Welcome to the Spring 2012 edition of the Gender and Sexuality Center newsletter! This is our second issue of LUMINARIA, a publication meant to illuminate women’s experiences at The University of Texas at Austin. Women’s communities at the university are rich and diverse, and this newsletter offers one space to bring those voices together. For this issue, we asked students from across campus to submit art, creative writing, essays, and projects that spoke to how gender plays a part in their everyday lives. We hope that their contributions inspire you to think about what gender looks like to student life at UT. Want to see your name in print? Our next issue will feature the people, movements, and ideas that inspire women on campus. Submit 100 to 500 words or a piece of artwork about your inspiration!

For more information, email us at: gsc@austin.utexas.edu

Untitled
Anonymous

As I begin to write, I have to wonder: What is a woman’s experience? Is it something that only women can have, or can men have women’s experiences and women have men’s experiences? When I walk down the street and see male construction workers ogling the female students passing by that might be eating a banana or licking ice cream cones, I have to wonder if what I am seeing happens to many women and if that is considered a woman’s experience of being objectified by men. But then I think of women who objectify men and I am further confused by how objectification is solely a woman’s experience. Then in making that point the question arises, what makes a woman a woman according to society? My point is that experiences are all relative to the one having them, so we should not make them gendered. By categorizing experiences based on gender, we are reinforcing the gender binary. If someone does not identify as a woman, but somebody considers them as such, do they then have women’s experiences? I do not identify as a woman at all, but I have what society would call a female body. When I walk down the street dressed as I feel comfortable, I suddenly feel like everyone is staring at me and I feel like people are judging me and whispering about me, saying I am strange. I am afraid when I cross the street that a person in their car will see me for who I am, hate it, and run their car over me. I fear that when walking at night, I might get attacked or “corrective-raped” by a stranger that doesn’t like what they see. These are very real fears for anyone of any identity. I am seen as: woman, girl, female, she, her. But that’s not who I am. I’m just me. I’m genderless, I’m both genders, I’m gender variant, I’m human. This is just something to think about.

Untitled
Anonymous

Perched in the barbershop, I threw Lone Star down a thirsty throat and stared at magazine pages, glossy 10-ks and countertops. I will never have. Photo shoots of manicured queers in their kitchens, high-focus portraits backdropped by anonymous hordes of smugly white and white-toothed lesbian lovers. It all feels like the tripwire that runs between myself and any community. I sit and wait for my haircut, short but not butch, shorn but no signifier. Men to either side, Texans on the streets. I want to queerly speak with lips that open.
Bloodstream  
Zachary Carter

I’m tempted to write out a list of things I want. Maybe wishes would be better way to describe this imaginary list. Maybe this isn’t really about me at all. I should first say I make a lot of jokes about privilege. They’re usually over the top, purposely ridiculous. Many parts of privilege seem too large to try and tackle, to even talk about. I have a hard time explaining to everyone that there’s privilege everywhere. How can I really explain how thoroughly I understand that the world was only created for wealthy, white, heterosexual cisgender men? Not really sure if I can.

I want these words to have a vulnerable tone. One of my fears is sounding like I already know everything. I live to learn, buying books every second to create a lifespan library. The word feminist lives between my ribs, in my bloodstream, allows me to relax my shoulders. I want people to understand what it really means. Feminism is not just about the equality of men and women, as I’d once described it. It isn’t about visibility. It’s about our world’s infrastructure. It’s about equality through acknowledged differences.

I can’t remember exactly where I first heard that. Someone in a class discussion said, “F--- equality. We have to have equal respect and acknowledgement for our differences.” Something like that. And while it’s a simple group of words, it’s incredibly true. Equality seems to often imply sameness. My experiences aren’t equal to and aren’t the same as those of anyone. I see all of our connections though. I see the intersectionality. I try to imagine what the space I inhabit would look like if it weren’t as large as it is. While I don’t have privilege in every space, I have a lot of it.

