Reflecting with Gratitude and Pride
By: Kimmie Garner, WMST Program Assistant

When I arrived at Colgate in August 2011, I couldn’t have even begun to imagine the dynamic, challenging, and inspiring discussions and activism that would take place in and expand beyond the Center for Women’s Studies. I would like to take my final submission to the Newsletter to reflect on the Center’s growth and express immense gratitude for the support I have received that makes the work we do so rich, intersectional, and powerful.

Over the past two years, average attendance at Tuesday Brown Bags has risen from an average of 74 attendees in Fall 2011 to 105 participants in Spring 2013. The Center now offers a feminist film series and hosts a biweekly “In the News” discussion group. Thanks to generous support from University Studies and the passionate, dedicated staff of the Habitat for Humanity Capital District Office in Troy, Meika and I co-led the Center’s first gender-focused alternative spring break experience this semester. Five students of various class years participated in an intensive week of service-learning, visiting Planned Parenthood in Schenectady, serving breakfast at Unity House in Troy, and installing insulation and sheetrock in row houses currently being constructed in Troy.

I would like to thank Meika, Letta, Mary, current and former interns, our campus partners in ALANA, ALST, Athletics, the COVE, the Counseling Center, Dean of the College, EDUC, LGBTQ Initiatives, NCBI, the Network, OUS, Printing Services, Sustainability, the Shaw Wellness Institute, the Upstate Institute, and UNST for providing me with the support to be so innovative and creative in this position. The growth we’ve experienced has been made possible by your steady guidance and you’ve truly allowed me to implement programming that puts feminist theory into practice. Thank you for surrounding me with such a dynamic community to make this an incredible first job!

After working for the Upstate Institute this summer, I will head to Missoula, Montana with my partner to begin my Master’s in Social Work program at the University of Montana. I will carry the spirit of feminist education and community building I have absorbed from phenomenal students, staff, faculty, and community members like you with me there and always!

Director: Meika Loe
Administrative Assistant: Letta Palmer
Interns: Natalie George ’13, Kelsey Gibb ’13, Che Hanter ’13, Christina Liu ’13, Xavia Publius ’13, Katie Rupp ’13, Gloria Kibirungi ’15, Stephanie Rameau ’15

Colgate
Center for Women’s Studies

Spring 2013 Newsletter
From the Director:

As we prepare to graduate fourteen senior concentrators and honor eight Women’s Studies interns, six of whom are seniors, I want to recognize their individual and collective leadership. This semester, our concentrators and interns have been involved in everything from innovative production and direction of feminist theater, to critical discussions of pornography, popular culture, body image, racism, and personal healing, to imagining new mentoring programs and health resources. It is exciting to see our seniors and interns modeling what it means to do feminism.

With such a large graduating class, this year was wonderful timing to host our Feminisms Beyond Colgate Workshop and Celebration. At this weekend event, Dr. Michelle Berger shared her data on women’s studies concentrators across the country, the senior capstone students led a virtual feminist tour of campus, and it was truly inspiring to hear stories from our graduates who are now change agents in education, health care, nonprofits, publishing, and beyond.

I want to send out a hearty thank you to all faculty, staff, students, and community members who participated this semester in our Brown Bag series. Brown Bag lunch talks that broke all-time seating capacity records this semester include our first ever talk on feminist bioethics, wonderful discussions on LGBTQ families and identities, and provocative discussions on popular music, sports, and global feminisms.

Gratitude also goes to Kimmie Garner for two years of excellent programming and leadership. Kimmie’s impact in the Center and on campus has been tremendous. Kimmie will head to Montana in the fall to pursue a graduate degree in social work. We will miss her cheery disposition and go-getter attitude! We wish her the best of luck in the next chapter.

All in all, our program is thriving – with classes and events busting at the seams. We are looking ahead to a busy and exciting fall, as we interview candidates for our globalization position and welcome a new Program Assistant and new (and familiar) student interns. Good news: we are on the list for a needed renovation of the Center to make room for our crowds. By the way, this time we are trying something new with our newsletter; all articles are written by students enrolled in Mary Simonson’s Introduction to Women’s Studies courses.

Thanks, all, for another wonderful semester of feminist community building and academic excellence.

