

"Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time."
— Ruth Bader Ginsburg

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COVID-19's Toll on Women in Healthcare

The COVID-19 pandemic has strained women in the medical field physically, mentally and emotionally. According to the World Health Organization, the healthcare work-force consists of about 60-80% women and more than one-third of active physicians worldwide. Women outnumber men in the field three to one according to Trish Joyce, of Health eCareers. Women often face specific challenges during their jobs that have worsened during the pandemic.

Stereotypes of women and gender inequalities have now been exacerbated by the pandemic. MS Magazine recently published that women spend an average of 8.5 additional hours per week on domestic activities than men. "These women also have a responsibility to take care of parents, who are older, and school-aged children. So, their lives are enormously impacted by worrying about elderly relatives and by school closures," stated Nancy Nielsen, senior associate dean for health policy at the University at Buffalo. Today, women in the medical field are expected to do their jobs with additional rigorous tasks in a frightening work environment, and then go home to aid their families and watch over their children.

Women in the healthcare profession work in a harsher environment and are at higher risk of COVID-19 than women in other professions. Dr. Celine Gounder, an infectious disease specialist and epidemiologist, points out that, "Nurses' levels of exposure are 'higher than doctors', because they're much more involved in intimate care of patients. They're the ones drawing blood, they're the ones collecting specimens." These tasks often fall to women

who make up the majority of nurses. These burdens are compounded by the sheer number of patients. A nurse told The New York Times, "Our hospital is taking on way



more patients than we can handle." Another nurse in California wrote to the Times saying, "We are being called to jeopardize our own health and safety to treat our community. It is disgusting. I wish more attention would be given to us on the front lines and the situation we face. We live in the richest country in the world and yet we don't have the tools to perform our job safely. This virus is terrifying."

Furthermore, women in healthcare have a much higher risk of contracting COVID-19 because the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) tends to fit women's bodies poorly. According to MS Magazine, women have greater rates of fit-testing failure, and many establishments have ceased the test-fitting of the N95 masks, increasing women's risk of exposure to COVID-19. Most workers do not even receive PPE. Some are given masks that are cleaned and reused for several days. These cleaning procedures do not seem to follow the CDC guidelines, according to

the Times. The Times also stated that professionals have been told to cover their mouths with bandanas or coffee filters. Healthcare workers, the majority of whom are women, "are gambling their lives every day," says The Washington Post, and hundreds have already died fighting to save others from COVID-19.

"We get such a pushback that sometimes you don't feel like it's worth saying anything, because nobody listens and nobody cares," said Charlene Carter, a night-shift nurse at Research Medical Center. "You want to stand up for what you know is right, but you know you're going to get reprimanded somehow." These women are physically exhausted from overworking, mentally tired from having to live up to stereotypical standards, and emotionally drained from what they experience every day. "We've had the unfortunate circumstance during this pandemic that a female physician committed suicide...[physicians are] the number one occupation for suicide," said Dr. Niva Lubin-Johnson, CEO of Purple Health Foundation. The pandemic has increased severe symptoms of depression, anxiety and psychological distress in women healthcare workers, according to the American Medical Association. These repercussions should not be taken lightly. These women have been profoundly affected by COVID-19 in all aspects of their work, which has taken a great toll on how they live. Women in the medical field have been mistreated physically, mentally and emotionally, thus having experienced an excessive amount of distress, which has obstructed their lives.

—Lilly Davis

This edition of Attune is a special one for me because it is the first newsletter produced during my time serving as the director of the Women's Center. It has been a pleasure and an honor to collaborate with the students who wrote and edited this newsletter. Everyone worked diligently to produce this issue during the strange circumstances created by the pandemic. And in doing so, these writers exemplified the resilience and critical thinking that they praise in their articles.

Collectively, these articles ask us to consider the way large, complex social

Letter from the Director

problems affect the lives of regular people and especially those who identify as women and gender minorities. They demonstrate how the problems of our current moment impact groups with more or less privilege differently, and they point to some practical ways to start addressing these large issues as we go about our daily lives. We cover everything from COVID-19, systemic sexual violence and sexism, the racist roots of the BMI and diet culture, the importance of naming and pronouns, to leading public figures like Tennessee's own Dolly Parton.

