DECONSTRUCT THIS

researchers, especially those in public institutions, to continue fostering
Women's Studies programs and encouraging students in the absence
of this type of engagement. A strong national environment is progressively
reorienting rationalized
the market for higher education. Women's Studies programs are changing,
and their status in the culture is progressively

Oh Cindy, you're always chasing
after those daft MEN.
What can I do to be

"YOUR KIND OF WOMAN"

feminist interpretations
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My Experience Working in an All-Female Non-Profit Organization
By Beatriz Martinez

I approached the doors of the Alameda county non-profit organization I had applied to as an after-school program teacher. As I walked through the hallways of the agency, I observed poster-sized pictures of young girls smiling with their arms wrapped around each other, all of several ethnic backgrounds. I passed by conference rooms named after notable and inspirational women who have made a difference within several fields of work such as literature and activism. The agency seemed welcoming and supportive of women and girls no matter what their race, class, sexual orientation, etc. I remember walking into the room where my interview was to take place and as I entered, I saw the three coordinators of the school sites in which the program operated. The first coordinator was African American, the other was Mexican American and the last was Irish American, they were all enthusiastic about the program and did not mind that I was nervous; in fact they helped calm me down. The organization seemed like the perfect place to work. It was my dream job as a Woman Studies major and someone who is passionate about early childhood education: the position I was hired for dealt specifically with first and second grade girls of low income families who lived primarily in the urban inner-city, just as I did growing up.

As I began training, attending meetings and consultations, I noticed my high expectations and positive assumptions of this all inclusive organization began to fade. The more time I spent there, the more I observed the organization in detail, specifically the upper levels of management, I found that it was not so inclusive after all. I applied to this organization because of its emphasis on gender, just as I chose to major in Women Studies for the same reason; yet my main interests were to focus on women of color, and I knew the direct services provided were for girls of color who came from low economic backgrounds. I grew disappointed after realizing that race and class were secondary to gender within the organization, and I began to feel marginalized as a heterosexual woman of color.

I attempted numerous times to create relationships with the rest of my staff in order to get to know them. Usually I would hear them converse about the “L Word” (a Showtime series) or LGBTQ events in which I would attempt to participate, but quickly was denied access. The initial reaction was silence or a quick answer to a question I had hoped would help to strike up a conversation. Within the organization I was a minority (as if I wasn’t used to that) not only being Chicana, but also as a heterosexual woman. The irony of this situation is that usually these roles are reversed outside of the organization. I didn’t want to think that this had anything to do with my sexual orientation until I noticed more separations and divisions within the staff: I was adopted by the group of heterosexual women of color who expressed to me that that was the way it was at the organization.

“If you analyze the situation properly, you will know that there might be a few things you can do in your personal, individual interest so that you can experience and enjoy the change.”
-Bernice Johnson Reagon

Next I noticed race and class becoming an issue within the specific program I was working in, between white privileged middle class lesbian women, and heterosexual working class women of color. I did not expect the most discrimination to come from a Latina in a position of power; however she once stated that she thought there should be “more white staff and less staff of color because they were not as qualified as the white staff,” in her experience. She continued to explain that the girls of color should spend more time around “white role models,” because they wouldn’t get that chance very often. One white middle class co-worker of mine suggested that the girls of color who lived in the low income areas needed to learn how to get along and help their communities, and since they were going to live “in these low income places the rest of their lives,” she wanted to be the one to teach them how to live in harmony with each other. These types of comments were insulting, and lead to my experience there being particularly damaging to my self-esteem.

During meetings, when I was asked to offer a suggestion or to comment on a topic in regards to my direct service with the students, I would answer honestly, attempting to voice my opinion whether it was about race or class. I was often criticized, spoken over or interrupted by the Latina coordinator I mentioned above. I also
noticed that not much of the white staff had experience working in primarily Latino and African American communities, and those who did or who lived in them, like me, were often judged wrongly, and our quality of education and working skills were questioned. I simultaneously became insecure and angry knowing that I would be verbally attacked if I said the wrong thing. I noticed she would pick on the women of color more, and almost never the white women.

In the middle of the school year, more than half the staff quit for reasons unknown to me and I soon found out that this organization in particular had a very high turnover rate. Although their wages were highly competitive, the organization is not for profit, which can result in a lack of stability due to funding. This may in turn, have a domino effect on the longevity of its employees. After asking some of the ex-employees why they left, they mentioned leaving the agency not for financial reasons, but because they felt they were mistreated and unappreciated.