Meika Loe
The Male Pill
By: Hannah Derbyshire ’14
In her Brown Bag on Tuesday, January 29th, Lisa Campo-Engelstein, Ph.D., discussed the reasons for why we need a male pill. She broke her talk up into 3 main points:

1) Women bear the burden of contraception in terms of finance and side effects. They are involved in almost 91% of all contraceptive use. When women choose to use contraception, they must visit a doctor, and most times they must get a prescription, both of which cost money. They also have to deal with so many side effects that cause discomfort and sometimes serious health problems. Men also only have two options—condoms or sterilization—so they are forced to use these, which are not as reliable or permanent. Otherwise, they are forced to trust their partners for contraception.

2) Because of historical shifts in legislation, contraception has fallen into the hands of women. And as Campo-Engelstein explained, this shift of responsibility toward women has created increased technology in the form of numerous contraception options for women and increased funding for women. The lack of education on andrology, the study of the male reproductive system, has also led to less advancement in terms of male contraception. This has created a perceived lack of interest and demand for male contraceptives, which has been proven through multiple studies not to be the case.

3) To create a successful form of contraception for men, multiple changes must be made. Ideology, technology, funding, and contraception and family planning. In order to be successful, there must be a positive change. Legislation and policies furthering and allowing paternal roles will also be beneficial to the success of such products and the idea of a shared responsibility, in general.

I thought that Campo-Engelstein’s talk was fascinating. What really stuck out to me was the idea that ideology shapes technology. Until this Brown Bag topic was discussed, I had never even considered the idea of a male contraceptive. Without realizing it, I had believed that contraception was, without a doubt, my responsibility and my decision. While I like that the power of what choice of contraception lies in my hands, I believe, like Campo-Engelstein, that a lack of reversible and reliable contraceptive options for men is unfair. What if men wanted to share the power of contraception with us, women? Honestly, what could be better! I think that the pressure of using contraceptive methods perfectly can be difficult, and if that pressure is not shared, the responsibility falls to only one person. Not a happy responsibility in my opinion.

I think that the idea of a larger number of male contraceptive options is nothing but a positive. A shared responsibility for contraception is ideal and should be real! So let’s fund, research, and test; let’s create this magic pill for men!

Vagina Monologues
A record setting $2,763 was raised from the Vagina Monologues this year! Proceeds will go to Victims of Violence, Vera House, and the V-Day Campaign.

One Billion Rising
Students perform protest art with a flash mob in conjunction with V-Day and the Vagina Monologues.

Senior Spotlight
Every spring, we spotlight the senior interns at the Center for Women’s Studies as they go out into the world beyond Colgate. This year, we asked them each to respond to the following question: How has feminism and your time at the Center changed you, and how will you take what you’ve learned here with you?

Natalie George: I have truly grown into a Feminist over the years and this was due to the Center allowing me to both discover and reaffirm my identity as not just a woman, but a person. I would have been lost without the guidance and support that I have received since my intro to Women's Studies days (with Meika!). I am beyond grateful for all of the life lessons learned at the Center and FUN times that I have had with everyone. I hope to take all of that positivity and knowledge with me into the workforce and use my Feminist lens to approach every aspect of life!

Kelsey Gibb: As I prepare to graduate and begin reflecting on my time at Colgate, the importance of Women’s Studies and feminism is undeniable. The Center for Women’s Studies and the Women’s Studies Program have become my home away from home at Colgate. This is where I came into my identity as a Feminist. Women's Studies has helped me become the woman I am today and I am excited about bringing my Feminist lens into my life after Colgate.

Che Hatter: In many ways, working at the Center has made me a stronger advocate for the issues that matter to me; being a Feminist liaison to campus departments and organizations has taught me the importance of our perspective on society for many different intersections of identity. The Center will definitely always be my home at Colgate.

Christina Liu: There was a time in my life when my interaction with feminisms was contained within the walls of a classroom and the walls of the Center, but it soon became clear that this was not enough. Feminisms have spilled, they’ve cascaded, they’ve intruded into every relationship, project, conversation, decision that I have had since that intro to WMST FSEM and I am so thankful that the Center has remained a stable home base for me to continually return to. The skills I have learned here have empowered me with a critical lens, an urgent desire for change, and the ability to remain active no matter where I go.

Xavia Publius: When I first came here I not only didn’t identify as a feminist, but I was very, very problematic. My time here has changed my views on life fundamentally and irrevocably. The things I’ve learned and experienced and watched happen will always inflect how I view the world in the future, and has inspired in me a firm desire to make the world a better and safer place for everyone regardless of gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, etc.