These articles reflect our lead quote from feminist icon Ruth Bader Ginsburg: "enduring change happens one step at a time." Ginsburg has galvanized our work here at the Women's Center for some time, and we deeply felt her loss. Rachel Pearson discussed *RBG*, a documentary about her life, during the first post for our new monthly Instagram series, First Fridays Resource Feature. We've added a tribute to her at the end of this issue. May her grit, persistence and enduring fight for equality for women and marginalized groups continue to inspire us.

—Helen Hunt, Ph.D.

The "S" in STEM Stands for Sexism

The first day of class is usually exciting. Most students experience the pressure of finding the right classroom or making it to class on time. One Tech student, however, had the added pressure of knowing her professor did not want her in his class. It was not because he believed her to be a troublesome student, but because she was a woman. This professor had previously said aloud that women shouldn't be engineers. While this one incident does not mean that Tech as an institution discriminates against women in STEM, it does point to a larger problem that many women experience. Unfortunately, while discriminatory behavior in STEM fields may seem to be an issue of the past, it is still a major problem.

An important part of this issue is the underrepresentation of women in STEM programs. According to researchers Casey Shapiro and Linda J. Sax, women's growing presence in higher education is not reflected in STEM fields. According to Shapiro and Sax, the underrepresentation of women in STEM creates economic consequences for women in the U.S., both on an individual and national level as it lessens women's financial independence and hinders their ability to compete in science and engi-

neering internationally. It also robs the nation of the collective intelligence of women who could be contributing to science and technology.

According to Shapiro and Sax, women are discouraged from entering STEM-related careers and are instead encouraged to enter a more traditional women's role in society. Teachers, parents and peers play a big role in how young people make future career decisions. Missing this encouragement from important people likely contributes to the lack of women who chose to enter STEM fields.

Another reason for the lack of women in STEM fields is the alienation women face in the learning environment itself. One student at Tech shared her experience of alienation in class: *I was sitting in class one day, complaining about how difficult an exam was, and one of my male classmates looked at me and said, "Why don't you just change majors? It's only going to get harder from here." Every single time I think about how hard being in STEM is and want to quit, I tell myself that I have to prove him, and every other male who thinks I can't do it, wrong.*

A 2005 study conducted by the American Psychological Association found that more masculine environments with mascu-

line objects made women feel alienated.

According to a 2009 article published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, society has communicated with many women that "they should dream in code, watch Star Trek, and read science fiction" to be in STEM.



These harmful stereotypes steer women away from STEM careers.

Including women in STEM is not limited to eliminating stereotypes and changing work and school environments. This is a societal issue, meaning that finding one clear solution to the problem is not possible.

In order for change to happen, young girls need to be raised in a way to see STEM as a viable career path. Tech students can help women STEM majors by creating a support system in which they feel comfortable. Some programs like this already exist, such as the Women and Minorities in Computing Endowed Scholarship for Computer Science and the Engineering

A Future Summer Camp, which encourages young girls in the seventh grade and eighth grade to pursue engineering. These programs are just what's needed for women to find success in STEM. When the same student was asked what changes could be made to benefit women in STEM at Tech, she said: *I personally find it ridiculous that certain clubs directed towards women in STEM have been opened up to men. I think that women in STEM should get to have a break and actually be able to open up with each other in a safe space instead of having one more place where we have to watch out for ourselves.*

Allowing women in STEM to have their own club would provide them with a safe space to talk and feel the connection and camaraderie that men in STEM often take for granted. Students can talk to administration collectively and ask for it, as students have power in numbers. Another way that students can help women in STEM is to speak up when they see discrimination.

By raising awareness about the issues and working together as allies, people can begin to make a shift at Tech and in society to change the future for women in STEM.

—Hannah Webster

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more and more apparent that some people refuse to follow rules. A simple trip to the store will reveal many people ignoring “masks required” signs or “one way” aisle markings. Everyone breaks a rule now and then, but some people may be more likely to break rules than others. According to psychological research, individuals who are more entitled and have a narcissistic outlook about life are more likely to break rules and not follow instructions.

