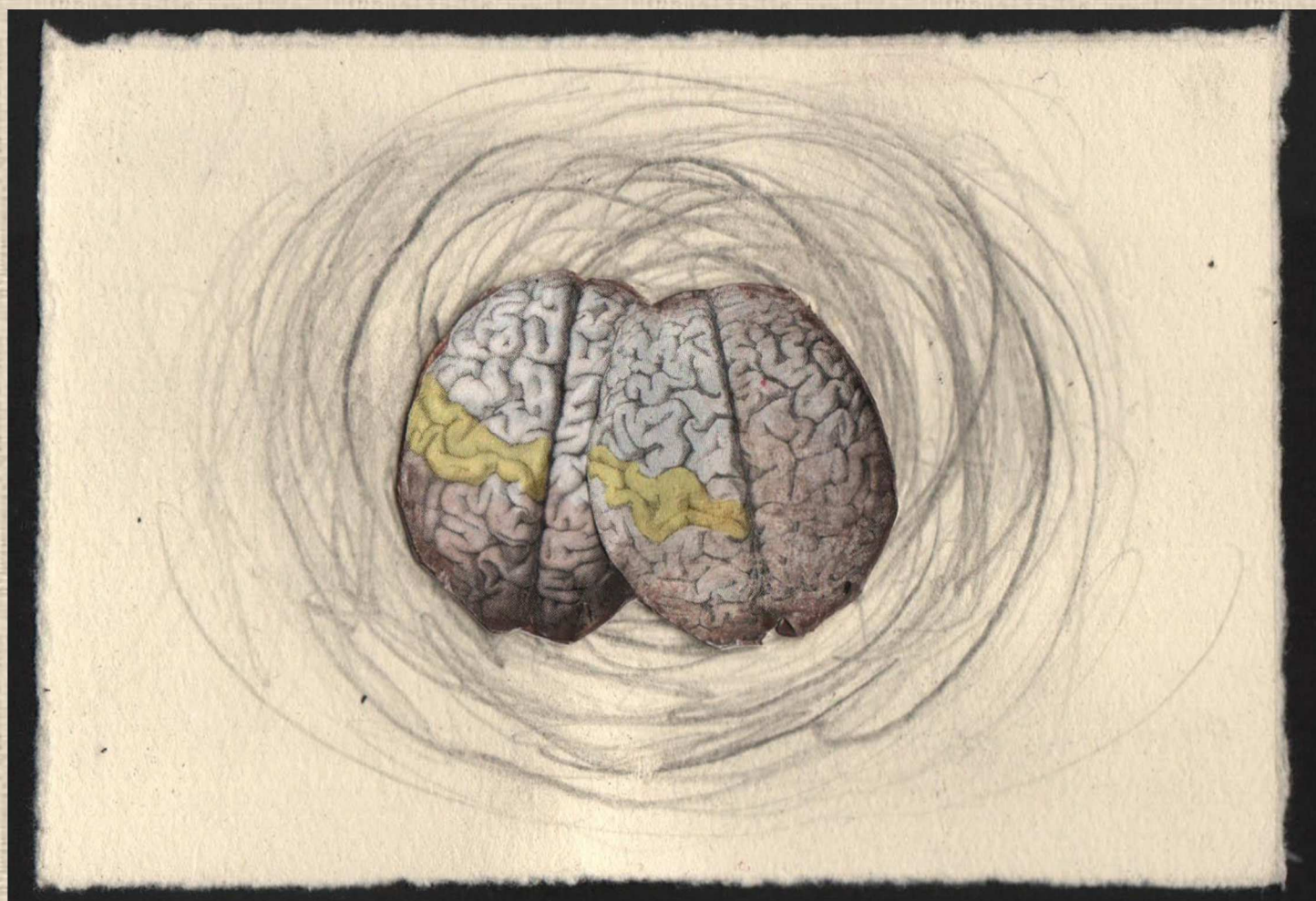


# FEMINIST SPACES

CREATE. SHARE. EXPLORE.



Volume 1, Issue 1, Fall/Winter 2014

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*Feminist Spaces* is an online, interdisciplinary student journal that invites undergraduate and graduate students from institutions worldwide to submit formal essays as well as multimodal/artistic pieces per our biannual Call for Papers/Works. Established in March 2014, this journal is sponsored by members from The University of West Florida’s Women’s Studies Collective, a student-run organization invested in the vitality of Women’s Studies at UWF and the larger academic community.

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Becca Namniek

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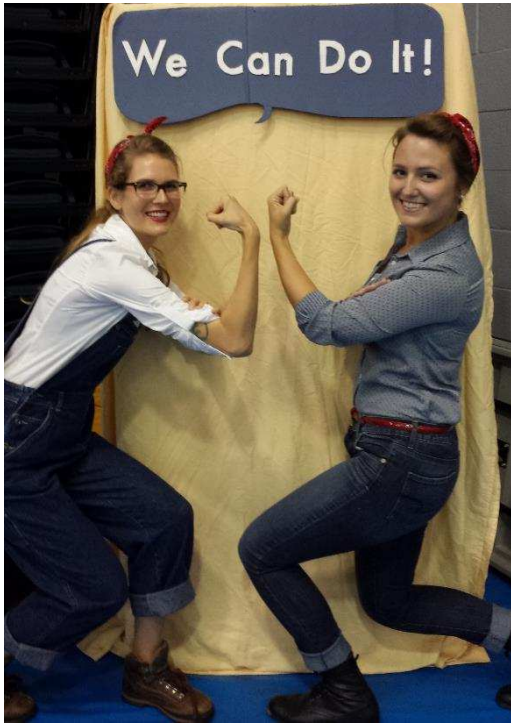
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## Letter From The Editors



*Taylor Willbanks & Becca Namniek,  
Co-Founders and Editors-in-Chief*

In six short months, *Feminist Spaces* evolved from an untitled project aimed at bringing together student voices, to an online academic journal showcasing the diverse talents of undergraduate and graduate students across the nation. If you're familiar with the journal's humble beginnings, you'd know that it was the product of another session of carpool banter between two graduate students who, upon learning the state of the discipline in higher education, began advocating for the vitality of women's studies at their own institution. The idea for a journal, then, emerged sometime over a drive-thru special, after realizing the lack of opportunities for students to publish critical and creative work dedicated to exploring the significance of women's studies. It was in this fateful conversation, between hungry bites, that we recognized the ways in which a journal devoted to women's studies could ignite social

change and inspire provocative critical insights. That day, over a dollar menu meal enjoyed in the front seats of our car, *Feminist Spaces* came into being.

What we never could have predicted, though, was the overwhelming support we received from students and faculty members across our institution. Aware of our own limited understanding of graphic design and computer programming, we turned to the best and the brightest, a fellow English Literature graduate student, Rachel Johnson, who gladly accepted the position of Managing Editor with little persuading. This first issue would not have been possible without her impressive tech savviness and unerring critical forethought. Her ability to make sense of our sometimes senseless or inarticulate ideas and render them possible is an extraordinary talent to which we are forever indebted. We are also especially grateful to the members of the *Feminist Spaces* editorial board for their inexhaustible efforts in actualizing the vision of the journal. Etienne Lambert, Karen Manning, and Katie Sundy, all graduate students in the Department of English and World Languages at UWF, were imperative to the rapid production and remarkable quality of this first issue.