My space shrinks when I notice that literature on the lives of straight people are in bookstore sections like, RELATIONSHIPS, SEX, LIFE SKILLS. Queer people are nestled inside SOCIOLOGY – GAY & LESBIAN STUDIES, WOMEN’S STUDIES. Is that where we all belong? We f---, we fight, we misunderstand, we reconnect.

Then the way I notice things changes even more. When outside the academic world, I say womyn because they are their own entities without men. I want to tear down all the gendered advertising and all of the silly rules wallpa-pering the world.

At a recent event, a member of our student government spoke of young womyn in action. She talked about the difficulty of waking up early enough every morning to shave her legs, to style her hair, to put on her face. I suppose I’m curious as to how many womyn relate to this created image. While listening to her talk about what I perceive to be a specific type of womyn, I wonder how many of those listening would prefer a more universal idea of womynhood. The student government member spoke of how important it is for womyn to be in action, to support one another, and to listen carefully. Since she offered no specific examples, I’m interested in understanding what kind of action she’s speaking of, and what that action looks like.

Isn’t it harder to wake up every morning and reemphasize the rules of womynhood? To box in all of the female-identified people walking around with long to do lists and real thoughts in their heads? I can’t answer these questions because it isn’t my place to, but I have to ask them. Actually, I feel this unending pulse traveling from my chest to my fingertips back up through my body. It’s such an obvious thing that I actually want to scream something about leaving everyone alone. Something about letting people make up their own rules, something about womynhood lasting forever.

I’m A Lady, Got My Mind Made Up  
Spencer Mainka

“Ladies and gentleman, please clear all materials from your desk so the test can begin”, “Have you heard Lady Gaga’s new song??”, “The Littlefield Ladybugs”, “the ladies’ room can be found around the corner”, and sing-alongs to Santogold’s I’m a Lady “And I like sometimes to wave it high, up where everyone can see—I’m a lady, got my mind made up....”

I would guess that most women (and men) on the UT Austin campus have heard one, if not all, of these phrases while in class, walking to that class, eating lunch, riding the Forty Acres bus, or chatting with friends. Maybe they
have even uttered these words, more specifically that word—lady. So what’s the deal, why the word lady?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word lady as “The female head of a household; A honorific title… as an added mark of respect”, implying a women with influence and capability, a women who demands respect. For example, in royalty the daughters of dukes, marquesses, and earls are given the title Lady. Additionally, the wives of knights and barons are referred to as ladies out of courtesy. Although this definition of lady is often dependent upon her husband’s status, a woman is recognized as having influence and being capable—lady as an epithet for power.

This is the University of Texas; we attend a university in a very southern state. Southern states, like with politics, accents, and barbecue, skews the definition of lady. The South uses the word lady to age a female, making her around the age of teenager—you may have heard someone referred to as a “young lady”. Additionally, lady is used in the South to deem a woman as having manners, she’s polite, says ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, and crosses her legs at the ankle. This ideal of the true, southern lady is inconsistent with the numerous modern ideals of womanhood and excludes many female identified people who would maybe like to use the word lady to describe themselves.

On the flipside of the first definition, lady could denote a woman as being from a lower class. In the 19th and early 20th century, women was the preferred term when referring to females from a higher social and financial background; lady was saved for the lower class. It’s because of this that we nowadays have the ironic use of lady, for instance in the moniker “lady of the night” for a prostitute.

It’s the irony found in this final definition of lady that draws me to the word most. If lady can be used paradoxically with class and status, then why can’t it be used in opposition to other female stereotypes? I identify as a lady, as well as a female and a woman, but there’s something about reclaiming the word lady and shattering the stereotypes associated with it that I can’t help but identify with. I’m a lady and I got my mind made up.
What Makes a Woman?
Shane Whalley

Some people may think this is a simple question. I would like to complicate it.

Is it about bodies and biology? Is being a woman about qualities and characteristics? Is it a combination? Who gets to decide?