"I have sought a sense of community and a variety of ‘progressive’ organizations, but the sense of solidarity was often fleeting and frequently did not persist over time." —Karen Bojar

I tried to let go of stereotypes and judgments based on race, class and sexuality, when I first walked through those doors, expecting a safe place for women with no identity boundaries, but just humans trying to work for the good of one another. Everyday that dream was sliced in intersecting pieces, becoming more and more divided, essentially shattering into what felt like hundreds of tiny pieces impossible to put back together. The reality of our society became evident throughout my experience at this organization; that is, the existence of oppression and privilege, hierarchies between certain groups of people, racism, classism, sexism, and the practice of colonial ideologies.

Before becoming fully burnt out, I realized that people cannot change unless they want to, so instead of focusing my energy on the adults who were set in their ways, I supported the open mindedness of the children and their eagerness to learn. Although I felt my work was unappreciated at the office of this organization, I felt that my fieldwork was what really mattered: my dedication and loyalty was to the girls in my program. I must give credit where it is due, therefore I cannot deny that it is because of this organization that I had teaching flexibility around cultural education because of the open curriculum to teach the girls about women in history, especially those of color since the majority of the girls were African American and Latin American. One co-worker of mine stated that she commended the agency for its emphasized “risk taking,” such as encouraging the girls to break out of stereotypes and step out of the box by trying and learning new things, which she feels really empowers them. She also mentioned being able to mold the program into what is convenient for the girls in relation to their academic level, cultural background, and motor skills. I learned I may never find the perfect place to work, and it probably doesn’t exist, but no matter where I am, making a difference is first on my agenda. Resisting the temptation to give up is second because that’s when you lose.

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Hunab Ku is an ancient Mayan symbol that represents balance and unity.
What's Your Type??
(A rant on women + music + representation)
By Alexis Harper

I spent my whole adolescence idolizing women who play music. That's what we're supposed to do, right? Put the famous people we see and hear on an altar. For me, that altar took the shape of a musician's stage (maybe for you it was/is a red carpet, a runway, a basketball court, or a bookshelf in Borders).

The first musical object of my affection was Debbie Gibson at age 3 or maybe 4 (it's a little fuzzy). My mom bought me all her tapes and I choreographed dances with the kids at preschool. Then there was Mariah Carey, TLC, Lisa Loeb, Alanis Morissette, Jewel, Ani DiFranco, and Tori Amos.

In high school it was Courtney Love and her band Hole, so my ever-supportive parents bought me a purple electric guitar...but not so much the Hole albums/posters/etc that my youthful heart desired (and thus, spent my lunch money on). It seems that in a parent's mind, Debbie Gibson and her public representation as a "good-girl" is far more worthy of idolatry than the shameless "bad girl" that is Courtney Love, however invented each of these archetypes may be.

Just as Debbie Gibson later attempted to shake the fabricated image of her good-girl self by posing in Playboy, Courtney Love’s gone through various phases of representing herself as reformed/redeemed. Though no matter how shiny her hair got in the late 90s or how much the hem of her dress lengthened, just like Debbie Gibson, she’s had a pretty tough time turning that initial media representation of herself around.

Since the media has that power of manipulation and has thus decided to keep these women as the good girls/bad girls we imagine them to be, we will never see Debbie Gibson as a sex symbol, and when we dress up like Courtney Love for Halloween we'll have track marks on our arms... forever and ever -- or at least until the media’s whim changes and/or a forthcoming generation has no idea who these people are. But that day is not today, and even when/if that day comes, there will be a new set of women to take their places. That is the process and the cycle of media representation: archetypes are created and after their creation women are designated to fit in them. Terribly limiting, don't you think?

Here's a breakdown of a few of the modern archetypes I've noted in my personal research as a pop-culture junkie:

The Crazy Bitch (i.e. Courtney Love, Bjork)
She dresses crazy, she acts crazy, and she always becomes the "crazy-quote girl" in an interview. And she's not that nice either... in fact when the paparazzi tries to take pictures of her baby children without permission, she might punch them (like Bjork). What a crazy bitch!

