Who Made Me, Who Made You, idk

by

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Research

My work concentrates on gender roles in society. My argument branches off from some Judith Butler's idea in her book *Gender Trouble*[1]. Judith Butler is an American philosopher and gender theorist whose work has influenced the way we think about gender today. In *Gender Trouble*, she questions the essentialized relationship between sex, being the anatomy, and gender,

asserting that they are a socially constructed performance. The performance of gender is an unconscious choice based on anticipated ideas of gender, and marked repetitive behaviors. The exhibition of gender is a social and semiotic performance rather than a natural expression of something innate.

Humans are animals who adapt and evolve. Throughout the world, the majority of cultures are patriarchies. A patriarchy is a social system in which men hold power in the social, political, and economical aspects. With gender being a performance and not a natural behavior, male dominance suppresses female's natural behaviors and desires, but while time passes, females' human natures are surfacing. Through my work, I discuss how the performance of being a female has evolved to be superior to the males', but also acknowledging anyone can perform a female just like anyone can be a male, but that is not the goal.

Gender Trouble[1], one of Judith Butler's most known books, talks about how nobody is a gender from the start. She denies the ideas of sex and gender and says we are born with a particular anatomy, and gender exists on top of this. Butler explains when we are born, we are already determined by gender, and that society and culture shape our behaviors and interactions.

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[1]Butler,J. (2007), Gender trouble.

She wants to destroy the idea of sex in defense of the pre-gendered person characterized by freedom, which would give endless possibilities to the self. The concept of the self is to free people of generalizations, avoiding replication of this society and its "normalizations" which usage of nature as a back-up is inappropriate. With these ideas in mind, I started wondering about the roots of patriarchy.

Christopher Ryan, an American author who studies the prehistoric roots of human sexuality, had a TedTalk in 2013. *Are We Designed to be Sexual Omnivores?*[2] Talks about how agriculture brought this whole idea of males being the providers, and in return, females give sexual fidelity. Agriculture has a sense of egalitarianism to some degree. But agriculture only started ten-thousand years ago, which is only 5% of our time on this planet, so how could this be part of our nature? And how were we before ten-thousand years ago? He denies these roles are part of our nature and says humans were rather promiscuous, and that monogamy and gender roles only came with agriculture. Women became the ones who make the food, care for children, care for the home, and stayed in for most of the time; meanwhile, men being stronger than women worked outside of the home, bringing food and protection to women. When settling down, patrilocal residence played a role in the making of patriarchy. A patrilocal residence is a social system in which a married couple starts living near the husband's relatives. Men stayed in their known territory and had their back-up system, which gave them confidence and power. While women leave their families and move in with the man who provides for them. Also, properties were passed down the male line leaving women powerless and defenseless, which little by little deteriorated female autonomy.

[2] Ryan, Christopher. “Are We Designed to Be Sexual Omnivores?” TED.

"All that we can surmise of humankind's genetic history argues for a more liberal sexual morality, in which sexual practices are to be regarded first as bonding devices and only second as a means of procreation"

-E.O.Wilson[3]

"...Liberal sexual morality" monogamy is a decision made by many humans, but it is not in our nature. The sole fact monogamy is not in human nature, but it is practiced around the globe, shows how much society controls people's lives. We let society guide our sexual and social relations by associating shame with the matter. Men are the physically stronger ones, the ones in power, the ones who make the rules, and for centuries they've been the ones who get an education, the knowledge. Knowledge is power, power men knew they had while leaving women in the dark. Women are suppressed and ashamed of their needs by society, religion, and men. Not too long ago, women were forced to get married, satisfy men, and give them a family; basically, sex became about men and procreation, but men also had to prove they were worth it.