In a joint 2019 study conducted by researchers Emily Zitek and Alexander Jordan from Cornell and Harvard Medical School, participants’ entitlement was examined in relation to following or breaking rules. The study found that entitled individuals were more likely to disregard rules and instructions. These individuals will also ignore

Breaking Rules

instructions no matter how small of an inconvenience following rules may be. Surprisingly, entitled people were less likely to follow rules and instructions even when faced with punishment. Finally, the study found that entitled people are more likely to think instructions are unfair, leading them to ignore those “unfair” instructions.

Zitek and Jordan state, “It seems that entitled individuals would rather incur a personal cost than agree to something unfair.” Zitek and Jordan’s study suggests that the relationship between entitlement and rule breaking is most likely due to the individual’s perception of unfair imposition. Overall, entitled people are more likely to break rules because they have a narcissistic outlook about the way the world works.

During the pandemic, rule

breaking has the potential to put not only one’s own life at risk, but also the lives of others. The study’s findings suggest that people who refuse to wear masks and social distance are likely those who have a higher sense of entitlement. Unfortunately, this research indicates that not much can be done to change the mind of an entitled person about rule breaking. Zitek and Jordan propose that making rules seem fairer may help to encourage entitled people to follow rules, but entitled people still see simple rules that most people abide by every day as unfair.

Zitek and Jordan’s study also mentions that entitled people strongly dislike being controlled. Confronting someone who is not following mask rules will probably not convince them to wear a mask since entitled people do not like being told what to do.

Though some people are going to continue breaking rules, there are some solutions. Psychology faculty from Indiana University offered advice on dealing with people who are not following rules. If approaching a stranger about not wearing a mask, your action will depend on the circumstances. Some strangers might have simply forgotten to grab a mask out of their bag and will comply with your suggestion, while others who are purposefully demonstrating non-compliance might try to “make a stand” and start a conflict with you. If you are going to confront someone, one faculty member recommends always doing so politely. Though you may be frustrated and angry to see someone breaking COVID-19 safety rules, the best thing you can do is keep calm and controlled, and do your best to keep yourself safe.

—Rachel Pearson

BMI Doesn’t Hit the Mark

If someone asked you what the Body Mass Index (BMI) measures, would you be able to answer them? If you said BMI measures obesity and overall health, you would be wrong. Adolphe Quetelet invented the index for purely statistical purposes in the mid-19th century. His primary focus was on the “average man,” according to Sylvia Karasu, M.D. for Psychology Today. “He had no particular interest in the study of obesity,” and rather than studying medicine, he was a student of mathematics. The statistics he gathered on this “average man” came from the measurements of “typical weights among French and Scottish conscripts,” according to Erna Kubergovic from the Eugenics Archive. In the 1800s, a majority of the population in France and Scotland were white. One of the most fatal flaws of effective sampling occurs when samples are taken only from particular populations; this flaw discredits Quetelet’s research.

In “Fearing the Black Body,” Sabrina Strings notes that BMI transformed from a statistical observation to a standardized measurement when Metropolitan Life Insurance Company used “data culled from the company’s policy holders between 1911 and 1935” to make a new table that included “body frame” in addition to height and weight. No

one is sure how “body frame” was measured for the data, but medical historians today consider “the ap-

proach ‘pure fiction,’ as body frame was not measured by the insurance companies themselves,” according to Strings’ research. Additionally, life insurance was only attainable by those who were affluent and legally capable of making such an investment. Historically, those who fit these criteria tended to be white men.

In addition to the flaws in past statistical methods, modern research dismantles the idea that BMI and its weight categories are accurate and medically significant. According to Christy Harrison in “Anti-Diet,” socioeconomic status affects average weight, which likely explains why obesity was first prevalent in the “rural and poor” states of the U.S., such as Mississippi, Alabama and West Virginia. Linda Bacon, author of “Health at Every Size,” also explains that only “severe obesity” correlates with a shorter life span. Meanwhile, being “overweight” correlates with a longer life span than those in the “normal” BMI range, and the effects of obesity on mortality predictions are low overall. Most importantly, all of these relationships are correlations, meaning there is no defined cause and effect pattern between

weight and mortality. The CDC recently determined “that obesity and overweight were only associated with an excess of

26,000 annual deaths, far fewer than guns, alcohol, or car crashes.” This evidence indicates that weight is insignificant in determining health and mortality risk.