The Slut (i.e. Christina Aguilera, Fergie)
There is a fine line between tasteful and crass, young lady! You don't learn how to walk that tightrope without a misstep, and bloggers will forever mention your name and "STD" in the same sentence (see: dlisted.com). You slut!

The Crazy Bitchy Slut (i.e. Lil' Kim)
This is the type of woman that supposedly goes to prison and comes back out gay and just as "bad" as ever (see: perezhilton.com, star magazine, etc). Can you name many white women who fit this archetype? I couldn't...

The Sweetheart (i.e. Beyoncé)
Hers is a tricky road to travel, with the farthest fall from grace. One day they love you, the next you forgot to wear underwear and everyone in the world has the polaroid to prove it -- and the harsh judgment to match (as if they've never run out of laundry detergent). B. Spears is the perfect example of the fallen sweetheart, but don't fret for there is always another waiting in the wings. Beyoncé is a unique holder of the sweetheart torch -- as a woman of color she's in a rare position (the likes of Lil' Kim, Whitney Houston, Yoko Ono, Mariah Carey, and other vilified/marketed "divas" should be so lucky).

The C.E.O (i.e. Madonna, Gwen Stefani, J.Lo)
"We climbed all the way from the bottom to the top now we ain't gettin' nothin' but love" – Gwen Stefani (from “Rich Girl,” which is the most ironic song in Earth’s history)

The Angry Woman (i.e. half of Lilith Fair)
Just like the age of Aquarius, there was an age of angry women in rock. You might remember it... "I'm a bitch, I'm a lover, I'm a child, I'm a mother" etc. Mostly the bitch part is what stuck. Some of these women went to Buddhist camps, found peace or whatever, and wrote “mature” follow-up albums... but to us
they'll always be represented as angry rock chicks.

The Sensitive Woman (i.e. the other half of Lilith Fair)

The girl and her piano, the girl and her guitar -- they are all very fragile and should be handled with care. But not in the same way as the Sweetheart, of course, for these ladies are tainted with emotional baggage.

The Spice Girls (i.e. Sporty, Scary, Baby, Ginger, Posh)

They deserve their own category for spelling it out for us. First of all, let's talk about "girl power." At 13, I didn't find it in Baby Spice's pigtails, or Ginger Spice's buster...but whatever. I sort of have a feeling that Genius Spice and Queer Spice were bound and gagged in the dressing room. Also, why is it that the only Spice of color was Scary??? Is it because that is the only space in which a systematically racist society would willingly accept a Black woman ??? The Spice Girls phenomenon is a marked anomaly in the world of women, music, and representation, yet it is a perfect example of the power of the archetype.

Other archetypes exist, of course, and since language and culture are living creatures new archetypes will be invented. At any given time a woman may be represented differently by the media or as more than one type, but only in certain combinations and never ever all at once. Could you imagine, for instance, an "Angry Slutty Sweetheart"...not really. How about a "Sensitive Bitchy Slut"...nope.

Also a trend (which cannot be interpreted as unintentional) is which women are allowed to occupy which spaces of representation. Women of color, for example, were for the most part left out of "the Lilith Fair" phenomenon and conversation mentioned earlier. That was a space for predominantly white women and their predominantly white audiences, and therefore Selena as a "sensitive singer-songwriter of the 90's" was not constructed by the media in the same benignly wholesome way as, say, Jewel or Sarah McLachlan, also "sensitive singer-songwriters of the 90's," and very white.

There are always exceptions...not all women are victims of media representation. Some women have masterfully transcended archetypes, and some women even embrace them to their advantage. An example of the former is PJ Harvey, whose musical style is somewhat androgynous -- a trait which could make her harder to peg as a certain "type" of woman. Tori Amos is an example of someone who acknowledges combinations of archetypes within herself and laughs in the face of the mediamonster when they mess it up. However, it's important to note that both of these women are not mainstream superstars like some of the others...their approach to archetyping may be the reason for that. Either way, it takes some doing to succeed in representing yourself outside of these stifling boxes, and having the media follow suit. Sometimes the media and the public don't listen (shout-out to Ms. Gibson and Love).