Of course, no successful journal can sustain itself without its own trademark “look.” Brilliant, adept, hardworking, and fantastically innovative, John Medzerian of the UWF Art Department was, and remains, an essential contributor to the development and future preservation of *Feminist Spaces*. As the designer of the journal’s logo, John’s work encapsulates the essence of *Feminist Spaces*. His design not only incorporates the rhetorical triangle, a model which cultivates ideas by bringing authors and audience together around various topics, but also allows for a distinctly feminist space at the center of that model, one that can be explored and shared by all.

Our first issue features eleven compelling “manifestas” composed by undergraduate and graduate students from several institutions, including the University of Arizona, Pennsylvania State University, University of South Florida, Brock University, the New School for Social Research, Michigan State University, and many more. Of course, we would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to the contributors themselves, as there would be no journal without the works they so generously shared with us and the rest of the global community. As writers whose work is featured in the inaugural issue of this journal, we hope that they continue reading *Feminist Spaces* and find a special interest in the future and longevity of this publication.

As we reflect back on the mission of the journal, we are reminded of why we endeavored to found *Feminist Spaces* in the first place. First and foremost, as students of the women’s studies curriculum, we understand the essential role that this discipline plays within our university educations, and hope that this journal serves as a space through which students may continue to engage with this principal field of study. Moreover, the people we have encountered throughout our time as women’s studies devotees have helped cultivate our minds and ignite our hearts with the fervent passion that has brought us to this very moment. We therefore dedicate this first issue to the persevering minds working within and for the Women’s Studies program at The University of West Florida, as they have directly impacted our educations and inspired our current efforts toward the welfare of diversity studies in academia. We understand that the great obstacles they endure are by no means easily surmountable, and we are forever grateful for their infinite wisdom and undying encouragements to create, share, and explore the realms made possible by the kinds of critical conversations featured here.

We now invite you to turn the page and discover what lies within and beyond these dynamic and continually growing feminist spaces.

Our very, very best,

Taylor Willbanks and Becca Namniek  
Co-Founders and Editors-in-Chief



## Contributor Biographies

**Elizabeth G. Allen:** Elizabeth G. Allen is a PhD Candidate at the University of Memphis. She focuses on early African American women journalists and editors. Her other areas of study include early African American literature, black women's writing, and women's and gender studies.

**Morgan Arnett:** Morgan Arnett is a resident of Pensacola, Florida and graduated in 2014 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of West Florida. Her focus is primarily painting and printmaking.

**Carly Cocuy:** Carly graduated from the University of West Florida with a BA in English Literature and a minor in Women's Studies. She is currently an English Literature graduate student at UWF.

**Brandyn Heppard:** Brandyn Heppard is an instructor of philosophy at Raritan Valley Community College in New Jersey, as well as a PhD student in philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York City. He lives in Jersey City, New Jersey. His research interests include comedy, feminist studies and phenomenology.

**Sarah James:** Sarah James is in her second year of the masters program in Communication Studies at Colorado State University. She is a graduate teaching assistant for the Introduction to Public Speaking course. Her research interests include the intersections of rhetoric, feminist theory and media. At the moment, she is working on the discussion of sexual violence against women in the military. She currently lives in Fort Collins, Colorado.

### **Katie Manthey & Maria Novotny:**

Katie Manthey is a PhD candidate in Rhetoric and Writing at Michigan State University where she studies cultural rhetorics. Her work sits at the intersections of dress studies, fat studies, and gender studies. She is also interested in community engagement and digital activism.

Maria Novotny is a PhD student in Rhetoric and Writing at Michigan State University. She studies cultural rhetorics, focusing on rhetorics of motherhood, pregnancy and (in)fertility. Her scholarship circulates around (re)conceiving embodied orientations to the infertile female body by challenging medicalized discourses that attempt to "fix" infertility through reproductive technology treatment.



**Stephanie Metz:** Stephanie Metz is a PhD candidate in the English Department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her primary research interests include nineteenth-century American literature, feminist theory, women writers, American literary naturalism, and the Gothic. She also teaches classes in cinema studies and fairy tales. She is currently working on a dissertation which explores the influence of the Gothic and American literary naturalism on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century American women writers.

**Sarah Miller:** Sarah Miller is pursuing an undergraduate degree in English Creative Writing at the University of West Florida. She was a feminist long before she knew what it was called. She has been writing since she first picked up a pencil. She is incredibly excited, and a little nervous, about entering the business of literature, publishing, and editing.

**Emma Gaalaas Mullaney:** Emma Gaalaas Mullaney, currently a dual-degree PhD Candidate in Women's Studies and Geography at the Pennsylvania State University, conducts research and teaching on the intersections of politics, ecology, livelihood, and social justice. Her dissertation, funded by the National Science Foundation and Society for Women Geographers, is an ethnography of the everyday working relationships between diverse varieties of maize, *campesinos* (peasant farmers), and agricultural scientists and extension agents in Mexico's Central Highlands region. Since 2010, she has also served as a Youth Delegate to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

**Elan Justice Pavlinich:** Elan Justice Pavlinich is a Presidential Doctoral Fellow at the University of South Florida English Department, focusing on cognitive and queer approaches to medieval literature

**Julia Polyck-O'Neill:** Julia Polyck-O'Neill is currently a doctoral student entering her second year in Brock University's Interdisciplinary Humanities program, specializing in Culture and Aesthetics. She holds an MA in Studies in Comparative Literatures and Arts from Brock University and a BFA in Visual Art and English Concentration from the University of Ottawa. She is a doctoral fellow of Editing Modernism in Canada, an international SSHRC-funded project, and a HASTAC scholar; her research focuses on the visual and literary work of Douglas Coupland and its intersections with Vancouver's historic and recent avant-garde literatures and arts.

**Hannah Robb:** Hannah is from Tucson, Arizona and studies Philosophy at the University of Arizona. Her main academic interests are applied ethics, political philosophy, and feminist philosophy. On the UA campus, she is a member of the Wildcat Community for Feminist Advocacy and Young Americans for Liberty.



## **Discovering the Heart of Feminism**

Hannah Robb

Feminism isn't what I thought it was. I was in my professor's office. She was talking to me about the stress of her job and her general frustration with the academic world. She looked at me and said that being a woman in academia, especially a woman in philosophy, is difficult. I remember her words vividly: "The female philosophers who end up succeeding are the women who have learned to act like men." That hit me hard, and stuck with me for a while after. Later on, I realized why. This sentence summed up what I thought feminism was: women who learn to act like their male counterparts in order to gain equal consideration with their male counterparts. It was for that reason that I hadn't been involved in feminism. I'm not good at being aggressive. I'm not even good at being assertive. Whatever "acting like a man" looks like, I knew that I had no business trying. Feminism, or what I thought feminism was, scared me.

Turns out, feminism isn't about learning how to mask femininity in order to blend into patriarchy with ease. I look back two years ago and I'm grateful that my professor and I had that conversation, because it got me thinking for the first time about the social implications of my gender. In theory, my gender shouldn't matter when I consider career paths in academia. However, the reality is that even though it shouldn't, sometimes it does. I've come to realize that as long as I feel pressure to sacrifice parts of my identity as a woman for any reason, including academic success, I am not free.

Feminism is about acknowledging personal power, finding one's voice, having the freedom to be who one wants, and what one wants, without a looming fear of not fitting into a socially constructed idea of what it means to "act like a woman." It's about realizing that sometimes I might not fit into the box I'm allegedly supposed to fit into, and sometimes I will. And both of those things are okay.