From its problematic inception by Quetelet through its journey into medicine, the BMI’s roots in racism, sexism and classism is enough evidence to declare its defectiveness. Even ignoring the glaringly apparent

inaccuracies during its development, BMI has no meaningful use in regards to predicting health outcomes according to recent research showing weak correlation and no proof of causation. So next time your doctor comments on your BMI, remember that number tells you nothing about your health or your risk of mortality. Instead, it reflects our culture’s roots in exclusion and inequality, providing a baseline showing how much further we have to go in liberating everyone from diet culture, regardless of shape or size.

—Amber Lovell



Scales, Arpeggios & Sexual Violence

In the summer of 2018, Drum Corps International was shaken to its core. Tricia Nadolny, a journalist of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, published a story accusing the director of the Allentown Cadets, George Hopkins, of sexually assaulting several women throughout his career. This story spurred various other accusations against Hopkins and member mistreatment in other corps. Sadly, sexual violence in drum corps is not just isolated to these incidences, and DCI needs to do more to protect and support their members.

DCI governs all U.S. and various international drum corps. Drum corps are exclusive, high-performing, independent organizations consisting of brass, percussion and color guard members. Though similar to marching bands, these organizations are the epitome of the sport. From November to May, corps hold audition and training camps to develop their show. Beginning in May students sleep in school gyms with their fellow members, practice up to 14 hours a day, and perform around the U.S. until the high-

stakes finals in August.

Unfortunately, DCI's oversight of corps has failed. According to Nadolny, an investigation by the *Inquirer* revealed that DCI did not require corps to run criminal background checks on any staff application. Dan Acheson, executive director and CEO of DCI, said there was an understanding that corps would do "what they're supposed to be doing to manage themselves accordingly," but corps did not.

For example, Pioneer Drum and Bugle Corps knowingly hired a registered sex offender as an instructor. The same investigation found that "nearly half of the 24 World Class corps employed at least one former teacher previously disciplined for misconduct with a student."

DCI is not the only organization in which this type of abuse occurs; sexual violence is a systemic problem found in many large organizations. The imbalance of power innate in corps' hierarchical structure makes DCI especially vulnerable to this kind of problem. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, having power over someone can influence how comfortable they feel saying no, especially to sex. The



young age of members (16-22) also exacerbates the likelihood of coercion.

George Hopkins isn't the only predator employed by a drum corps. Nadolny also reported that percussionist and instructor Mike Stevens groomed Melody Romo when she was just 15 and the two eventually engaged in a sexual relationship. Five other women have approached the *Inquirer*, accusing Stevens of inappropriate behavior. Stevens and Hopkins are just the start. Several men with sexual violence in their pasts have been employed by various corps or by DCI.

By knowingly hiring perpetrators, the corps and DCI show survivors the organizations do not believe their stories or don't care. DCI critic Stuart Evan Rice claims that he warned DCI and Acheson to Hopkins' behavior 15 years before the accusations came out. Accusers of Hopkins, Stevens and other perpetrators have cited that they tried to tell various leaders in their respective corps, but they were ignored, according to Nadolny. One of the most important ways to support a survivor of sexual violence is to believe them, and then take action to protect them. In both these areas DCI has a long way to go. Drum corps members work too hard during the season to also be worried about their safety, especially from those who should be caring for them.

—Amy Bosley

That's My Name. Wear it Out

A chosen name is a name that is different from someone's legal name. Using someone's chosen name shows respect to their chosen identity. "Any person's name is emotionally loaded to that person and has the power to pull him or her into whatever is going on. By putting that person at the center of attention, naming takes only a moment from you—but for them, it is deeply affecting, and lasts," says Dr. Daniel Chambliss, professor of sociology at Hamilton College.

When someone chooses to go by a different name, it is not an easy decision. It takes time and requires precious thought. Choosing to refer to someone by their chosen name is a quick way to make them feel valued and appreciated.

In some cases, a chosen name is more than just a name prefer-

ence—it's a fresh start. Some people change their name to simplify their legal name. Others choose to change their name because of newly found spiritual beliefs.

Perhaps most importantly, chosen names are crucial to those with transgender identities because they create coherence and safety. "Having a name that is incongruent from your gender identity and gender presentation is also a way that many trans people are outed as trans which exposes them for transphobic violence and harassment," trans woman Jae Alexis Lee writes.