Katie Rapp: I’ve identified as a feminist for a few years now (and subconsciously valued feminist ideals my entire life), but through my work at the Center for Women's Studies, I have taken some first steps into translating beliefs into action and making a direct impact on my local community through a Feminist lens. Because of feminism, I have cultivated a deeper sense of self-confidence, ignited a passion for fostering equality and mutuality among genders and seek to create community through empathy and story sharing, a foundation that I know will be powerful as I continue to engage with feminist activism beyond Colgate.
Picture this. You walk into the Jug: the typical dark, loud setting. Music is blasting, people are conversing, dancing; money’s flying all over the bar with commands for drinks being thrown out simultaneously. Now let’s be completely honest with each other here… what are the chances of you witnessing a hook up that night? I’d say the likelihood is pretty significant. And you may ask what I mean by “hook up”; having sex on the dance floor? Well, some people may make it look like this is happening, but the term “hooking up” is extremely vague, and this is something Rebecca Plante, a sociologist from Ithaca College, stressed in her very informal, yet informative lecture at Colgate on Tuesday, February 5th.

“Hooking up” is generally defined as a sexual encounter happening between two brief acquaintances/strangers, usually lasting one night without expectation of developing a relationship. This term is obviously immensely ambiguous and Plante explained that this is intentional, often as a way to avoid judgment by our peers. After simply confessing to your roommates the next morning that you “hooked up” with the captain of the football team, they are then forced to reach their own conclusions on how extensive this encounter was. Some may look at this concept as empowering or degrading, or as neither, as something that is way more complex. Plante performed a study with approximately 12,000 college students, primarily those who were female, white, and heterosexual and asked them a variety of questions pertaining to their own opinions and experiences within the hook up culture on campus. She presented several statistics and data that, for many, came as either surprising or expected. It was interesting to hear her perspective on the matter; one thing she mentioned which happened to catch my attention was the fact that no matter what your definition of a hook up may be, there is always emotion and feeling involved. While some girls may enjoy this type of voluptuous encounter just for fun, many girls are upset by the lack of relationship following a hook up. A lot of times rejection and insecurity may develop if their true expectations did not match the unencumbered expectations of their partner. Even if one wasn’t looking for commitment, there had to have been something that attracted him/her to this particular person in the first place, whether it be their impeccable looks, personality, or the desperation of his/her own personal loneliness.

Plante also asked her audience, what would you constitute as a “wise hook up”? Answers varied from using protection, to knowing the reputation of the “chosen one,” to even being impossible. Evidently, while this concept is now being considered a social norm, it is being interpreted so differently throughout society.

Whether you constitute a hook up as a “hit it and quit it” experience, or a booty call, or whatever your little heart desires, Plante made it clear that there is much discrepancy surrounding its definition (depending on who is talking, where you are and who you are talking to.) She essentially left her speech open-ended; she did not provide the audience with a real conclusion, presumably so we could create our own. Her presentation was exceptionally engaging and funny. She did not emphasize abstinence or preach about the dangers of sex, which many lectures similar to this have done; it made for a very comfortable, welcoming setting.

Whether Plante may agree with this or not, I think that hooking up on college campuses is hardly a phase. This is a new transformation our culture is going to be seeing for a long time.
Meatsuit Realness
By: Ally Latta ’13

On Thursday, February 7th in the Center for Women’s Studies, Xavia Publius discussed her analysis of FOX’s hit show Glee in a Brown Bag about her thesis, entitled “Meatsuit Realness: Vocality, Gender, Sexuality and Cyborgs in Glee.” While many Colgate students were previously familiar with the popular television show, it is likely that few had ever thought about the show in the way that Xavia does. Xavia analyzed Glee from an interesting and unusual perspective: she attempted to highlight the show’s creation of a “queer space” through the manipulation of gender roles and voice-editing software (such as Autotune). Ze argued that Glee toys with the idea of cyborgs (which ze describes as beings that are not fully human because they are inherently too perfect or are somewhat robotic), thereby allowing the show to create a queer space in which characters are able to create non-traditional identities. The presence of “cyborg-like-characters” allows Glee to explore sexuality in a way that often challenges the normative heterosexual stereotypes that exist in society, allowing non-heterosexual or non-gender-normative viewers to connect with the show in interesting ways. Overall, I found this Brown Bag to be quite enlightening and interesting. Xavia clearly did a lot of thorough research on the topic, and her presentation definitely showed this fact. However, as someone who was not previously familiar with many of the terms and concepts that Xavia used in her analysis of Glee, I felt that Xavia’s discussion and analysis was at times over my head. Perhaps if ze had had more time to explain all of hir analytic terms, then the presentation would have been a bit easier to follow for an amateur like myself. That being said, this Brown Bag was eye opening and it definitely challenged traditional conceptions of gender and sexuality in FOX’s hit television series.