I enjoy being a gender and women's studies student for the same reason I enjoy being a philosophy student. Both subjects get me thinking, analyzing, and asking *why*. They inspire me to read, research, wonder to myself and aloud to other people (whether they like it or not). Women's studies inspires me to watch films, documentaries, take classes, and ask more questions, and to *think critically* about what feminism, and womanhood, means for me.



## **Telling Our Stories: Women's Studies and Embodied Rhetorical Subjectivities**

Katie Manthey & Maria Novotny

Katie Manthey is a fat girl.

Maria Novotny is infertile.

We choose to start our piece about why women's studies is important with these statements because they are powerful; these statements contain subjectivities that we, as the authors of this piece, currently embody. The journey of coming to understand and embrace our bodies and how they make meaning in the world has been through feminist rhetorical practice, which we see as part of women's studies. We also see these subjectivities as sites for scholarly work. Through this collaborative, multi-vocal structure, our manifesta embodies how we came to see our work and ourselves as interdisciplinary scholars in women's studies.

**Katie:** My story starts in 2001, when I started dating my now ex-husband. We were young, and together we created our own ideology about acceptable bodies, gender, and beauty. From the beginning, having a “hot wife” who “wasn't fat” was critically important to him. He informed me that if I ever weighed more than 200 pounds, he wouldn't love me anymore. I remember laughing at him—could anyone really be that shallow? At my heaviest in our relationship I was 210 pounds. Today, I am 245 pounds, and we are divorced. For a long time I carried the shame of my body weight both physically and emotionally.

**Maria:** Writing parts of this manifesta, I sit in the room that was to be “the baby's.” We envisioned this mauve-colored room as “the baby's” room, hosting a variety of baby needs – a port-a-bed, bouncer and an endless diaper supply. For four years, we anxiously tried to conceive, but a



desk eventually occupied the space that was previously reserved for a bassinet. Books are now stacked on the desk with a mirror to the right. As I write, I find myself looking up at the mirror wondering how different my life would be if this space were actually the baby's room. Feelings of sadness, frustration, and grief have frequented this space. Now, as I look up and take a break from writing the stories of other infertile women, I envision a new purpose for this space. I see how my infertility has become not just an experience of grief to be set aside from my professional life, but an embodied subjectivity always surfacing within my scholarship.

### **Sites of Women's Studies Scholarship**

As feminist rhetoricians, we draw upon these storied identities to inform our scholarship, viewing the intersections of the personal and the professional as a unique methodological framework that is informed directly from the interdisciplinary field of women's studies. For us, women's studies values the phenomenological experience of being a woman, demanding that we investigate ignored scenes of feminist scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Our decision as graduate students to study fat and (in)fertility as experiences that inform the rhetorical practices of women, presses back against the elite nature of institutions that have traditionally marginalized the scholarship as well as the institutional positioning of women's studies.<sup>2</sup>

Everyday rhetorical practices of fat and (in)fertility are areas of scholarship that have been viewed as "unscholarly."<sup>3</sup> However, as graduate students participating in these communities, we understand that our own ways of knowing are informed from these community experiences. It is from this experiential, embodied knowledge that we find direct support for the argument that feminist rhetorical practices have value and need a space to be further explored in educational institutions. Women's studies provides an institutional space in which we are able to examine how our scholarship and argues against institutional practices that marginalize the assembled experiences of both historical and contemporary women.



### *Methodology Part I: Collaborative Practices*

This conscious decision to embrace our engendered relationship to our professional scholarship has been one fraught with risk, exposing our female orientations to our world as inherent to our professional work. Our refusal to create personal and professional boundaries as female graduate students often leaves us with many unsettling feelings. How will our commitments to the personal be interpreted in the job market? How do we manage the vulnerable feelings of exposing our deeply personal identities to the discipline? How will our students react to a pedagogy informed by personal experience? Sharing these concerns and vulnerabilities with each other has resulted in a surprising camaraderie. Further, it has opened us up to collaboration, a feminist practice of knowledge-making. We view our ways of knowing as dependent upon both our personal and professional experiences, and we realize that achieving a “balance” in the myth of “having it all” in academia is impossible. However, relying upon each other to build systems of support and potential collaborative moments embodies an essence of women’s studies scholarship.

### *Methodology Part II: Sharing of Stories*

If collaboration is part of feminist knowledge-making, a second part of a women’s studies methodology must be attuned to meaning-making. Women’s studies reminds us that practice not only involves a different orientation to how knowledge is made, but also how different meanings influence the knowledge-making. Stories allow for sharing and listening to the meaning-making process. In fact, stories allow us to investigate the phenomenological orientations we all have to certain spaces because, as Ahmed states, “Spaces are not only inhabited by bodies that ‘do things’ but what bodies ‘do’ leads them to inhabit some spaces more than others.”<sup>4</sup> Stories as a methodology then provide a space of agency for individuals to unravel the ways in which female bodies are oriented to inhabit certain spaces by adhering to particular rhetorical practices.<sup>5</sup> Stories are moments to speak back to hegemonic moments that erase the voices of those who fail to conform. For the two of us, women’s studies has opened institutional space to see that the parts of ourselves that hurt—the parts that make us who we fully are—are academic, social, activist, and personal.



Women's studies, through story, gives us the tools and language to understand that the personal is political.

### **Katie's story + women's studies**

The coursework I undertook that was concerned with gender and sexuality proved to be most influential in understanding my own lived experiences as theory. Queer Rhetorics, a graduate class at Michigan State University, taught me that shame is a feeling to be investigated. Women's studies has helped me understand that my body exists in a constant state of flux (calories in, calories out), and in contemporary American culture there is a powerful discourse that declares a "war on fat" and calls my body an "epidemic." How I manage my body and, specifically, how I present it to other people through dress practices including clothing that hides or reveals my flesh, is a feminist rhetorical move. The decisions I make every day are a constant bricolage of my identity: I do things that hide or reveal certain physical parts of myself in order to have an "outside" that matches my "inside" (or at least what I want that to be). I've also learned that I can make a career of looking in and speaking out with other people about body image and size discrimination.

### **Maria's story + women's studies**

It was never my intention to become a feminist rhetorical scholar on (in)fertility. For many years, I thought of my academic life as definitively separate from my personal struggles to conceive. This binary perspective of the personal and the professional all changed, however, through women's studies and queer theory courses. I found in these courses that personal experience is always, and has been, a vital component of women's studies scholarship. As I read and wrote about heteronormative and patriarchal ideology, I continued to draw upon my own experiences in the fertility clinic, desperately relying upon reproductive technology to restore my defective uterus into its "natural" state as a female reproductive being. Through my interactions with women's studies, the division between the personal and the professional eroded. Today my scholarship, influenced by women's studies interdisciplinarity, argues for a theoretical embodied



orientation to (in)fertility which challenges medicalized, heteronormative discourses that offer “fixes” to the experience of infertility. My aim is always to account and make space for the phenomenological orientations to female infertility.

### **Finding Our Allies, Our Work and Ourselves as We Continue the Work of Women’s Studies**

Telling these personal stories and theorizing them in academia is made possible through the discipline of women’s studies. Women’s Studies refuses to ignore new scenes of feminist scholarship that have always, already been available – just previously ignored. As feminist rhetoricians who draw upon interdisciplinary contexts, we see women’s studies as an institutional home that allows for these stories to be told and provides pedagogical techniques for future students to consider the ways in which everyday feminist practices need to be examined and shared. Story and collaboration are simply two of the many pedagogical methods to study feminism. As we prepare to leave our graduate studies and enter the “real world” of institutional work, we are encouraged by the work we have located in women’s studies.