Let’s break the questions down one by one.

One’s genitals, chromosomes and hormones are the legal definition of being female. What the doctor marks on a person’s birth certificate is their legal sex. It is not always accurate, even based biology. In most instances members of society want to make the legal definition of one’s sex concrete and unchangeable. So legally changing one’s sex is expensive and difficult.

What makes a woman in terms of qualities and characteristic is tricky. It seems like there are gender rulebooks for both men and women and we are given the one that matches our biological sex at birth. The “Girl/Woman/Lady” rulebook starts with the rule: girl babies are wrapped in pink and goes on from there. Girls are given new rules every day. Some of those rules might fit and some might not.

So what happens to the person who is given the “Girl/Woman/Lady” rulebook as a child and most of the rules don’t fit? How many rules can a woman break and still be considered a woman? What if the rules in the “Boy/Man/Gentleman” rulebook feel more comfortable? What if the rules the person wants to break are the ones about what a woman is suppose to look like? What if they want to dress more like a man? What if they don’t like make-up, dresses and glamour? Can they still be considered a woman? Is there a line? Who gets to decide when it has been crossed?

Then there is the other side. What if someone who was given the “Boy/Man/Gentleman” rulebook and likes the “Girl/Woman/Lady” rulebook more? Is there a way for that person to be seen as a woman? How many of the “Woman” rules does that person need to follow?

What if we gave people the room to be the gender that they want to be? What if our bodies didn’t determine our gender? What if we could choose the rules that we liked and didn’t like? That being a woman and what that looked like could be self-defined and not policed by others.

What makes a woman: a person’s self-definition and authentic experience.

Figure/Figurine
Alex Messenger

With this series of ceramic figurines, I wanted to expand the meaning of this concept called “womanhood” through the examination of gender. How are bodies gendered at first glance? How can those processes be called into question in the viewer? By covering body, I hope to call attention to how gender is assigned to people’s bodies and how the possibilities are in fact very rich and unlimited. We should not make assumptions about not just women’s bodies but all people’s bodies and genders based on assumptions of what may or may not be underneath the cloth.

**Figurine #1, Raku fired porcelain, 2011**
Pale green cloth covering body with its light-skinned legs sitting on a white bench; the right leg is severed below the knee.

**Figurine #2, Raku fired porcelain, 2011**
Light-skinned torso laying on pale yellow cloth with arched back; legs and head are covered with pale pink cloths.
Figurine #3, Raku fired porcelain, 2011
Light-skinned figure kneeling with head between pair of light-skinned legs with pale purple cloth covering both figures.

Figurine #4, Raku fired porcelain, 2011
Legs sitting on a cloth-covered bench; right leg is bent under with left leg hanging down; sculpture is cream-white with black cracks.

BOOK REVIEW:
Unbearable Weight by Susan Bordo
Katherine Charek Briggs

In Leslie Heywood’s introduction to the tenth edition of Susan Bordo’s Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body, she describes the personal ties to the book that so many female scholars felt at its first publication in 1993: the return of their “passionate connection” (x) to theory and community with fellow women who finally felt understood, which is just how it impacted me 15 years later. In the interim, Unbearable Weight became a foundational text of the field of body studies and continues to have an interdisciplinary impact on feminist politics of the body.

The cover of Unbearable Weight features shades of purple and the Picasso painting, Nu Assis, étude pour les Demoiselles d’Avignon.

Bordo’s central research question addresses how contemporary Western society constructs and embodies the female body by looking at women’s relationships to food, eating, and self-discipline as represented in cultural and media artifacts. Through her three main sections, “Discourses and Conceptions of the Body,” “The Slender Body and Other Cultural Forms,” and “Postmodern Bodies,” Bordo’s main argument evolves, ultimately leaving us with a firm grasp on how modern culture introduces, standardizes, and normalizes women’s disordered and obsessive relationships with their bodies.