Let's think for a minute about the mayhem that would be incited if young kids were looking up to women that were everything all at once, or something great that no one had even thought of yet. Boys would see women as complex heroes instead of just moms, or just girlfriends, or just dorky and irrelevant, and girls would gain confidence outside of those roles, too. See, it doesn't serve women's purposes to be "this" or "this" but not "that" and "that." It serves the status quo, no ifs ands or buts. Why else is it that the daily chronicle of a white straight male rock guy's rehab experience and poor fathering skills are not on the CNN/FOX news scroll?? By applying culturally unsavory archetypes (i.e. bitchy/slutty/angry/emotional) or culturally acceptable but harmless archetypes (i.e. The Sweetheart) to highly visible women, the media neutralizes so many possibilities for change.

Dear Frida,
By Reneé Sproles

A lot has changed in the years you have been gone. I wonder if you would recognize your country and mine? Would what you see make you happy, sad, worried, angry, joyful—all of the above? Your country is not communist, something I know you believed in. You wanted rights and equality for all, but that never happened and the poverty of Mexico is devastating. Every year thousands of your citizens flee your beloved country risking their lives to make it to mine. But the United States is no utopia and the crossing is filled with danger. Many do not make it—they suffer and die, often nameless in a harsh landscape. They are preyed
upon by ‘coyotes,’ unscrupulous men who take
money from the poorest of the poor, telling these
people they will get them across the border to a
better life, but often this is not the truth. Many
of these men steal their money and leave these
people to die. Some die locked in trunks of cars
in deserts that reach 110 degrees. Some get
picked up at the border and sent back, arrested
and deported. And why do they come? So they
can work in our fields picking our food. So they
can work in our homes cleaning them. So they
can work at the carwash, washing cars they can
only dream of ever owning. And what do they
get for this? Five dollars an hour if they are
lucky and the hatred of many who never realize
the work they do. The poverty is so profound
in Mexico; America is often their only hope of
survival. In a perfect world, their own country
would be able to care for them, but it can not. I
wonder how you would paint them? Would you
paint them as dead bones, a dream escaping from
them as they die, their blood scattered across two
countries, both of which are responsible? A scar
on the earth that will never heal. What would
you Frida, as an artist, see in their suffering?

And what happens to the poor who
stay? Well the lucky ones, almost always young
females, get jobs working in the ‘maquiladoras,’
corporate-owned sweatshops, in the City of
Juárez Mexico just south of El Paso, Texas.
These women are lucky to make five dollars a
day. They make TVs, microwaves, dresses and
computers for my country; we are the consumers
and they are the producers. A first world
controlling a third world; isn’t this how
colonialism works? Isn’t Mexico lucky to live
under NAFTA? And these women, what
to replace her. I wonder how you would paint
them? Would you paint them as dead bones, a
dream escaping from them as they die, their
blood scattered across two countries, both of
which are responsible? A scar on the earth that
will never heal. What would you Frida, as an
artist, see in their suffering?

But your country is still a place of
beauty, a place of color, art, music and dancing.
It is a country of faith and of families. It is a
country that considers you one of its greatest
artists and treasures. Every year thousands flock
to your beloved ‘blue house’ to see your home
and to learn about your life and your art. It is a
country that is slowly realizing more
opportunities for women, and not just as maids
and sweatshop workers. It is a country that is
rich with natural resources and just lacks the
ability to properly harness them. It is not just a
country for rich American tourists who throw
money around and call everyone “Paco” and
“María” because the American dollar is strong
and the peso is weak. It is a country that has a
rich history of indigenous people who built the
largest pyramids in the world. It is a country
with a capital that just gave same-sex couples the
right to marry; something I think would have
pleased you, since you yourself were a lover of
men and of women. It is a country where
children still laugh, play and sing. I wonder how
you would paint them? Would you paint them as
color and light on a landscape of tropical beauty?
A smile on the earth to help it heal. What would
you Frida, as an artist, see in their joy?

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Gone, But Not Forgotten
(When Domestic Violence Leads To Murder)

By Christina Williams

It seems as though the man who murdered her has more rights in jail than her family, who has been left behind to grieve the loss of a much-loved family member and friend. We faced him in court a couple of times where he smirked at us through the fiberglass window that separated him from us, as if he was satisfied with, or proud of his actions. Meanwhile the trial is postponed yet again. It has almost been two years that we have been waiting for him to be found guilty of first degree murder and sentenced to a prison to serve his time and punishment for his crime.