In a patriarchal society, women are the ones who benefit the least. However, a study made in Ireland about suicide prevention[4], shows men are also negatively affected by patriarchy and its gender roles. This study shows men are more likely to commit suicide than women, because they restrained themselves from seeking help when under phycological distress as this could compromise their masculinity. Men were supposed to be the ones "who hustle, who push, who have power, who achieve the prize of sexual access,[5]" and all of these things made them feel entitled to do what they wanted with women. To back-up all this, men, the ones with the

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[3] Ryan, Christopher. “Are We Designed to Be Sexual Omnivores?” TED.
[4] Keohane, Aisling, and Noel Richardson. “Negotiating Gender Norms to Support Men in Psychological Distress.” *American Journal of Men’s Health* 12, no. 1 (January 2018): 160–171.
[5] Blum, Deborah. *Sex on the Brain : the Biological Differences Between Men and Women* New York: Viking, 1997.

"knowledge," put it on nature, suppressing women's sexual needs and desires by the shame-based on gender and organized by gender.

Shame, the feeling of never being good enough or that something is wrong with you, this feels the same for both genders, but in different ways. For men, it is shameful to be perceived as weak, meanwhile, if a woman is stronger than a man, it is a big deal, something magnificent. Vulnerability is related to shame, as it is "the most accurate measurement of courage," according to Brene Brown in her *Listening to Shame*[6] TedTalk. She also says that vulnerability is the birthplace of creativity, innovation, CHANGE, and that empathy is the antidote for shame. Wilson said, when talking about sexual relationships, procreation should come in second place, but human bonding in first. Men and women have this bonding craving in their nature, this feeling of belonging, desire to connect with one another, need of vulnerability, but this is often denied by men.

A study about the discrepancy between men and women's sexuality by author Peggy Orenstein[7], it is shown that women don't value or pursue their sexual pleasure and that this is because of how they feel about their bodies and the internalized shame they have for themselves. The problem here is that women's sexuality is misunderstood or simply not taken into consideration. For example, the whole idea of shaving to avoid humiliation, some women measure their satisfaction with their partner's pleasure, they think oral sex is less intimate than intercourse, or the plain fact that throughout the 16th to 20th century it was believed that the clitoris was nothing more than a weird deformation[8]. There was, and there still is a vast ignorance when it comes to women's sexuality and body. People think men and women are such

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[6] Brown, Brené. “Listening to Shame.” TED.
[7] Orenstein, Peggy. “What Young Women Believe about Their Own Sexual Pleasure.” TED.
[8] Barmak, Sarah. “The Uncomplicated Truth about Women's Sexuality.” TED.

different species, even opposites, because of their sexual and reproductive organs. If we compare the clitoris with the penis, there are more similarities than differences. The only difference is that most of the penis is outside of the body, and the clitoris is mainly inside. These similarities can be seen here (fig.1).

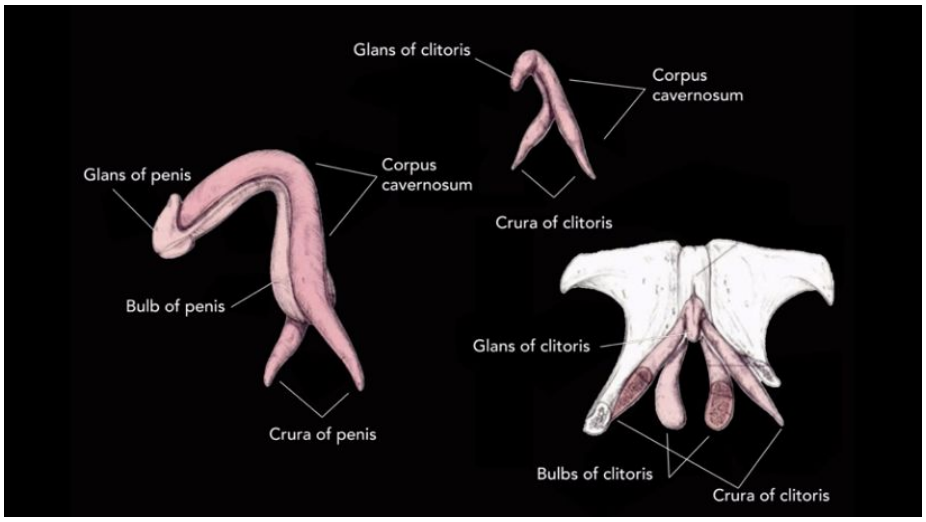


Figure 1. Cliteracy. Salford, Greater Manchester, England. Sophia Wallace. TEDxSalford 2015.[9]