In building these claims, Bordo takes a mixed-method approach that uses feminist theory to conduct close textual and discourse analyses, largely of print and television advertisements, alongside stories of her own personal experiences. Her writing is very clear and accessible to scholars from any discipline, as well as any engaged reader with an interest in the material. This text is appropriate for graduate or undergraduate students; at least two of my classes at UT have assigned this text, either as an introduction to body studies or for engaging more deeply with ideas of dominant ideology and the culturally female body.

With assertions about the conspiracy of cultural pressures, Bordo makes a clear intervention into what was a conversation on the pathologizing of the individual woman’s relationship with eating disorders, her own body, and the representations of bodies in the popular media. This alone is a significant contribution to the field and is still relevant today in scholarship and to students in particular: several organizations at UT offer counseling, programs, or informational campaigns on body image and media criticism that are the action components to Bordo’s original theory.

The intellectual and social stakes of Unbearable Weight have proven to be very high over the past 18 years of scholarship that has built on Bordo’s premises of the heavy consequences and indications of popular cultural images on women’s embodiment. The growing divide between third-wave feminist activism and postfeminist popular culture was already in motion in 1993, but the face of body studies would have been definitively different, and likely shown less conviction, had Unbearable Weight not kickstarted what is an increasingly urgent field of inquiry.
Upcoming Events - SPRING 2012

FEBRUARY

Friday, February 3
• Gender Exploration Workshop, Gender and Sexuality Center, SAC 2.112, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 8
• GSC Speaker Series: Nayan Shah. Shah teaches history, ethnic studies and lgbt studies at the University of California San Diego. He is the author of *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (California: 2001) and *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (California: 2011). His presentation explores intimacies between global migrants and examines the intersections between capitalism, U.S. and Canada’s treatment of immigrants, sexual citizenship and race in the early 20th century. 3:30 – 5 p.m., GAR 1.102. Co-sponsorship with CAAS.

Friday, February 10
• The First Annual Gloria Anzaldua Luncheon, featuring Cherrie Moraga. Student Activities Center (SAC) Ballroom, noon. Co-sponsorship with QPOCA.
• Opening reception for "A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness," an exhibit of work by Celia Herrera Rodriguez, 7 p.m., Benson Library.

Saturday, February 11
• Staged reading of play by Cherrie Moraga, 2 p.m., Mexican American Cultural Center.
For more information: [www.proartsaustin.org](http://www.proartsaustin.org)

Monday, February 13
• Gender Exploration Group, beginning February 13 and running through April 9, Gender Sexuality Center, SAC 2.112, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Wednesday, February 29
• Open Training: Transgender Awareness 101, Student Activity Center, SAC 2.120, noon to 1:30 p.m.

MARCH

Monday, March 19
• Open Training: Bisexuality Awareness 101, Student Activity Center, SAC 2.120, noon to 1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 29 and Friday, March 30
• "(Dis)locating Justice: Emerging Scholarship in Women’s and Gender Studies", Student Activity Center. Registration opens end of January. Sponsored by the Center for Women's and Gender Studies. For more information: [http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/cwgs/events/conferences/Student.php](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/cwgs/events/conferences/Student.php)

Friday, March 30 and Saturday, March 31
• Feminist Action Project conference, School of Social Work, more info at: [http://feministactionproject.blogspot.com/](http://feministactionproject.blogspot.com/)
• Women’s Resource Agency production of *The Vagina Monologues*, time TBA, Student Activity Center (SAC) Auditorium.

Friday, March 30 — Sunday, April 1
• *The Vagina Monologues*, produced by the Women’s Resource Agency, Recreational Sports Center, 8 p.m.

APRIL

• Final performance of Peers for Pride. Time and location TBA.

Tuesday, April 3
• Open Ally Workshop, SAC 2.120, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

MAY

Wednesday, May 16
• Lavender Graduation, Student Activity Center (SAC) Ballroom, 4 p.m.
Register at: [http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/gsc](http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/gsc)