Meanwhile he sits in county jail which, compared to a state penitentiary, is a less harsh and less-strict environment. He is close to home, can receive visits up to three times a week, has a roof over his head, three meals provided to him a day and apparently brags about taking her life execution style. He has absolutely no remorse. His family can still communicate with him through phone calls, letters and visits, while her family can never see her, hear her or touch her again. We will never again hear her loud boisterous laugh, though similar to her mother and sister, it is unique to her that when you hear it you know she is there, even if she is in another room. We can talk to her and believe she can hear us, but can she? I hope so.

Even his lawyer knew he is guilty and had to take himself off the case. How long must we wait until justice is served while he is manipulating the system to prolong his trial and the wait to learn his fate? I keep wondering though, why is it when a lawyer’s wife was murdered a couple of months after my friend was, though not a domestic violence case, the judicial system tried and convicted the suspect within a year? Was it because the parties involved were white, middle-class people with money, the victim’s husband was well known and could afford to pay to hurry things along? Because the people involved in my friend’s case are Latino and of lower-economic status, do the Napa courts see this case as less of a priority? Maybe, just maybe, there are legal reasons other than the few conflicts of interest that came up, as to why it is taking so long to go to trial.

He took a mother from her four children. Does he think the longer it takes to go to trial, that she will eventually be forgotten? NEVER!!! How can a murderer have more rights than the victim’s family? What if the situation was different? What if in that moment he ended her life, she was able to somehow get the gun away from him and defend herself, and he had died instead? Chances are she would get more time than he would, depending on the charges. Because men are seen as naturally aggressive, it is not surprising to society when they do something violent. But if a woman does something violent, even if it is a result of years of abuse which she couldn’t take anymore and feared for her life, she would be seen as more dangerous than a man because she is supposed to be naturally passive.

I have gone to a brief Domestic Violence Response Unit training in San Francisco. At this training I learned that law enforcement and the courts of San Francisco are trained to specifically recognize the signs of a woman who has killed her batterer in self defense after long term abuse; this is taken into consideration as they decide on what to do with case. But in more conservative areas, long term abuse is not always taken into consideration by the courts because a woman killing a man is seen as a crime against patriarchy. Unfortunately as long as there continues to be domestic violence, lives will be lost. Either the women or the men themselves, as the women try to defend their lives and the lives of their children. It is sad and horrible to know that people in relationships and families who are supposed to love and take care of one another, are abusing and killing each other instead.

Maybe there can be a way to better educate people about domestic violence, and that death is a certain possibility. There should be a curriculum included as a requirement in general education for students from elementary school through college, that teaches the cycle of domestic violence. I think this would be helpful in educating children about the reality of D.V. and if it is happening in their home, the educators can create a space where students can feel safe to ask for help. They can learn to prevent the cycle of violence when they become adults by not becoming abusive themselves, as many child victims had become abusive when they grew up. There could also be adult educational classes as well, especially teaching what one could do to protect their selves, change their situation, or leave when they realize they are in an abusive relationship. Perhaps the community can take these ideas into consideration.

R.I.P. Sandra, 4/17/74 – 7/31/05.
I walked into the dark room— it was my first time.
I was excited but nervous because I didn’t know what to expect.
I was early because I wanted the perfect place.
More and more people arrived
Most of them women.
Everyone was there for the same reason.
For support
Recognition
Acknowledgment
Praise
Discovery
Perhaps still hesitation... but certainly awareness
Of their own and everyone else’s vaginas.
I said the V-word to my mother.
The response was quite impressive.
“I’ve heard it’s good.”
(The play of course—Not my vagina!)
I got chills in the room
Everyone got louder and more comfortable with each act.
It was an open space for whatever feeling you felt like feeling.
Whatever emotion, and every emotion
You were welcome.
Not all vaginas were happy vaginas.
Some experienced pain only known to them.
Others experienced joy that some would never know.
But together we work for something that shouldn’t cost a thing.
Something that everyone is entitled to—
A life free of violence.
This may have been my first time,
But no longer a virgin, I am going EVERY year!
V-Day is a global movement to stop violence against women and girls. College students and local volunteers produce performances of Eve Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues* to help raise awareness of violence against women and children and fund anti-violence organizations in their communities. Aside from performances, V-Day has campaigns in many other forms such as gatherings and films that work to educate for social change including a documentary, *Until the Violence Stops*. The V stands for Victory, Valentine and Violence and most of these events occur during or around the week of Valentine’s Day.