The Vagina Monologues
By: Sarah Chandler ’16

By the time audience members left the Colgate University performances of The Vagina Monologues on February 14th-16th, they were much more comfortable with the word vagina. And, ultimately, all the better for it. A celebration of the female experience, the Monologues focused on the various experiences of women as compiled through personal interviews. Each monologue, which was performed by different actors, touched on topics such as love, sex, rape, and orgasm. In turns, joyous (such as the account of a woman finally finding a partner who appreciates her distinct beauty), funny (one monologue is based off of a 6 year old’s opinion of her vagina), angry (the monologue is about a woman the fates of Bosnian women in rape camps), and empowering (one scene was about the miracle of watching a baby be born), the Monologues sought to capture the essence of what it means to be a woman in today’s world. Staged in the Palace Theater against a backdrop of twinkling lights in the shape of a clitoris, beautiful tissue-paper vagina flowers, and filled to bursting with all different members of the Colgate community, the performance was an attempt to give voice to a generation of women coping with their womanhood and sexuality. It succeeded. But more than that, it brought the entire audience together. Only during the best of performances can the differences of an audience—including age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual preference—melt away. It is during these occasions that such different people can come together and laugh and empathize and relate to what is being discussed. After the show, everyone in the audience seemed to leave the theater feeling a little more aware, a little more empowered, a little happier to be a woman, to love a woman, to have a vagina, or to know someone who does.
Why do you identify as a feminist?
I have not always historically identified as a feminist, but since coming to the United States, issues of feminism have become more salient. There are so many rights in the U.S. that women haven’t yet gained so I think I’ve become more politicized since coming to the U.S. But I do identify as a feminist because I believe in the bundle of social justice rights that all gender expressions, all races, all creeds are equal. I really dislike the system in the United States and I find the sharp divisions in society so remarkable.

What is the focus of your research?
My research has a clear gender dimension because I work with refugee girls from Somalia, the Congo, Ethiopia, and in Nairobi, Kenya. The girls I work with are between fourteen and nineteen years of age and they are all fleeing from different forms of violence. The girls from Congo, for example, are fleeing open physical conflict, forced marriage, and endemic rape, amongst other things. In Somalia, they are fleeing because of latent violence because Somalia has been in open war for about twenty years. In Ethiopia, they are fleeing either religious persecution or cultural traditions like forced marriage. In my work with these girls, I am looking at ways in which they reconstitute their livelihoods and how they care for themselves living in the conditions which they do. I’m trying to understand their problem solving and the alliances and enemies that they have to figure out their agency. This work is part of a broader project that I ultimately hope to bring to Upstate New York because there are many refugee communities from Africa in Syracuse and in Utica. I’m just beginning to do that work now, but in the past, my work has focused on socioeconomic inequalities in Rwanda and the way in which peasants fight back or resist the genocide reconstruction policies of the government.

How do you incorporate a feminist lens and the concept of intersecting identities into your classroom?
Incorporating a feminist lens is part of the bundle of activism that I have. I incorporate a feminist lens in highlighting difference and bringing in work that I disagree with a lot and by trying to draw students out into conversation. I try to promote active listening. I run my courses in an elliptical sense, so they are sort of overlapping on each other all the time. I really like for students to take risks and express themselves. Finding voice is part of a feminist approach and I work to create that rapport with students with what I would call rigorous humor. I build a dynamic in the classroom where all opinions are valuable. In being a feminist, you start where the students are and not where you want them to be and I think that is important to do this. There is a lot of diversity of opinion in my classroom and we encourage that in PCON. I think that plurality of ideas is really central and is a feminist approach.

Can you tell us a little about the course you will teach next semester: “Gender in Peace and Conflict”?
Gender in Peace and Conflict is a theory course that is cross-listed with WMST. It is an interdisciplinary course that covers the ranges of ways in which women are active, either as combatants or perpetrators in conflict, the ways they are supposedly victimized, and the ways that women take the lead to resist and practice nonviolence and promote peace. It starts with the traditional PCON “the world is on fire” business and then it ends with some optimistic ways in which we can feed into these social movements that women are so good at producing, reinforcing, bringing to light. I will teach from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, political science, and history, as well as a novel on the civil war in Lebanon.

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