We wonder, however, how we can continue to find our allies in Women’s Studies. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of women’s studies, we understand that locating ourselves, our work, and our allied support can be difficult in new institutional settings, especially as feminist rhetoric scholars. We view this manifesta as a place to begin unearthing this struggle by asking how we can make more visible the telling of our stories and how collaborative listeners can continue to do the work of women’s studies in the often rigid institutional structure of today.



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<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1953).

<sup>2</sup> Judith Allen and Sally Kitch, "Disciplined by Disciplines? The Need for an Interdisciplinary Research Mission in Women's Studies," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 275-299.

<sup>3</sup> Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), n.p.

<sup>4</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 58.

<sup>5</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).



## **Valuing Women Begins in the Classroom**

Sarah James

In a discussion with my students about adopting gender-inclusive language for their speech assignments, such as saying “you all” instead of “you guys,” I found that many of them were resistant, to say the least. Looking around the room, I spotted some students snickering, others bore perplexing countenances, and even one or two drew up a snarl with the deepest revelation of indignation. I may as well have been telling them that UFO’s did, in fact, exist. However, this was an undergraduate course in public speaking. I was in my second semester of being a graduate teaching assistant, and I understood that I must navigate this conversation carefully. It was not my goal to patronize my students – how could I blame them for growing up in a world that accepts patriarchy as a universal truth? On the other hand, I had no intention of sugarcoating this request, nor would I allow them to leave my classroom believing that women’s studies was a dying subject, and that the use of gender-inclusive language was unnecessary. I had a responsibility to my classroom as a teacher, and more importantly, as a feminist, to promote the value of women.

For me, women’s studies is more than equality or social justice; it is the interdisciplinary practice of advocating for the value of women. Our society is littered with examples of the degradation of women. One witnesses a woman walking along a street who is being publically harassed for her appearance, or a young female college student is raped within her first month of what others told her would be the best years of her life; or the female professional finds out she is making less money than her male counterpart. All of these realities seem so far away as a student, but become authentic when they materialize, as they do for many women. Women’s value in our society is no better than it was fifty years ago, but the general public opinion would have us think differently, since women have the right to vote and establish a career. Women’s studies is not about equality; it is the means for our world to change women’s second-class status, and learn that to value a person and truly appreciate them is more meaningful than to treat them as an equal.





The valuation of women is no simple task; accomplishing this goal requires willing participation from all and is best attempted on an educational level to locate proxy and prevent further debasement. Educational institutions must commit to implementing women's studies as an interdisciplinary subject, not just an elective that students can forget about as soon as they leave the classroom. Teachers should expect students to value women in their work, and create a classroom environment that demands respect for all differences. More importantly, all in academia must recognize their privilege and acknowledge the honest moments in their lives in which they propagated the devaluing of women as a means to collaborate. In her work *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde states, "your privilege is not a reason for guilt, it is part of your power, to be used in support of those things you say you believe. Because to absorb without use is the gravest error of privilege."<sup>1</sup> Education is a privilege, but not one to be ashamed of. Instead, it is the job of the educated and those who educate to contribute to the fight to provide future generations with a world in which women are valued.

As I think back to the resistance I faced in promoting women's studies and the value of women in my classroom, I acknowledge that many of the disapproving looks stem from the disbelief in a better world and that many of my students may have felt my request was idealistic. However quixotic my feminist principles may seem given the hegemonic nature of our society, it is still reasonable to believe that women can be properly valued one day. According to Oscar Wilde, "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias."<sup>2</sup> The work of women's studies is unfinished. I imagine a utopia in which women are valued. The progress of feminists must be never ceasing and fully charged in educational pursuits.

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<sup>1</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose* (London: Penguin, 2001).



## **Women's Studies: Secret Society**

Carly Cocuy

I earned my women's studies minor almost completely by accident. As an undergraduate in the English department at the University of West Florida, my coursework included the British Romantics, twentieth century contemporary texts, and Early Modern Literature. It wasn't until I enrolled in courses like gender studies and feminist literary theory that I grew into a passionate student. This is not to say that the canonical works of "The Dead White Men's Society" were not interesting or necessary to my education. On the contrary, I would be lying if I said Shakespeare and Coleridge and Faulkner were insignificant in the development of my academic career. However, I was not generally the type of student to stay after class to continue discussion with my professors or classmates, and I rarely cracked open the recommend readings listed on any syllabus. So you can imagine my surprise when I found myself impatiently waiting for the library to open in order to study the works listed in the bibliography of an article written by a French woman philosopher who had confused, distressed, embarrassed, and emboldened me in less than thirty pages. The density of the theory in her argument and the headache it gave me had gripped me by the ponytail and mentally knocked me around. I loved it. I began to grapple with the presence of women—their voices, their language, their writings—in my other classes. Even more frequently, however, I was troubled by the absence of women and women's voices in certain texts and genres. The "woman question" had formed in my mind without ever having been asked of me.

While enrolled in a Black Women Writers course, our class received a visit from administrator from the Women's Studies department who informed us that: 1) Women's Studies existed at my university, and 2) many of the students enrolled in this class were likely much closer than they realized to earning a minor in women's studies.



After looking over the literature she provided, I realized that I was only two courses from earning this minor. I was equal parts excited and disturbed by this revelation. How was it that something that so intensely garnered my academic and personal interest had escaped my notice? How had I never until now heard of a Women's Studies department at my own institution? I had grown into an empowered and informed woman, student, and feminist, and this was due in part to taking courses as an English major that provided me with the platform to do so. Who knew that these courses were also applicable to an invisible department revolving entirely around woman? Not me.

The following semester, I registered for Introduction to Women's Studies. Our studies were broad and varied: literature written by women; women's presence in media; the sociological gendering of children through "harmless" children's movies and books; women's status as second-class citizens globally, in the United States, and in the home. We also discussed the negative implications of women's oppression on the male psyche. These were not discourses for the promise of a utopian matriarchy wherein women acted out the directives of the S.C.U.M. Manifesto, nor was it The Little Rascal-ette's She-Woman Man Hater's Club that demanded apologies and guilt from the men enrolled in the course. No, this course and this entire program sheds a light on an area of academia that has been relegated to shadows, that has been shuffled from one department to the next and has yet to find a forever home. The department website boasts of its "unique interdisciplinary scope," yet the program's existence at my institution is by no means secure. Women's studies is relevant to the study of psychology, history, economics, literature, politics, philosophy because woman functions in all of these realms as well. Providing Women's Studies with a permanent home on this campus can only serve to affect change in all of the disciplines in which woman is present.



## **gross domestic product: words, thoughts, (apro)curation**

Julia Polyck-O'Neill

My poetry explores the intersections between third wave feminism, critical posthumanist discourse, Canadian feminist avant-garde writings, and a narrative interrogating my own subjectivity as a feminist writer, curator, and doctoral student of culture and aesthetics. A key factor of this creative work is the recombinant aesthetic: the blurring of sources as I borrow from the texts of others, removing the authors' names, and inserting my own poetry throughout as a mode of patriarchal subversion. This form of avant-garde subversion is particularly pertinent in an academic context, wherein the author/author function and rules of citation act as institutional impediments.

