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## Campolindo Launches First Annual Women's Symposium

By Zoe Portnoff



Campolindo Women's Symposium participants show their enthusiasm at the April 11 event. Photo Kelly Pein

At Campolindo High School's First Annual Women's Symposium, students, teachers and guest speakers discussed the complex issues facing women today, both locally and globally. Planned by teachers, students and community members, the vision of the day was "to provide an opportunity for young women at Campo a chance to celebrate their identity as women." Topics ranged from a group discussion about the role of the media in the 21st century to a lecture about the power of the self-narrative.

Speakers at this event included Rainie Pearce, an instructional assistant at Campolindo and a marathon swimmer who once swam the English Channel, and Maura Wolf, professor and head of the Saint Mary's College Women's Leadership Initiative. In addition to teaching at SMC, Wolf is the author of three books, including her most recent title, "What Matters Most: Everyday Leadership at Home, at Work, and in the World."

Wolf began the program by saying, "I believe one of the main problems women face is a lack of support from each other and from other people." Wolf led an activity in which she asked students to think about how they envisioned themselves on a deeper level. She asked them to think of stories about themselves that they believed defined them or demonstrated their character.

"If my activity goes well, people get very quiet. It's not a cheery activity. ... They're moved into a quieter, contemplative space," explained Wolf. Students and teachers attending the event found Wolf's activity thought-provoking and inspiring. "I thought that Mrs. Wolf's exercise was very powerful, and it will definitely stick with me," noted Campolindo junior Ava Tajbakhsh. Other activities included a video showing the effects of Photoshop and airbrushing techniques commonly used today to create unrealistic body images as well as a "Power Pose" exercise led by Campolindo senior Sharon Maher.

Students had many opportunities to voice their opinions about the problems women face today. Tara Gottfried, a senior at Campolindo, stated, "It's simply inequality. People assumed that once women got the vote, we were equal to men, but it's so much more than that, which people don't realize. It's systematic inequality and it's social inequality, like the fact that even though people try to disprove it, women are still paid less than men, and even more so, women of color."

Sharon Maher, a Campolindo senior and one of the student leaders of the symposium, added, "Really, what ends up happening is that we are expected to do different things. I do think there are certain skill sets that may come with each gender, but expecting someone to follow that to the letter because of their biological gender is something that only holds us back as a society and as a species."

Although in the Western World, especially in the United States, both men and women have many opportunities open to them, yet there is no question that gender discrimination still exists in our society today. "There's the statistic that women make 70 cents for every dollar that a man makes, but that's at an even greater disparity amongst lower socio-economic and minority women, so their challenge is just to get by. There are different tiers of challenges that exist. In the global world, there are women who have zero rights, and no access to education," said Molly Kerr, a Campolindo teacher and one of the main organizers of the event. "Underlying it all is a sense of self-

confidence, and the idea that you can 'Be and Achieve.' That takes place in terms of the relationships you have, how you perceive yourself in the world, and what you feel you are capable of. Along these lines is looking for mentorship and relationships to help reach that (goal), whether that's on a personal level or as part of a group or a professional organization."

Originally envisioned by Campolindo teacher Lindsay Webb-Peploe, the Women's Symposium enjoyed a broad base of support from Moraga's school board and Campolindo teachers, students and even alumni such as Chrissy Brady-Smith. All female juniors and seniors received invitations to the event, and RVSP forms were also available online to everyone. Although this event was mainly planned by Campolindo teachers and administrators, student leaders such as Regan Gong, Kelly Williams, Sharon Maher and Emily Fong also played an important role.

Future symposiums will ideally be led by students, giving students the opportunity to gain leadership experience.

"We are hoping this day will generate a group of young women leaders going forward at Campo not just to plan the next symposium, but to be empowered and take action on either global or domestic issues in regards to women," said Kerr.

Campolindo staff and students plan to host a second symposium next year and hope to inspire young women to take action both at school and beyond.

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[back](#)

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