Why do we have a V-Day in the first place? There is obviously a need to push some of the issues talked about and performed in the monologues to the forefront of social awareness or it would not have the intense success that it is having today. The better question is, are we going about this local/global approach to end violence against women and children the most effective way? Does the content of the monologues and the ways in which they are mobilized transnationally give each participating group agency?

Many of the monologues focus entirely on restrictive views of women’s sexuality. They often reduce women to their sexual organs, a move which alone already denies access to those who may identify as women but who do not have a vagina. The performance of the monologues can also be interpreted as stripping females of their sexuality, which is also very harmful. I am sure we all like a good laugh but should we be encouraging it if it is at the expense of someone else? Anyone in the room could tell you that the feel of the monologues has an anti-male bias with much of the humor being at the expense of men. One of the monologues asks for audience participation in chanting the word “c-nt.” Its purpose is to reverse the word’s meaning and replace the negative connotations with positive ones, but is this radicalized view of language and sex an effective means of women reclaiming their sexuality?

According to the V-Day website, the *Vagina Monologues* is “a catalyst for mobilizing communities to heighten awareness to stop violence against women and girls.” In the article “Feminist Reverberations,” Joan Wallach Scott discusses Women in Black, the feminist group of protesters that define themselves as “a loose network of women world-wide committed to peace with justice and actively opposed to war and other forms of violence...a means of mobilization and a formula for action” (17). Different groups of women unite in silent protest: their actions are the same but their aim is different, based on their local situations. I believe that the V-Day project should take this approach in their worldwide campaigns. Scott says, “Each group is autonomous, each group focuses on the particular problems of personal and state violence in its part of the world...it embodies feminism as a situated strategic operation: it is not a question of global/local, but of echoes and reverberations that traverse the world” (19). The *Vagina Monologues* are written for a western audience, and need to be made culturally relevant when being performed in other countries. Without giving each country agency or presence the *Vagina Monologues* are just the “west” imposing ideas onto “the rest,” and brings us to the question of who is represented in the performances and who is not.

Amongst all of this criticism, I think that there can be some good found in the *Vagina Monologues*. It opens up dialogue for necessary conversation regarding issues that people may not otherwise be comfortable talking about, such as rape, sexuality, female genital surgeries, menstruation, etc. There is the idea that the shared experience had healing power for those who have been hurt. Also the enlightening nature of the monologues may empower some women regarding their views of their bodies, since many of them are often made to feel uncomfortable about them. But how does one identify as a feminist and grapple with finding enjoyment in the *Vagina Monologues*? In a world where media representations of women are often stereotypical and subordinate to men, sometimes we have to put our feminist lens aside. The *Vagina Monologues* is heading in the right direction but there is still a lot of work to do in regards to the transnational approach, to put an end to violence against women, while giving them agency.

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Are you a boy or a girl?
By Ruth Robinson

"Are you a boy or a girl?" the kid shouts at my friend as they pass on the street. "I know! Confusing, huh?" my friend replies, not wanting to give in to the dominant paradigm of gender binary. You see, my friend's gender performance is not simply "one or the other" or even a combination of "both" genders, but, rather, is something beyond what is expressible within the present language system.

I often take for granted the complexity of gender. Through the lens of the mainstream, I appear to be "a girl," and sometimes, I forget the many characterizations that I am assumed to have within this identity. Knowing my gender to be much different than that, I sometimes imagine various ways in which I can counter this narrative, creating more space for gender variation to flourish.

Assumptions, for one, are a dangerous thing. One should never assume what someone's gender identity is. This task alone is challenging. So much of day-to-day interactions consist of using gender as a signifier through pronoun usage. If the person is female appearing, it is typical to use she/her; if they look male, to use he/him. Alternatives to these often constricting terms, are found in the world of gender neutrality.

Though less known, the gender-neutral pronouns such as ze/zer, and sie/hir serve multiple functions. These terms are not only a way to refer to a person without assuming a gender, but are also an identity category. Someone might identify as "Ze", while another person might choose not to identity, but prefer to be referred to with gender-neutral pronouns.

Another way to refer to someone without assuming gender is to use third person plural, they/them/their/themselves. This method is sometimes criticized for not utilizing appropriate grammar form because it uses the third person plural to refer to a singular person — though, I would rather refer to someone in plural rather than risk referring to them by an incorrect pronoun altogether. This is my preferred method of utilizing gender neutrality because it is more understandable to the general public who, often times, have never heard of gender-neutral pronouns such as ze/zer.