Sophia Wallace is a mixed media artist who works on gendered body knowledge[10]. One of her most well-known works is Cliteracy. For this project, she utilizes and plays around with language and words to explain how important it is to know the human sexual anatomy, women's mainly. "THE HOLE IS NOT THE WHOLE" is one of her quotes, and this is referring to the vagina. The vagina is only the opening, and it ignores the clitoris, which is the actual female sexual organ. The right term to use is barely used when talking about the reproductive and sexual female genitals, the vulva. Wallace also gives the actual meaning of the word vagina, which is a Latin word that means a sword holder. The definition "sword holder," and the exclusion of the

[9] Figure 1. Cliteracy. Salford, Greater Manchester, England. Sophia Wallace. TEDxSalford 2015.

[10] "About." Sophia Wallace. Accessed December 13, 2019.

clitoris as a female sexual organ reduces the female body to be a receptacle, "sword holder." Both the penis and the clitoris have glands, and these glands contain nerves, 8000 for the clitoris, 3000 for the penis, meaning females are more sensitive to the touch of their sexual organs, which means more pleasure. To neglect the clitoris is to skip women's sexuality and their joy, and to say that women would only have sex for a reproductive reason and to please men. The ignorance and lack of interest in women's sexuality and anatomy are such that not every woman knows what the clitoris even looks like. This lack of knowledge and importance is shown by the colossal orgasm gap between the genders, being less than 60% for women compared to 90% for men[11].

"Everything that has been written by men about women should be viewed with suspicion because they are both judge and party."

-Poullain de la Barre

In a patriarchy men had the power, freedom, knowledge and resources to discover and invent; from science to politics, to psychology, and much more. For every discovery, invention, or rule, men have been both: judge and party, leaving women out of the equation. Simone de Beauvoir, a feminist who lived in the twentieth century, wrote a book, The Second Sex[12]. In the book, she talks about gender not being biologically inherited but imposed by society to keep man dominance, leaving women as the second class sex. She explains how, in society, men are

[11] Sophia Wallace. TEDxSalford 2015. Youtube. Retrieved December 8, 2019, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dg2RoARuAHM. Screenshot by Author.
[12] Beauvoir, Simone de, Borde, Constance, Malovany-Chevallier, Sheila, and Thurman, Judith. *The Second Sex* New York: Vintage, 2011.

considered human, neutral. Meanwhile, women are considered "the other," but you can only become an "other" by being "othered" by someone else.

Beauvoir compares the life of a woman to a live doll; in a sense, they are both objectify, submissive, and an accessory. Women were "the others" who had to fulfill men's needs, look for external cues to seek validation of their worth; also, women were "the other" who had fewer rights and fewer public influence. To change this, women must understand their social ontology. The problem with this is the relations and the outside. How women grow up and form their identities is crucial for women to become autonomous subjects. She says the desolvation of the gender dichotomy won't do anything, and this is because the change has to come from deeper than just rights, and politics. First, it requires a self-understanding of what being a woman means, and then social changes. The extirpation of the suppression of the woman by defining women as "other."

Men had the physical strength to control situations and set the tone as the heahmany societies for years. It was never about intelligence or men being superior to women, just physically stronger, and with this strength came power. In October of 2017, Bruce Carlson gave a TEDTalk *Are Men More Intelligent Than Women or Are Women More Intelligent Than Men?*[13] where he raises the question of what intelligence is and which of the two human genders is more intelligent. He asked the public who thought men were more intelligent to raise their hands, and something interesting happened; not many hands were raised. Then he asked the same question about women, and most of the public immediately raised their hands. In the 1800s, education was ruled by men to develop their intelligence, but what ended up happening was that men

[13] Carlson, Bruce. "Are Men More Intelligent than Women or Are Women More Intelligent than Men?" TED.

became intellectually overbuilt but emotionally underdeveloped. Carlson says men act from their intellect, which means they're full of facts and women come from their heart or emotions, feelings.