Chosen pronouns are just as important. Devon Price, a social psychologist (they/them), has a few suggestions for how to navigate pronouns. Before asking, consider Price's list of preconditions. Make sure that "You're an ally to trans [or non-binary] people, you're in a space that is safe and accepting of trans and you

know how to treat trans people respectfully." Establishing your own pronouns when introducing yourself may help others feel comfortable sharing theirs. Ultimately, respect is key, whether or not someone chooses to share their pronouns.

Ignoring someone's chosen name or pronouns called deadnaming or misgendering them. Deadnaming is addressing someone using a name with which they no longer identify. Laverne Cox, a trans woman activist, shared an example of the harmful effects of misgendering in an interview with *The Washington Post*. Cox explained that she contemplated suicide because of the "psychological and emotional injuries she went through every day as a black trans woman living in New York." She would leave notes so that people would know not to mis-

gender her after death. Clearly the burden of combating misgendering and deadnaming is something no one should have to face, especially to the point of suicidal ideation.

To avoid this at Tech, chosen name policies must be pursued. These policies may help students be more comfortable on campus, in residence halls, and in their social lives. Furthermore, a more inclusive campus would be more appealing to many prospective students. Lastly, students are more likely to be mentally healthier, and therefore they can function at their fullest potential. By enacting this policy, Tech would show its support of all students and will benefit a community that otherwise may go unrecognized or ignored.

—Natajha Johnson & Bria Turner

Greek life creates opportunities for friendships, helps with the college transition and allows for networking to help in future jobs. The first Greek life organizations were much more academically inclined than the Greek life we see today. In the U.S., the first fraternity was formed in 1825 and the first sorority was formed in 1851. As of this year, there are 60 fraternities and 30 sororities spread nationally throughout the U.S. Sororities make up one third of Greek life, and, upon observation, seem to be held to a higher standard than fraternities.

Gender inequality is a familiar topic in Greek life, both nationally and here at Tennessee Tech. Policies that govern Greek life promote gender inequality and allow fraternity brothers to have more freedom than sorority sisters. Fraternities have fewer rules and regulations in their handbooks than sororities, inadvertently giving them more freedom. Tech has 11 fraternities and six sororities, with three councils in charge

Higher Standards

of making sure the chapters comply with the guidelines set by national and Tech handbooks.

Both fraternities and sororities have handbooks for Greek life recruitment policies; the Interfraternity Council's (IFC) handbook is five pages while the Panhellenic Sorority Council's (PCS) handbook is 14 pages long. The recruitment policy handbook is a how-to guide to recruiting new members. The IFC handbook includes the following rules: no alcohol at parties during recruitment week, must not misrepresent the house and must not promote alcohol.

The PCS handbook dives more into the social status, fines and interaction between sorority members. The sorority handbook includes the no alcohol rule, but also states, "No alcoholic beverages may be served at any sorority event or during formal recruitment, including Bid Day." Fraternities can have alcohol at regular events throughout the semester, but sororities cannot. Another rule

exclusively in the PCS handbook states that recruitment counselors must set their social media accounts to private and are not allowed to be present at bars 30 days prior to their sorority's final day. This rule regulates the social aspect of sororities in attempts to keep up a proper image.

There are also three fines spelled out in the PCS handbook that are not included in the IFC handbook. One of the fines is promising a bid, or an invite to the sorority, to a prospective member. Under this rule, something as simple as saying, "see you tomorrow" to a prospective member could cost the sorority \$200. There is also a fine for a woman touching the ground due to a tackle at a Bid Reveal event, where prospective members run into a crowd of current members of the sorority they are accepted into, which usually results in members hugging each other. If a woman hits the ground during the run, the sorority is fined \$250. The final fine relates to a bio card, which is a grade release form for Greek life. If a sorority member turns in a bio card that is not properly registered, each potential new member is fined \$50. There is no fine mentioned in the handbook

for fraternities per-taining the same card. These are identical forms that are turned in to the same office, but sororities have a defined fine in the handbook, while fraternities do not.