Part of the inspiration underlying the exercise of layering my voice between quotations is the desire to locate my voice amongst those of historic and contemporary feminist scholars and artists who likewise sought to locate themselves within a predominantly patriarchal field. Their frustrations emanate from their texts in a way that speaks—continues to speak—to the gendered reality of academe in the twenty-first century, despite the advancements achieved by earlier revolutions. It would be easy to omit my voice from my work entirely, and my poetic practice is a mode of self-assertion, or insertion, that also iterates—without being didactic—an atemporal conversation between feminisms. I am therefore enabled to recuperate a sense of subjectivity amongst the plethora of texts that frequently seem to threaten to overtake my identity, while also affording an empowering sense of collectivity and continuity.

The four poems below speak to this aesthetic, but are my own words.

gross domestic product: words, thoughts, (apro)curation

1.

**it** is 2014 & we are all composites of the texts & images we consume.

wait, i can speak only for myself.

i am a composite of the texts & images i consume.

the world moves so fast.... my world moves so fast

if i don't stop & write thoughts down i soon forget them.

if i don't write life down it washes over me & i can't

measure

my response.

written words:

everything becomes a system

integrated;

thoughts

like



links in a  
chain

life is a feedback loop

micro  
macro  
feminisms  
politics  
poetics  
systems  
theory  
economics  
macro  
micro

is postmodern avant-garde an airy textile woven of pastiche?

i understand my reflection better when i see other people

2.

i'd like to take this moment to apologize for being clumsy with my feminism for blushing when i say the word vagina clitoris for sometimes forgetting to fight the patriarchy for loving foucault derrida fanon deleuze McLuhan soja marx zizek sartre lacan agamben barthes jameson (and I should stop there)

too much

& de beauvoir butler kristeva irigaray luxemburg atwood cixous greer wolf wolf braidotti stein hutchinson berlant (& i admit it's hard to think of more)

not enough not more

i am a classic third wave apologist

& i understand this is how feminism is embodied now?

3.

manifesto

for a twenty-first century

student? scholar who is a woman

who loves art & poetry & sometimes wishes she was a STEM major

so the world would take her seriously even though she (shhh) admits to finding these disciplines boring as fuck

(although) math and science have potential from a philosophical standpoint

&

everything is poetics is poetry

it is important & useful to know



Phyllis Webb

Daphne Marlatt

Denise Levertov

Judith Copithorne

(& HD & Stein et al, of course)

as they remind us how poets (who are women) had to simultaneously fight & blend & find a room of their own & talk about cunts because if they didn't

no one would

they would still be

we would still be

faint green-checked blue

coated

uncertain female

figure(s)

(yes, i was quoting Frank Davey.)

we would still be the silent dancing girls

& i know there are worse fates

my mother tells me there are worse fates

& that there is still room to quietly subvert the patriarchal structures that bind us

but i don't want to be a quiet girl lady chick honey

i need to hear these stories

i know now that my single Women in Literature course

(taught by the wife of the Chair of English at the time; irony? but i am a wife)

is not enough

it's not enough to know that george eliot was a woman

& that mary shelley was (secretly?) more important

to literature than her husband

i need to hear these Canadian stories

these lesser known lesser taught stories

i can't be the only one who needs these stories

i need the stories

& i need the art

i need more than margaret and margaret and alice on my shelf

(although the weight of their narratives has kept me grounded for decades)

& despite how much i need these stories

read these stories

i sense i am preconditioned to prioritize the stories and politics of men because they had the privilege of moving beyond the rote gender battles that permeate the landscape & i read an

article online just yesterday about how women in literature write about

gender & family

while men write about

everything else



this is why we must write about politics accelerationist aesthetics posthumanism continental  
philosophy climate change/global warming mass media  
we must highlight feminist intersectionality  
but we must not be forced to alter our passions

& i see the value in mommy blogs but i do not identify with mommy blogs  
can i still read the mommy blogs  
or will they laugh at me?

i am a wife & i am a student a scholar  
but i consider this a coincidence  
& my bibliographies have a high sperm count (why chromosomes)  
& i am told this is wrong  
& i am told this is the problem with my generation

& yes i have a difficult relationship with my mother  
yes my father was a STEM major with a STEM career

& i realize this is because i don't try hard enough to fight back  
(against whom?)  
& this is why i need daphne marlatt/ana historic  
& i need third wave feminist discourse  
i need narrative to show me  
i need biographies

i don't need scolding

4.  
i didn't see any of this until it was woven together  
i didn't see how we are unified until the words formed a system

words both define and combat alienation

that is how we are avant-garde today  
the avant-garde is affective  
the avant-garde is liminal  
it is a counterhegemonic state that  
the margins breathlines loci  
what are we but failed experiments  
in 12 pt **font**.

holds me together  
hold me together



## **“Will All the Feminists Please Raise Their Hands?”**

Stephanie Metz

Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote that “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman.”<sup>1</sup> The work of women’s studies resides within that metamorphic process of ‘becoming.’ Years later, that process is no less easy. Pondering de Beauvoir’s statement, Caitlin Moran demonstrates the panic induced at the thought of becoming a woman that she realized at a young age: “oh God. I just don’t have a clue. I don’t have a clue how I will ever be a woman.”<sup>2</sup> Unpacking the processes and the actions that constitute gender remains no small task in a time when an often toxic media culture frequently misrepresents or seems utterly unaware of the strides made by feminism.

In a generation of women raised with the concept of girl power, the number of those same women disavowing feminism betrays a severe disconnect between pop cultural notions of empowerment and more substantive measures of progress within the academy and society at large. As a freshman undergraduate in 2005, I encountered this disconnect between stereotypes of women’s studies and the reality of the discipline. In a casual conversation with friends, I mentioned that I considered myself a feminist. My male friends expressed quite a bit of surprise, but other than some mild teasing, no strong objections were made regarding my position. Shortly after, I found myself in a class where we began a discussion of feminist liberation theology. As an entrance into this topic, the class composed a list of what we knew about feminism, which our professor transcribed onto the board at the front of the room. The picture we painted of feminism that day was not flattering: there were mentions of bra-burning, shouting, and man-hating harpies. At this point, the professor asked any feminists in the room to raise their hands. One of my male friends glanced at me pointedly. This was clearly my moment to reveal my true harpy self to my classmates. My introduction to feminism had been minimal up to this point, and I was dismayed by all the negative





conceptions on the board in front of me. My hands stayed still on my desktop. Maybe I wasn't a feminist.

Luckily, in my sophomore year, I took a literature class that incorporated feminist theory and analysis in a way that made women's studies and gender studies crucial tools that helped us, as students, make sense of the literature we were studying. Studying with this literature professor inspired me to go to graduate school and specialize in women writers. To think that women's studies can be so powerful, and also so powerfully misunderstood, demonstrates the continued need for women's studies in universities. The discipline of women's studies extends far beyond the classroom through the transformative work it does in rethinking perceived notions of gender, sex, and sexuality. The recent success of Moran's *How to Be a Woman* demonstrates how hungry the general public still is for feminism and women's studies in their everyday lives. Moran urges her reader to "say 'I am a feminist.' For preference, I would like you to stand on a chair and shout 'I AM A FEMINIST!'—but this is simply because I believe everything is more exciting if you stand on a chair to do it."<sup>3</sup> Having spent several years learning and practicing women's studies, I can proudly raise my hand, stand on a chair, even dance to Lady Gaga, and shout that I am a feminist who believes that we need women's studies in our culture and in our universities.