A feeling is something hard to forget, a feeling presides thought, generates motion, initiates a behavior. A feeling is something that helps us understand the other person's point of view without using words. Being smart means being quick, intellect. The meaning of the word intellect is the capacity for thinking and reasoning as distinct from feeling. On the other hand, the definition of intelligence is the capacity for understanding, perceiving, and comprehending the meaning. What this means is that intelligence is a mixture of emotions and intellect in the right way, at the right time and in the right amount, we create intelligence and meaning. Men criticize women for being overly emotional, but can't men learn something from women? It hasn't been too long since women started getting an education, only a couple of centuries, and this is what is making women evolve. Women have been working on their emotions for very long, this is passed down from generation to generation. Now, they also get education making considerable changes in society, while men don't work as much on their emotions for the shame of being perceived as weak, vulnerable, or feminine. Carlson says once you combine these two elements, intellect and emotion, you gain clarity. He calls these "moments of personal growth, moments of maturity."

The arts are a particular way to work on the emotional part, and this is why art has been introduced in many schools, to push people to become more intelligent, to force people to see with clarity, to become better human beings. When Carlson give the formula to become more intelligent, he does not exclude or include any gender or sex to this possibility. Gender roles

become useless, while education (intellect) and internal exploration (emotions) become essential in the formation of the self, as a unique individual.

"The more you are treated as if you don't know what you are talking about, the more you begin to question whether or not you do, in fact, know what you are talking about."[14]

-Paula Stone Williams

Paula Williams is a transgender woman who gives her point of view from both of the genders, as a man and woman. Paula explains how, as a woman, she feels like people doubt her more, and that people just assume she is less intelligent because she is a woman. Before transitioning to a woman, things were less complicated, and at his availability because of all the privileges men get. She says it would be impossible for a well educated white man to understand how much our culture is tilted in his favor. Under all these differences and circumstances, she sees now as a woman, and she still believes women reflect the best parts of what it means to be fully human.

Have you ever heard that question: "who is the man in the relationship" when a woman makes more money than their male partner or when they have the control in the relationship? If making more money or having control means being a man, then it has nothing to do with the sex people are born with or the given gender. We live in a rapidly changing culture, and the changes are becoming visible. *New Data on the Rise of Women*[15] published September 11, 2012, is a book written by Hanna Rosin, an Israel born American writer. In this book, she shows data on how

[14] Keynote Speaker." Paula Stone Williams, April 25, 2019.
[15] Rosin, H. (2019). *New data on the rise of women*. [online] Ted.com.

women are starting to dominate some areas men used to dominate, for example, every two men, three women graduate college, among other examples.

Strong patterns of behaviors created by men's suppression of women have been backed-up by gender dichotomy, and human nature. These patterns have been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. People like Christopher Ryan who talk about some human behaviors that are practiced in society but are not part of human nature, or people like E.O Wilson, who talks about not practicing what is in human genetics. The reason for these behaviors is that we are all performing our gender roles. To take the liberal approach of equality, humanity has to break through the self. The end of gender dichotomy starts with social ontology, which would give endless possibilities to the self, it would provide humanity freedom of identity generalizations. To start the change, Brene Brown says we need vulnerability, empathy, and creativity. Sophia Wallace and Peggy Orenstein say we need education. Women and men educate and acknowledge women's anatomy and sexuality. The use of intelligence, like Bruce Carlson, defined it as a mixture of intellect and emotion. And we get results like Hanna Rosin's data on women. It is the 21st century and although some people may think sexism and stereotypes have vanished, the human race still has a long way to go.

