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The Guardian: Second Annual Women in Leadership Conference Held at UCSD



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May 29, 2019 (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/the-guardian-second-annual-women-in-leadership-conference-held-at-ucsd/>)

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By Natalie Tran
The Guardian, UC San Diego, May 28, 2019

The second annual Women in Leadership event was hosted by Sally Ride Science @ UC San Diego was held in Price Center West on May 22, featuring a panel discussion with CEO of Girl Scouts of the USA Sylvia Acevedo, best-selling author and former first daughter Chelsea Clinton, and astrophysicist Jedidah Isler. The three women engaged in a conversation about how to empower girls and women to become future leaders.

Those unable to get a free ticket to the sold-out event had the opportunity to meet the panelists at a book signing at the UCSD Bookstore preceding the event. Likewise, an online livestream of the event was also made available, and free T-shirts with artwork of the United States Postal Service's Forever stamp of Sally Ride were given out.

The event began with introductions from Chancellor Pradeep Khosla, Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Elizabeth Simmons, Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Becky Petitt, co-founder and Executive Director of Sally Ride Science @ UC San Diego and lifelong partner of Sally Ride Tam O'Shaughnessy, and award-winning journalist and moderator Lynn Sherr.

The presenters spoke about their dedication to increasing diversity in science, technology, engineering, and math as well as leadership roles, touching upon topics such as marginalization, representation, and acknowledging current barriers and challenges. O'Shaughnessy and Sherr shared their personal experiences with Sally Ride, highlighting Ride's humor, wit, and work through Sally Ride Science in bridging students to STEM education and careers.

The conversation began with the open-ended question of, "Are we approaching equality? Are we at equality?"

Isler responded by acknowledging women's progress toward equality, but stated, "We are not all getting there at the same time," breaking down the wage gap among women of different ethnicities. In a later question about intersectionality, she cited the systems of oppression in place that made it "nearly impossible to disentangle the effect that I have on the world" as a black person and a woman.

"Separating the two does violence to my identity," Isler said.

Then when asked, "Do you think we're more aware of [intersectionality] today than we have been in the past?" Isler gained a round of applause when she responded without missing a beat, "Who is 'we?'"

The three women also shared the personal obstacles they witnessed as women in leadership positions. For example, Acevedo referenced a scene from the 2016 film, "Hidden Figures," in which the main character, a black woman working at NASA, had to use a bathroom in a separate building due to her race.

Acevedo remarked, "They at least had a bathroom. You see, my first job as a test engineer, they didn't even have a bathroom for me." She noted that she had to bike for weeks until they installed a portable bathroom for her.

Personal stories like this were told humorously by the panelists but reaffirmed the many obstacles they faced in becoming leaders in their fields. Acevedo described the importance of making a difference when gaining a position of power. As CEO of the Girl Scouts, she increased the salaries of almost all of her female employees in order to match that of their male counterparts.

"One woman went from \$35,000 to \$105,000," she said, prompting a collective gasp from the audience.

On the other hand, Lynn Sherr read aloud some "nasty" tweets toward Chelsea Clinton as well as Clinton's response to them. Clinton offered some explanation for her witty yet civil replies.

"I believe that those of us with platforms have a responsibility to use them," Clinton said. "Partly to try to show — particularly girls and young women — there are other ways than ignoring the trolls that can hopefully be productive and positive and generative because we know that disproportionate amounts of online abuse targets are girls and young women."

Clinton continued by explaining the concept of "radical kindness," something that she finds important to uphold in this era of increased polarization.

"Radical kindness is a possibility," Clinton said. "We don't have to be demeaned by the demeaning language that other people use towards us. We don't have to ignore it if that doesn't feel right or comfortable. We can respond with something that is hopefully authentic to who we are and brimming hopefully with kindness but also is not stepping back."

The conversation also addressed current issues, such as the Alabama abortion ban, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and child marriage. The panelists stressed the importance of educating young people on issues of gender and justice but also agreed it was never too early or too late to do so. Grown adults are always in the process of learning. This sentiment was echoed in questions to do with men and "anti-feminist" women, which inspired thought-provoking answers.

One question, in particular, asked, "Why do you think all women are not in support of all women?"

"Proximity to power," Isler explained. "The closer you are to power, the more likely you will not want to see it change."

During a discussion about gender dynamics in families, Sherr commented, "We used to say in the '70s that the best feminists were the men with daughters."

“But you shouldn’t have to have a daughter,” Clinton argued. “I mean, it kills me every time someone says, ‘Well, as the father of a girl ...’ No, it should just be ‘as a decent human being.’”

The last part of the event included selected questions from the audience, such as “Looking back, what advice would you give your 20-year-old self?” and “What is one thing we all can do to increase equity for women?” to which the panelists gave personal, funny, and touching responses.

In response to these advice-oriented questions, they encouraged the inclusion of trans women and nonbinary individuals in representation, the importance of showing children powerful women, and recognizing that we live in a system of different privileges, among other suggestions.

Women in Leadership concluded with Lynn Sherr’s summary of the conversation using quotes from the panelists. “Some good takeaways for all of us: radical kindness. You’re okay. Do more. Be human. And certainly, become a Girl Scout.”

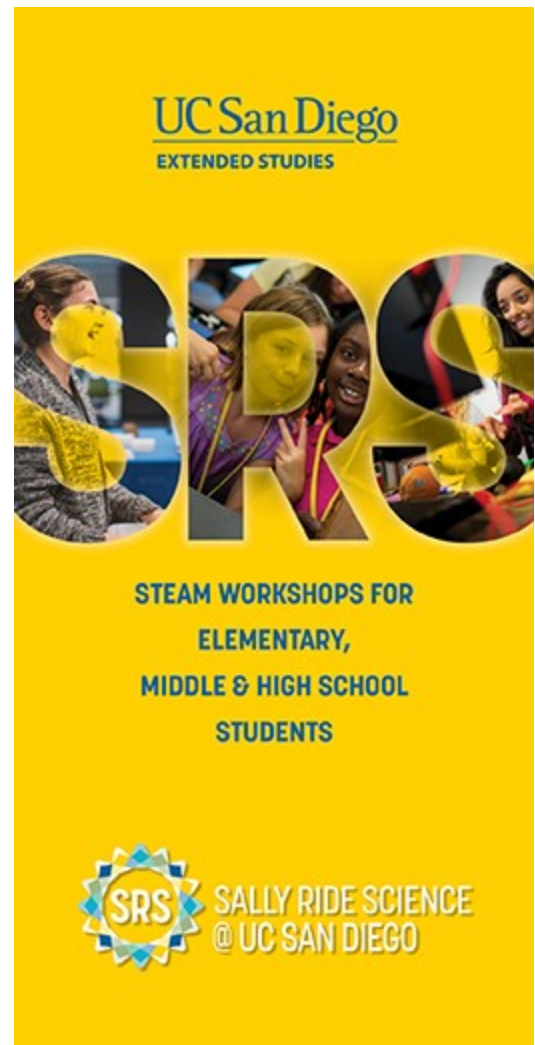
A recording of the event can be viewed at [sallyridesience.ucsd.edu \(https://sallyridesience.ucsd.edu/women-in-leadership?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=precol-sally-ride-science&utm_content=mk-wil\)](https://sallyridesience.ucsd.edu/women-in-leadership?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=precol-sally-ride-science&utm_content=mk-wil).

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