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- Moran, Caitlin. *How to Be a Woman*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2011. Print.

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<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, trans. Borde, Constance and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 283.

<sup>2</sup> Caitlin Moran, *How to Be a Woman* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Moran, *How to Be a Woman*, 68.



## **Medieval Universities, Postmodern Humanities, and the Feminist Center-Periphery**

Elan Justice Pavlinich

Once upon a time, intellectuals at medieval universities sought seven prominent women. Their names were *Grammar*, *Rhetoric*, *Dialectic*, *Music*, *Arithmetic*, *Geometry*, and *Astronomy*.<sup>1</sup> These daughters of *Philosophy* governed intellectual centers by cultivating curiosity purely for enlightenment. Now, our generation is witnessing the withering of Classics departments, poorly funded Humanities, and the shameful treatment of adjunct faculty.<sup>2</sup>

Despite structures of feminine allegorical authority, medieval universities banned women from higher education until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and North America.<sup>3</sup> In the Middle Ages, women constituted a present absence in that they did not attend universities, yet feminine allegories defined curriculum. These universities privileged feminine ideals represented by the allegorical figures named above who comprised the medieval curriculums *trivium* and *quadrivium*. Medieval institutions commodified the Seven Liberal Arts in feminine form as objects of desire for the all-male students and faculty at the expense of recognizing and recording the realities of actual medieval women.

Today, the current academic crisis involves a similar chronic devaluation of the Humanities, resulting in the dissolution of passion, creativity, and culture, and robbing intellectual pursuits of the human experience. Once again, academic institutions are neglecting the human condition in favor of a profitable ideal by commodifying certain disciplines to the detriment of "other" voices that are suppressed and marginalized. In response, scholars are beginning to reclaim the roles of the medieval allegorical women who undergirded the androcentric narratives that were written by men who labored under their feminine influences. Indeed, women's and gender studies offer a contrast to the dominant ideology that favors objects of study, categorized by reason and commodified by capitalism. Instead,



women's studies indicate the boundlessness of the human experience and the return of passion to upset categories and excite enlightenment.

Accordingly, the place of women in academia is a central issue to the current precarious state of the Humanities. It has been claimed that achieving an ethics of sexual difference is a defining issue of our generation.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, women's and gender studies encourage us, as scholars, to broaden our understanding of texts and temporalities so that the ineffable importance of marginalized voices is both codified and continually echoing and evolving in our hearts and minds. We learn to connect humans to a common understanding that gender is not a defining dichotomy; gender is a source of energy and expression that facilitates our communion across *the enervating dust*.<sup>5</sup> Women's and gender studies therefore resurrect the daughters of *Philosophy* from days of old and put flesh and bone on these feminine sentinels by advancing the lived experiences of marginalized people and connecting them across the boundaries of periodization. Women's studies provide a forum for building bridges, for instance, from issues in our medieval past to the problems that we face today. These perspectives are not irrelevant to contemporary academia; rather, both past and present feminist viewpoints are crucial for academia to succeed.

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<sup>1</sup> William Michael, "The Seven Liberal Arts," *Classical Liberal Arts Academy*, accessed July 3, 2014, <http://www.classicalliberalarts.com/page.cfm/page/239/The-Seven-Liberal-Arts>.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Miller, "Final Classics Major at MSU Gets Diploma," *Lansing State Journal* (May 2, 2014), accessed June 24, 2014, <http://www.lansingstatejournal.com/viewart/20140502/NEWS01/305020075/Final-classics-major-MSU-gets-diploma>; Claudio Sanchez, "The Sad Death of an Adjunct Professor Sparks a Labor Debate," *National Public Radio* (September 22, 2013), accessed June 24, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2013/09/22/224946206/adjunct-professor-dies-destitute-then-sparks-debate>.

<sup>3</sup> Judith M. Bennett, *Medieval Europe: A Short History, 11th Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 180.



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<sup>4</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Mina Loy, "Human Cylinders," *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: New Day Press, 1997).



*"Center-Periphery" Elan Justice Pavlinich*



## **Finding Myself in the Academy**

Elizabeth G. Allen

I never took a Women's Studies class as an undergrad. My alma mater offers a Women's Studies program, though its funding has been severely reduced in recent years. The fact that I lack undergraduate exposure to feminist studies may act as a strike against me, as I am now a teacher of Women's and Gender Studies at that same university. Rest assured, I do have the training. I took women's and gender studies courses as a graduate student, primarily because I learned a valuable lesson: academic conversations about women are not easy to have outside of the Women's Studies classroom. As an undergraduate student, I constantly looked for something from my classes, something more than the academic debates at hand. I later learned that I had been looking for myself. I perused my history textbooks, and I poured through my literature anthologies. Thank goodness for literature. That's where I found myself. Narratives written by and about women were most accessible to me through my literature classes, so I became an English major. By my junior year, I contemplated taking a women's studies survey; however, there was little room in my schedule for what my advisor deemed an elective. Having taken between fifteen and eighteen hours each semester to keep my scholarship and in order to graduate on time, I was at capacity. It may sound as though I'm making excuses, and perhaps I am. I feel deep shame for failing to take the undergraduate courses available to me, especially now that I see how fortunate I was to have had the opportunity.

Once my undergraduate career wrapped up, I realized what I was missing: a real, meaningful chance to spend at least four months reading and writing about the things that I had been able to investigate for only one week or through one assignment, in my other classes. My graduate career was much different. I took all the women's and gender studies courses that were available to me. I took classes specific to reading and writing about women's lives and experiences. I took these courses because I was searching and because I was angry. I was angry that it was so difficult to



have academic conversations about women, sexism, misogyny, and gender in an institutional setting that lauded itself for progressive, creative thinking and intellectual freedom. Frustrated with glossed-over and dated interrogations of feminism, I aggressively sought to revise these practices in my graduate work. In my graduate courses, I found that not only were conversations about women easier to find, but so were discussions regarding race, class, and sexuality. My women's studies courses were, by far, the most challenging and meaningful classes of my education. In these classes, I could explore all of my questions, all of my frustrations, all of my experiences, and most importantly, myself. I finally found myself in the academy. I did not need to scour the literary anthologies anymore.

As I revise and adjust the syllabus for the women's and gender studies survey that I will teach this semester, I realize how fortunate it is that these programs exist. What if I had not found a place for *me* in the academy? Would I have moved into a different profession? What if the many students that will find their stories and spaces in women's studies classes at other universities did not have access to these programs? What silences would persevere? What gaps would be unfilled? Unfortunately, where there are no women's studies programs, we know exactly how these silences and gaps persist. The academy consists of many spaces, mostly occupied by the white, patriarchal norms that dominate virtually everything else. Women's Studies programs create alternate spaces—spaces where students and teachers, like me, can explore what has been kept silent. Women's studies courses may be relegated to electives in many advising offices in campuses across America, but the radical and impactful activist nature of Women's Studies programs is undeniable. As long as women studies exists in our universities, our students can avail themselves of these crucial programs, and they will be changed by what they learn and experience in these alternate spaces.



## **Feminist Spaces: Incubators of Freedom**

Brandyn Heppard

Many students still seek to enter feminist classrooms because they continue to believe that there, more than in any other place in the academy, they will have an opportunity to experience education as the practice of freedom.

-bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

In spring 2013, I had the opportunity to teach at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women in New Jersey. Raritan Valley Community College had recently joined with other New Jersey colleges and universities to create NJ-S.T.E.P. (Scholastic and Transformative Education in Prisons), which offers A.A. and B.A. degree programs for students inside. I leapt at the opportunity not only to teach in a prison, but to teach feminist philosophy inside. It was in that classroom that the words of legendary author bell hooks came to life for me:

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In the field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress.

This is education as the practice of freedom.<sup>1</sup>

In that classroom, together we took the time to understand our resent situations by learning more about the history, movements, and systems at work, while at the same time imagining new and better futures. “And so we danced our way into the future as comrades and friends bound by all we had learned in class together.”<sup>2</sup>

The following spring I had the opportunity to teach feminist philosophy at a nearby men’s prison. Notwithstanding my transformative experience at Edna Mahan, I still had reservations. I’d never taught feminist philosophy for an all male class, let alone inside. Despite my reservations, perhaps because of them, this experience was equally transformative. In light of my own situation and relative privilege in society, it was a healing experience to address other men who have benefited from patriarchy, despite their



status as inmates. It was liberating to explore how living in a “political system of imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy” has decimated us all.<sup>3</sup> Though the class was exclusively male, it by no means placed men back at the center of the discussion. It remained a feminist space focused on feminist issues, exploring feminist values.

At the end of the semester, the common sentiment shared by all the NJ-STEP professors was that our students inside reminded us why we teach. They gave us an acute sense of purpose: education as the practice of freedom. Although this type of passion and engagement is possible outside of prison and outside the academy, the classroom remains the best incubator of freedom. My experience inside exemplified for me just how feminist spaces are liberated spaces. It reminded me of the childlike joy that learning brings when not reifying and replicating patriarchy. It demonstrated for me how human beings condemned to live behind bars, some with no chance of parole, can experience the feeling of freedom through learning, education, and practice, literally making it the practice of freedom.

I personally experienced the transformative effect that feminist theory and practice can have on individuals, institutions, and programs. Students desire education that does more than inform, but will also *transform* them. This is exactly what they discovered in feminist philosophy. The English word for education is derived from the ancient Greek word “paideumai,” which means to lead out. For the ancient Greeks, the role of education was to make us more ourselves; to lead out what was already within. Today’s “banking model of education,” predicated on the notion that knowledge should simply be deposited in order to be regurgitated upon demand, should more accurately be characterized as seduction because it leads us further away from ourselves. Feminist spaces stand in direct opposition to the seductions of the banking model of education by democratizing the learning process, exploding the notion that the professor is solely responsible for imparting knowledge. “Seeing the classroom always as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community.”<sup>4</sup>

I was also able to witness the humanizing nature of feminist spaces. hooks argues that we cannot enter the struggle as objects only later to attempt the project of recovering our subjectivity. Despite the uphill battle for legitimacy in the traditional academy, “those of us who have been intimately engaged as students or teachers within feminist thinking have always recognized the legitimacy of a pedagogy that dares to subvert the





mind/body split and allow us to be whole in the classroom, and as a consequence wholehearted.”<sup>5</sup> Feminist thought collapses the walls between theory and practice. Accordingly, there is always an implicit ethos to feminist thinking, a necessity to engage human beings as human beings in all of their humanity. My students inside called for no less, creating an inclusive, participatory, and shared environment. Although rendered nearly invisible, students inside are all too human, and often desperate for the recognition of their humanity. In this way, their desires are no different from those of traditional students on campus. Yet, it was in this space, locked away by the full force of patriarchal society, where these students were able to reclaim much of their humanity, even if it was only for a short time.

When asked by students inside why I teach feminist philosophy, I expressed my belief that within the academy Women’s Studies is the discipline most centrally concerned with the old American pledge of “liberty and justice for all.” From that moment on, we were equally eager to ask questions alongside one another and struggle in solidarity for answers. We now find our world in a moment of crisis. The academy is not immune. Within the set of conditions that constitute the interlocking nature of patriarchy, the academy takes on a certain mode of being that it otherwise would not within a different set of relations. Patriarchy is insidious, multifaceted, and specializes in reproducing itself. It suffers small defeats and lays in wait to co-opt the next movement, the next leader, the next revolution. Yet the academy supports spaces of learning “where paradise can be created.” The academy is one of the safest spaces to do the important work of understanding oppression, while also working towards its elimination. Women’s studies plays a vital role in the struggle for liberation from patriarchy, without which, the academy remains only a field of possibility, while in actuality continuing to be a plantation for replicating patriarchy in all its ingloriousness.

Feminist spaces are not only centrally concerned with social justice, but as bell hooks argues, “there has been no movement for social justice in our society that has been as self-critical as feminist movement.”<sup>6</sup> Being self-critical is the most important aspect of any progressive movement, thought, or space. The self-critical nature of feminist thought makes it responsive to the criticisms and wisdom of traditionally subjugated knowledge. Such responsiveness allows for more critical engagement and more accurate analysis. The self-critical nature of feminist movement is what has necessitated its inclusiveness, thus having many voices, many



faces, many waves, and counter waves. It certainly gave insight and voice to these students inside.

I learned far more from my students inside than they learned from me. “Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process.”<sup>7</sup> Teaching feminist philosophy inside provided us the opportunity to experience education as the practice of freedom, a practice that is not only possible in prison but throughout the academy, and beyond. Women’s studies engender feminist habitats, which serve as incubators of freedom, cultivating a spirit of resistance and liberation from within, including spaces that emerge from the darkest, most forgotten depths of patriarchy.

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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>3</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 14.

<sup>4</sup> hooks, *Teaching*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>6</sup> hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> hooks, *Teaching*, 9.



## My Earliest Memories

Sarah Miller

My earliest memories are stitched with floral patterned dresses and uncomfortable shoes. I remember the sting of my scarlet scalp as my mother twisted my hair into braids, pigtails, buns, ponytails, poking my back to make me stand straighter, hissing in my ear to *stop crying*; my eyes are all red. I remember my brother asking me why I walked so strangely, and being too embarrassed to admit that I was sucking in my stomach and pushing out my chest in a vain attempt to resemble the curvaceous women on television. Never mind the fact that I was nine years old and already petrified of my own body. I remember lying in the top bunk above my little sister, entombed in Cinderella bed sheets, staring up at the popcorn ceiling and picturing Prince Charming in the mortar constellations. He was always hovering just above me, and when I slept I tossed and turned. Never mind that I had nightmares about him, in which he swooped down upon me and swept me away to a dark, musty castle and made me his slave.

I remember my mother kneeling over my skinned knees and urging me to wear itchy pantyhose to disguise my flaws from the church congregation. Meanwhile, my brother hurled stones at the fence and tore his toys apart under the impassive eye of my father. When I was twelve, I sat on the bathroom counter and cried, begging to know why I had hair on my legs, my arms, my face. *Why am I ugly, Mommy? Why don't I look like the girl in the commercial? What is wrong with me?* She sent me back to my room, reminding me that *nobody else cares half as much about the way you look as you do*. Never mind that the boys and girls at school had already noticed, had already designated me as the next best toy. Never mind that I already blamed myself. There are so few photographs of me at that age, but the elusive girl in those pictures is not ugly. She is scared.