My Project

When I started making art most of it was mostly related to equality, equality among all, among race and gender: from photography to videos and sculptures. My instincts told me feminism was the future, and the way to go but then realized feminism is just a middle point. Feminism is the social movement that advocates for women's rights with the equality of the sexes as a goal.

I grew up in Lima, Peru in a very sexist environment. Since I was young there were many differences in the treatment my younger brother got from my family, that I did not get. For example, although he was two years younger than me, he could be out until way later than me, he did not have to learn how to cook or clean. In the beginning, I did not understand why, why was it that he could do things I could not? My family would always have the same answer: "Because he is a boy" like that was a good enough reason.

Originally, before COVID-19, this was going to be a video installation. The audience had to enter a dark room, which represented my headspace, where I am my truest self and the most vulnerable. My idea was to put puff sofas on the floor so people felt comfortable in the space. I wanted this room to be inviting so the audience could sit around, relax, and listen to my story. I wanted to use this vulnerability to become a conversation starter between the viewers. This was especially challenging to me because I don't usually open up easily, so for me to put all these very intimate parts of my life out there for people who don't really know me, was hard. The darkness in the room also had a purpose, darkness can be scary for some people but it also gives a sense of security because you're not being watched, you're not being judged. Also the video

was going to be playing on an infinite loop. I wanted to loop the video with the idea that if the video is watched and listened to so many times maybe it will stick and become normalized, just like gender roles did. I've always believed that you get what you give, and for this piece I am giving vulnerability so I hope to get some back, not to me personally but to the world. My desire is for vulnerability to become normalized and practiced more often. Empathy is what I want the viewer to feel because like Brene Brown said, empathy is the cure for shame.

Who Made Me, Who Made You, *idk* is an non-linear, autobiographical narrative video made up of fragments of thought in a way of self-conversation that walks the viewer through how society shaped my gender ideas since I was very young and living in a very sexist, stereotypical oriented environment. In this video I explain how I wanted to act like a man to seem stronger, until I realized I was better than that.

The beginning of the video starts with a lot of confusion. The main question is why did I used to think I was a gay boy trapped in a girl's body? I obviously didn't know the why before, and I came to understand it at a later time in my life.

My mother had me when she was 17 and my father was 37 years old. The age gap was huge and also the power in the relationship. People say kids are like little sponges when they're little, and they absorb everything they see and hear. In my case, I had an abusive dad who wanted to have my mom under control. I don't remember much from that time but my subconscious definitely does, because since I have memory I've always hated being under control and following rules, especially those gender rules that were just put upon me.

To answer the question of why I thought I was a gay boy trapped in a girls body wasn't easy to come up with. While I strongly believed there were no differences between genders and that

both, females and males, were capable of doing the same things but at the same time having completely different and unique individuals. Also, why is it that women have more to lose in relation with a man? The objectification is obvious. I grew up in a sexist society and it rubbed on to me. There was a constant fight in my head of what I believed I was and what society wanted me to be. I thought I internally was a boy because what I craved to do and how I behaved was not considered to be very feminine behavior.

I lost myself trying to fight the stereotypes, and I say I lost myself because I lost my sense of direction. Instead of trying to be my truest self, internally exploring my emotions and going towards happiness, I just wanted to contradict society and I started at home, I was angry. Sometimes, I exaggerated like the time my grandma asked what I wanted to be when I was older and I said “a prostitute, grandma” with a smile on my face. I explained to her that to my knowledge, sex was something men really enjoyed so, why couldn’t I enjoy it and get payed for it? Back then I wasn’t really thinking about the terms of selling myself, and just to be clear, I did not desire to do so. Relying on my family for understanding on all these topics was not an option, they just didn’t get me. My mom would barely let me go to a party and if I did, I was supervised. My brother was not. If I wanted to go to a friend’s house, my dad would ask for the house phone number to make sure I wasn’t leaving my friend’s house. My brother was simply allowed to go, no questions asked. Yes, my family over protected me, and I don’t blame them, at least not now.