These are just a few examples of rules that sororities and fraternities have to follow during recruitment week alone. These rules hold sororities to a higher standard, and pose potential fines for sororities that do not exist for fraternities. The policies focus more on the social aspect of sororities, like having to set social media accounts to private and not allowing counselors to show up at bars. These rules also give more freedom to the fraternities because they have fewer rules to risk breaking. These rules demonstrate the inequality between fraternities and sororities, as they are held to unbalanced standards and regulated by different rules, which continues the gender inequality foundational to Greek Life.

— Shelby Campbell

A Tennessee Treasure

Dolly Parton might have rocketed to fame through her songs, big hair and sequins, but she has used her success to help others who are less fortunate than her. She uses her music to promote important messages. For example, her recent release "When Life is Good Again" speaks of life after COVID-19 and her song "19th Amendment" gives a history of women earning the right to vote. Dolly created the Imagination Library for kids who are unable to afford books to read, and the Buddy System, which is a program that helps motivate high school students to graduate.

Dolly is also known for not getting involved in politics; however, she has recently broken this historic silence by taking a stand with the Black Lives Matter movement. Dolly's viewpoint is that all lives don't matter until black lives matter. In an interview with *Billboard*, Dolly said "Of course Black lives matter.

Do we think our little white asses are the only ones that matter? No!" This is very important coming from a popular country artist from East Tennessee. Many people in rural, predominantly white Tennessee towns embrace "All Lives Matter." This

popular mindset often shuts down different perspectives quickly, which can make it difficult for people in the area to support Black Lives Matter. Dolly Parton speaking out against this mindset has the potential to help people, especially young adults who disagree with the mindset they grew up around, feel more confident dissenting from the "All Lives Matter" movement.

Dolly Parton has proven that she believes the perspectives of Black Americans in our community matter. For example, she has renamed her popular Dollywood dinner



attraction "The Stampede" after learning some people view the word "Dixie" as offensive. Concerning this change, she told *Billboard*, "We'll just call it The Stampede, as soon as you realize that [something] is a problem, you should fix it. Don't be a dumbass. That's where my heart is." Dolly Parton's validation of the viewpoints of Black Americans serves as inspiration to change for us

here in Tennessee and the larger south. She has, once again, shown how to make the world a safer place.

Overall, Dolly Parton has always wanted to make changes for the greater good. She has dedicated her time and resources she has gained from fame through the years towards making the world a better place. Dolly Parton spreads hope and equality wherever she can, and that is exactly what we need in the current political climate.

— Madeline Boyanton

First Annual Commission on the Status of Women Award Winners

Women's Center staffer Amy Bosley won the Alison Piepmeier Outstanding Student Award. The award celebrates Piepmeier's legacy of fierce feminism by recognizing a Tech student whose research, activism and outreach advances gender equity.

Yvette Clark won the CSW Excellence Award. The award is presented to a Tech employee who has contributed to gender equity. It honors three qualities that characterize women's leadership at Tech: perseverance, generosity and mentorship.



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and follow us on Instagram **@tntechwomenscenter**

Coming Spring 2021

Book Club: Attend this term's inaugural meeting of our student book club in February. This is your chance to meet other readers and discuss books and issues of interest.

One Billion Rising: In February, Tennessee Tech community members will join with, come together, rise up and stand against sexual assault and violence against women.

Beverly Gooden: Beverly Gooden is a victims' rights advocate as well as the author and creator of #WhyIStayed. She is a graduate of Hampton University, where she completed a B.A. in Communications and received her M.A. from the University of Chicago in Social Justice. Beverly breaks down the myths and misunderstandings around domestic violence to illuminate the complex reasons why victims stay in abusive relationships and what everyone can do to help survivors. She's passionate about gender violence, women's issues, healing, empowerment, and economic justice.

Jes Baker: Jes Baker is a positive, progressive and irreverent thought leader in the realm of self-love, mental health advocacy and body image. She is internationally recognized for her writing on her blog "The Militant Baker," the "Attractive and Fat" campaign and her literary debut *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls*. Her work is dedicated to shifting social paradigms so that all people can embrace themselves just as they are.

More information can be found at
tntech.edu/women/

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Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was an associate justice of the Supreme Court from 1933 until her death in September 2020. She was an avid advocate for gender equality and women's rights. To quote Ginsburg, "Fight for the things you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you."