut Storrs campus. Over the course of the Fall 2015 semester, research teams of undergraduate students conducted interviews with undergraduate students, an online survey, and examination of current UConn policy and practice to work towards this goal.

Interviews

Of the eight undergraduate students interviewed, seven identified as transgender, non-binary, or gender-nonconforming and one identified as cisgender.

All eight respondents, when discussing resources, pointed towards the UConn Rainbow Center as a hub for information, especially regarding transition. However, some students reported negative experiences within the Rainbow Center including transphobic language and exclusion.

In regards to safety and campus climate, responses were mixed. One overlapping concern was the need for gender neutral bathrooms. Using public restrooms was a source of anxiety for many respondents, who worried about harassment or even assault.

Students felt that there was a lack of gender neutral bathrooms on campus, and a lack of knowledge or awareness about any that already exist. There was also worry about taking space from students with physical disabilities since many gender neutral, single-stall bathrooms double as handicap accessible restrooms.

Policy and Practice

Student researchers chose twelve departments from the UConn campus that influence student life with established and practiced policies.

First, these departments’ websites were analyzed in order to study information easily accessible to the ‘average’ student. Then, interviews were conducted with department staff and administrators to discuss their policies and practices.

It was found that all departments must comply with Connecticut’s anti-discrimination policies, which include discrimination based on gender identity and expression. All departments interviewed strove to comply with this policy, and were open and receptive to being inclusive of all gender identities.

However, it also became apparent that even while resources are available, they can be difficult to find due to poor advertising or website inadequacy. Finally, most departments would direct students with questions or concerns to the Rainbow Center, or its director.

Survey Results

The survey was created for transgender undergraduate students. It required a valid UConn email or log-in, but did not keep any identification, making the survey completely anonymous. The survey was 28 questions long. In total, the survey received 16 usable responses.

How favorable do you think campus climate is for transgender students?

Undergraduate students. It required a valid UConn email or log-in, but did not keep any identification, making the survey completely anonymous. The survey was 28 questions long. In total, the survey received 16 usable responses.

Does UConn have enough single stall or unisex bathrooms?

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Contact Information

For more information contact Dr. Barbara Gurr at barbara.gurr@uconn.edu or email the study at genderstudy@uconn@gmail.com.

*Note: the study continued this Spring collecting video interviews and survey data. Updated results will be available in the upcoming academic year.
Inside the Notebook: Journal Entries from WGSS 3269

These snapshots are featured journals from the WGSS 3269 Women's Movements class. The journals are intended to inspire students to think about the concepts and issues raised in lecture and to apply them to their everyday lives. For example, one journal entry in the course asked students to examine how “heteronormativity” operates and functions in society. Heteronormativity is the cultural assumption that there are only two genders, they are biologically distinct, and they are the natural sexual compliments of each other for reproductive purposes. The second portion of the journal invites students to read their entries each week during a “consciousness raising” section of the class. After an entry is shared, the rest of the class engages in a discussion in relation to their own experiences and various perspectives. The following entries demonstrate students’ critical thinking about their own identities in relation to the course material as well as provide real world contexts to non-binary gender expressions.

1/29
I just got an email from the school to take a survey. The question was “what should the “Women’s Health” department in the infirmity change their name to?• Genital Health • Genital Related Health • Sexual Health • All-Sex Health * • Women’s Health (no change) • Genital oriented Health • Reproductive Health That’s what I choose *
It’s nice they’re trying to be more gender neutral - that way anyone could go get the help they need from them.
I just went to “Out of the Box,” the group for trans people and gender-nonconforming people at the Rainbow Center. The topic of gender neutral bathrooms came up, and I learned just how few there are on campus. There are a lack of them in important places, such as the library, where students can be there until three in the morning (I know I have). UConn has made great strides in other areas, such as the gender free housing floor, which is continuing to expand. In regards to the bathroom issue, there’s a feeling of social isolation to stay in East. It is still a ‘big deal’ if a lecture building has a gender neutral bathroom and I can speak on the fact that none of the STEM buildings have them. I just assumed that UConn had more than they actually do. It was a good reminder to remember my cis privilege and stay aware of these issues that I normally don’t notice. Also, “Out of the Box” was the only group I’ve been to that had Indian food and it was lit to have garlic naan for free.

Sisters:

Saw this pasted on Social Media for International Women’s Day and I couldn’t agree more with the statement.
CASTELLA E. COPELAND

About the artist:
Castella E. Copeland is a sixth semester student at UConn pursuing a triple major in Political Science, Human Rights, and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies with a minor in Global Arts and Culture. She writes poetry in her free time to make sense of how she experiences the world and to relieve stress. She also likes to make paper cranes to stay organized for school but has enough to make a gown out of them.

A Day I Wanna Relive

Over and over as the pain etched into my skin
Bursting the vessels that sail along and carry my essence
From head to toe

The heels of my heals on my feet wanna fall off
As they attack the surface of the earth shattering me
Splint by splint from the wall within
I search for the winter frozen amid the humid summer
Only to be found within the lost dreams
Remembered on the laziest of summer days

I feel inspired to read and work and write
I can't put down all of my thoughts fast enough,
My head a fury of thoughts strumming to the drum beat
In my heart as I save the world from within myself
Thinking, wishing that others can see me for me.

And I wanna be free, look forward to it
As I work and work and understand much in my head
But I conceal and mask it with a wall of jade
Flawed from the perfection one sees the cracks are there
It makes the beauty of the diamond and pieces glow from within

Driven and yet I don't know how to drive I dove into the air
A vast ocean of water and space to be free
To resonate with the sound vibrantly bringing colors into the wind
Into my eyes as a movie a dreamscape where endless possibilities are reachable

I can't sleep so many thoughts constantly in motions
Am I a boy or a girl or something
At heart and yet I feel so unpretentiously unpretty
As I try to fall asleep to the tones of a house that became my new drug
To surround me with words and emotions that swirl in the air to get it all wasted
And know that it's all spared by the pins that mark where the fabric needs to fit
In my life

Repeat toughen up the soft feet to be coarse sand
Grated only by the grade of executing the fear dwelling
From the depths of happiness I cry

INSPIRATION

I wrote this poem last fall after not being able to sleep thinking about my identity. There are many masks that I live with from past traumas resulting from the interplay of different aspects of myself as biracial, pansexual, and as a woman. I had this moment when I wrote about what it felt like to be physically, emotionally, and psychologically in pain, knowing that I may live behind these masks alone. I guess you can say that this poem is a culmination of different memories that I was processing at that time. Each line is a different memory with each word representing the moments that I collected from it.
INSPIRATION

At the precipice of revolution and significant social change, feelings of discomfort and resistance often emerge from those who would not benefit from a change in how things currently are. The "way we have always done things" is quickly slipping away; the dawn of a new era is constantly upon us. This work seeks to encourage personal reflection on the inevitability of change, why we resist it, and how often what seems like radical change is not all that radical. Beckoning viewers into the "new" queer world, this piece asks them to reflect on how "new" it truly is.

About the artist:

Matt G. Brush is a fifth semester student at UConn pursuing a double major in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Human Rights. He collages in his free time as a way to relieve stress and clear his mind.
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in this issue....

The Window: I will listen with my elbows on the sill

Feminism/s and Future/s: Social Justice in the Arts and Humanities

Six Months in Storrs

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