But, don't worry. There is no need to be too focused on what "correct" pronoun is appropriate. It's more about leaving space for something new to be. It's about refusing to make assumptions on the basis of culturally designated gender signifiers. It's about restoring the individual agency of the person to choose how they want to identify, or, if they even want to be defined and categorized in terms of their gender entirely. How do you identify?

*pronunciations: ze: "zee"; zie: "zee"; zir: like "sir" with a "z"; sie: "see"; hir: "here"

THE BODY PROJECT
By Amber McCoy and AnnaH Wilson

In a transnational world, gendered bodies become strategic sites of struggle within a multitude of different capacities. The body is a site of both biological and cultural reproductions of national identity (Yuval-Davis). As such, the body appears as a site of contestation, understood only within a long-term historicized perspective (Shohat). Bodies situated in relation to each other, or in relation to geopolitical spaces, articulate and maintain certain imposed hierarchies. Bodies are contextualized — racialized — pathologized — eroticized — nativized — compartmentalized — commodified — globalized, and are then policed accordingly through laws and social systems structured to benefit patriarchy.

This group collaboration was a way for us to deconstruct our bodies, to redefine our bodies, to renegotiate the spaces our bodies fill, to defy the finality of our physical space, and ultimately, to undermine patriarchy. It was a way for us to contest, edit, and revise the imposed political narratives that have cloaked our gendered beings with invisible text since the days that we were born. This project was about agency and resistance. It was about filling in the spaces between our bodies and our shadows with what we believe should have been legible all along.

Some of us experienced this project as an avenue to challenge the worth and value applied to feminine aesthetics, such as weight or beauty. Some of us engaged in this project with thoughts of our bodies being suspended in motion: an examination of the ways that bodies express themselves through creative movement (like dance). Some of us engaged in this project as an act of celebration—as an opportunity to rejoice in the process of authentic, unapologetic, internal identification.

Some of us perceived this project to be threat to any adversaries or obstacles (patriarchal or otherwise) which might negate our abilities to carry this empowerment through into the future. Some of our images insist on a cheerfully militant and compassionate presence all at once—Only through this juxtaposition can the power of revolutionary optimism be utilized.

For some of us, the chalk outlines symbolized a way to defy the many sociopolitical deaths that often render us immobile due to classifications based on race, citizenship/national identity, perceived gender(s), sexuality, socioeconomic status, ability, reproductive capacity, age, etc. We were moved by the experience of lying on the cold pavement—alive—breathing—tense in the muscles—being contoured by those we trusted, with the expectation that we would rise up from the outlines and stare back at ourselves with the intent to resurrect and reconstruct our own images from scratch.

We diligently debated the symbolism of a chalk outline and the meaning of having a "Body Project" dominate our issue of Deconstruct This. We wrestled with the art arrangement being fragmented throughout the text or as a unified collective. We recognized that the images (much like our resistance) have a stronger impact in solidarity than singularly. We tried feverishly to avoid a singular representation of womanhood (as the dominant media would portray us; fragmented centerfolds, stripped of purpose and intelligence). We agree to take up as much or as little space as we individually needed to construct a form we could connect with; to leave behind rigid rules or organization and to let our projects illustrate themselves; to celebrate our unique visions of what it means to canonize ourselves for exhibitionist and voyeuristic pleasures.

We decided on the symbolism of the chalk outline because this image of fatality embodies the struggles of women throughout the world, and the highly gendered cost of remaining subordinate to patriarchy. We have taken the lessons we have learned throughout our personal lives, through the stories of our peers and the literature made accessible in our education and visual revamped it. We are aware of the lives and deaths of the women of Juarez, Mexico working in the maquiladoras; we have seen the forced sterilization of Puerto Rican and African-American women; and we have just recently experienced the Supreme Courts (eight rich men, one rich women, all but one white...we believe you Anital) five-to-four ban of partial-birth abortion, which will put many women in harm's way and is one step closer to over turning 1973's Roe v. Wade decision. So yes, our "Body Project" is an obvious and deliberate form of creative resistance to the fear, shame, abuse, neglect, and harm that we as feminists must unite against, because our bodies are a site of contestation and it is a matter of life or death.