I watched my father loom over my mother, listened to him slice at her with his words, always shepherding her into a barbed-wire fence. She was



always at home, always the one who made my tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches. I developed the insidious understanding that the woman is meant to be soft, pretty, and caged. Never mind that in my teenage years I sought a boy who would cut me thin and crush me. Never mind that I found Prince Charming, again and again and again. I spent every day of those years despising myself, worshiping the boys who held my wrist and not my hand, who forced me into bed and into silence. With every inch I have physically grown, I have atrophied tenfold inside. By age twenty I had become a withered slip of a human, already resigned to the aching, incompleteness of my being. At a glance, I was pretty enough. I had finally come to resemble the women on television. But I was trapped, suffocating between my top-bunk princess sheets and the man in the close, spackled ceiling. There is no room to move, to sit, to stand, to grow.

Today, I am still inching my way out. I am waking up, squeezing my fingers and toes and regaining what little mobility I can. I am trying desperately to see myself in the stars.

You ask me why women's studies is important. You question the necessity of a thing we have supposedly outgrown. *But women can vote! Women have rights! Feminism is outdated!* But we are not even fully awake yet. We, as a collective, have yet to address the sneaking tendrils of oppression that infiltrate our politics, our schools, and our homes. A little girl is not so much a human as a canvas, a prop to decorate with flowers and ribbons and paint. A woman is not so much a human but a shapely coat rack upon which to hang domestic responsibilities, or a polished mirror to reflect Prince Charming. Why do all of our princesses look the same? Why are we forced into the same silhouette, that sexualized wasp-waisted, full-chested, long-haired prototype? Little girls are shoved into corners, into spotlights, under tables, into closets, and why? Where exactly lies the sickness that drives our men to manipulate and destroy our women? How do we identify the disease when it is disguised and marketed as the ideal of perfect health? When will we stop telling our little girls to hide themselves, to fear their bodies, to blindly walk that neurotic line between *aesthetically pleasing to the male eye* and *demonic whore temptress who drives the man to violence*? When will a woman's intellect finally achieve the same



emphasis as her physical appearance? When will a little girl be praised for the strength of her convictions rather than the sweetness of her smile? For how much longer will we continue to show her that she has a greater chance of dying at the hands of the man she worships than earning a wage equal to his? When will we stop telling a battered teenage girl to cover her bruises and make herself pretty for the next man who will break her bones and steal her innocence? How many more little girls have to starve themselves to death, cry themselves to sleep, debase themselves to slavery, and resign themselves to misery before we finally address the origins of these plagues?

You ask me why women's studies is necessary. I have more questions than answers.



## **I, Feminista(s): A Testimonio of Collective Counterpolitics**

Emma Gaalaas Mullaney

In this essay, I draw on three intimate moments in my life as a feminist academic to explore the precarious yet powerful position of the graduate student in the politics of knowledge production. Our institutions may continue to generate profits and power from our devaluation, but through groups of solidarity and support we perform a protest, a collective counterpolitic. Feminist ways of knowing and being lend political leverage to our efforts to empower our students, protect and challenge each other, and radically reimagine our inherited forms of oppression. The following are brief glimpses into my lived experience of Women's Studies.

*The student whom I'll call Elaine approached me after class, waiting in the back until all the others had left, and began to ask a logistical question about how best to structure her essay.<sup>1</sup> I had been very impressed with a few of my students' papers submitted for our in-class debate on the politics of natural gas extraction in the Marcellus Shale, and had encouraged these students to consider revising their essays as op-ed pieces and sending them to local newspapers. Elaine's work in particular stood out for the passion and lucidity with which she explored questions of livelihood, regulation, and environmental justice on the Marcellus Shale. I knew already how important these issues were to her. Elaine, who grew up in northwestern Pennsylvania, lived with her husband and three young children near a drilling site. Over the course of the semester, we had worked closely together to accommodate occasional childcare emergencies, and had discussed at some length the compounding economic and environmental uncertainties threatening her family and neighbors. Returning to school at almost twice the age of my other undergraduates was part of Elaine's stand against these looming threats, and she tackled the work with gusto. As she began asking her question, about how a journalistic article might differ in structure from an academic debate piece, Elaine stopped abruptly in mid-sentence. She*



*broke into sobs. It was startling for her, this confirmation that someone else thought she had something immensely worthwhile to say.*

We are dedicated to making social space that affirms the value of those who are constantly told they are worthless. Feminist theories and practices work to make visible the structural exclusion and exploitation of bodies according to violent logics of difference. They are tools, honed by many well-worn hands, with which to crack open institutions of privilege and impunity.

*I couldn't breathe. The blood was pounding in my ears. Here I was, sitting in a chair, on solid ground, surrounded by oxygen, and I was drowning. Trying to calculate how I was possibly going to get my reading done for seminar tomorrow in time to take care of him tonight. I had an elaborate dinner planned: a way to rescue the massive amounts of habanero chiles he'd bought on impulse last week. Maybe, if my delicious hot sauce brought back happy memories, he wouldn't be so mad. Maybe, if we spent all evening cooking together, he wouldn't have as much time to drink. Maybe, just maybe, if I worked hard enough, if my plan was good enough, I would feel safe tonight. Through rising panic, I could hear my fellow grad students arguing over Spivak's approach to Marxism, and the abstract conversation felt like fresh air hitting my lungs. This was work I was good at, that was good for me. That was for me. I didn't feel safe that night, I couldn't breathe easy yet, but I did see a way out. And that changed everything.*

We resist the Othering of those in need of transformation. The target beneficiaries of feminist interventions are, in many ways, ourselves. Our work is a collective counterpolitic of self-determination, of self-valorization, of self-reflection. We are part of a long history of radical transformation that does not begin or end within academia. We draw humility, strength, and guiding inspiration from those who have fought against domination before us. We learn from the many different struggles that collide to destabilize the meaning of feminism, and illuminate new ways out of deep and dangerous trenches.



*Though we were sitting in an air-conditioned conference room in Hyderabad in 2012, our conversation had the feel of 18<sup>th</sup> century England. I had the creeping sensation that the voice of Reverend Thomas Malthus was speaking through the mouths of these women and men representing delegate countries from around the world at this, the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. Our debate over protected conservation areas in East Africa had turned on the evocation of the latest best-selling neo-environmental determinist explanation for why it makes total sense that we continue to live in a world where some have so much and others have so little. And, just like that the cause of genocide, was women's uncontrolled reproductive rates, and the solution to resource scarcity was a combination of recolonization and human sacrifice. The onslaught of racist, misogynistic prescriptions was fierce, but I had come prepared with evocations of my own: Njoki Wane, Ida B. Wells, bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Mia McKenzie, Geraldine Pratt, Cherríe Moraga, Katherine McKittrick, Sandra Harding, Karen Mildred Gregerson. I have an anti-colonial army of feminists at my back.*

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms and some identifying information has been altered to protect those featured in the narratives.





### **Call for Critical Reviews**

*Feminist Spaces* is seeking reviews of various textual modes in its next issue, to be released March 2015. These reviews may address books, films, musical numbers, etc., that contend with women's studies, investigate a critical issue surrounding feminism, or demonstrate the pervasiveness of oppressive ideology within social, political, or cultural spheres.

If you are interested in composing a review, please contact Managing Editor, Rachel Johnson, at [feministspacesjournal@gmail.com](mailto:feministspacesjournal@gmail.com) for more information.