Works Cited:
I don't fuck much with the past
but I fuck plenty with the future.

-Patti Smith
beyond the stars
imagine
your silence will not
protect you
essence of love
glitter
free spirit
give
hold hands
color me happy
Women struggled to be taken seriously to be more than just pretty faces and Pretty girls. They wanted to be defined by their minds rather than their bodies.  
(Amelia Richards)

To dance is a powerful outlet of expression and healing. It can also be empowering in that after letting go through movement, you feel a release of negative energy that sometimes can consume you when others try to keep you suppressed.

Women are enslaved to an beauty myth, chained to the false belief that our value is based on appearance alone.  
(Christine Harland  MCA)
Who am I?
I am a mother, a wife,
a daughter, an aunt, a sister,
a friend, a lover, a care giver, a chauffeur
a cook, a maid, an ATM, an activist,
a volunteer, an educated woman capable
of almost anything. I laugh, I cry,
I yell and sing. I worry and wonder
and dream. I try, fail and succeed,
sometimes all in the same day.
I take and give, beg and borrow.
I am human. I am me.

They have been some of the best and
worst years of my life, but I made it.
This ride is over, but another journey
is beginning...
gendering (a nation)

I travel the landscape of her
Like an unfamiliar terrain.
I memorize the structure of her bones—
The way they hold her flesh up
In those small mountains

Cheeks slope like
Swollen hills
Shadow deep valleys
Beneath two
Dirt Brown
Ponds of water

Inside the hollow
Gaping
Cave of her mouth
I find small rocks competing for space
Along a thick line of pink gum
Like barnacles on the damp surface of ocean stone

I outline the form of each
Serrated
Scoured
Jagged
Off-white masterpiece
With the roundness of my fingertip

Clumsy hands tumble down
The length of her torso
Grating along a
tall
Strong
Rack of bones
That rattle the precision of my palms
Like car tires on a gravel path
Like
Quick
Sharp
Ripples in water
Thoughtlessly capsizing boats

I dig at the space between these ribs
I stretch and pull and pry to tear them apart
Attempting to smooth out the bumps

At the edge of the waves I find a still spot—
Hips
Like sliding shores
As Umber
And Grainy
As sand

I try to sift my hands through granules
But find my fingers merely scraping
Across the surface

Today
She tells me
I do not know her

--Annah Wilson
RESOURCE LIST
Compiled by Amber McCoy & Becki Hively

Books, articles, journals
- Websites, organizations, events
- Movies, documentaries
- Music


Ladies and Gentlemen, the Fabulous Stains. Paramount Pictures, 1981.


I hope you have enjoyed the second issue of Deconstruct This, the collaboratively-produced publication of the Women Studies Senior Seminar at San Francisco State University. This year, Deconstruct This takes the subtitle "Feminist Interpretations" and invites its readers to consider the aesthetics of feminist praxis in dialogue with theory and personal reflections. As the seminar's instructor, I have been inspired, challenged, and heartened by the students who produced the volume you have just read. This year's cohort eschews uniformity yet functions collaboratively; they embrace a wide range of feminist interpretations garnered from their Women Studies courses and simultaneously they insist on their relevance to life beyond the university; and most importantly they have amazed me with their creative energies and spirit.

- Deborah Cohler, Instructor WOMS 690
FEMINISM IS...

...self-determination, open-ended and whatever I need it to be; it is the aim of freeing myself to be who I am and to live in justice and peace; critical awareness of how the world works and asking questions of how society functions; like a cup of tea, when you really want coffee; being aware of the choices we make and how we respond, react and define our relationships to society, while looking beyond our own national boundaries and further out than just this particular time and space; punk rock, egg shells, opera, vinegar & orange peels; healing the disconnection between my body and I; the exposure to truth; finding the strength to rise from that which tries to push you down and to be able to break away and free yourself from the patriarchal power and control of those who think they own you; to be me, a mom, a lover, a daughter, a friend—I can be whomever I need to be to be strong, asking my great-grandma what she used in 1922 to catch her period blood (a washrag).

The Department of Women Studies at San Francisco State University offers an undergraduate major and minor in Women Studies and a minor in Women's Health Issues. The department also offers a Master of Arts degree in Women Studies. For more information, please visit http://www.sfsu.edu/~woms.