I have never believed I was a misbehaved or rude kid, I just had very strong ideas and always spoke my mind in the best way I thought possible; apparently, this was an issue. Family members considered it a problem, a teacher once told me I don’t have to say everything I think and to keep it to myself, friends labeled me as the “crazy” or “weird” one. I could tell my

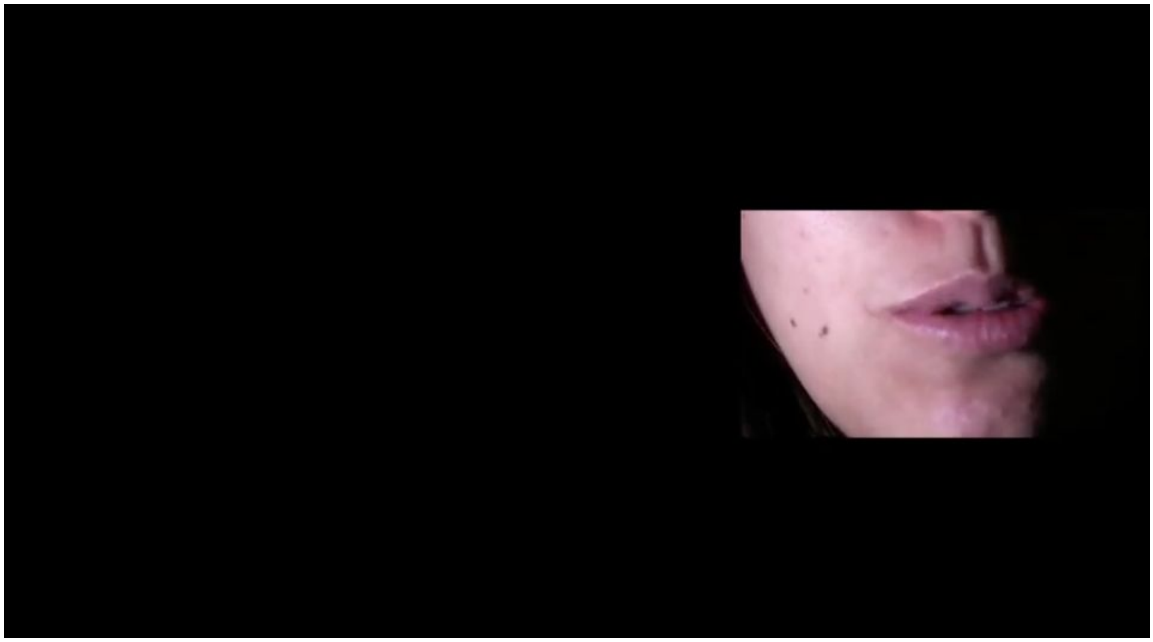
openness made people feel almost uncomfortable but also intrigued, I would say, just like many rules of society made ME feel uncomfortable so I thought it was a fair game.

Split screen is a display technique I used throughout the entire video. This technique is typically used to show moments from 2 or more angles, or actions happening in different places but simultaneously. I used this technique to jump in time, but also to show my thoughts randomly going from place to place on the screen with the uncertainty of where it was going to appear after. The reason why there were three was because I wanted to represent the past, present and future, but also create a sense of confusion of where I was, where I am, and where I will be.

Talking about gender, sexist, patriarchy, society, and the self is very complicated. A lot of self awareness as well as being aware of society and individuals is exhausting. People divide themselves internally making different versions of themselves depending on the circumstances, so which one is the real self? This internal division and confusion is shown through the split screen.

There are many reasons as of why I chose a black background. First, I wanted to create a sense of mystery associated with the unknown and negative, a sense of strength and seriousness, I want the topic to be taken seriously because besides the point of it being a social problem, I am talking about myself and MY life. Black has an absence of color and color means light. My surroundings lack the color that is on me. Me being the only color on the screens keeps the focus on me and only me. The fact that the screen is black also doesn't fatigue the audience with

multiple things on the screen.

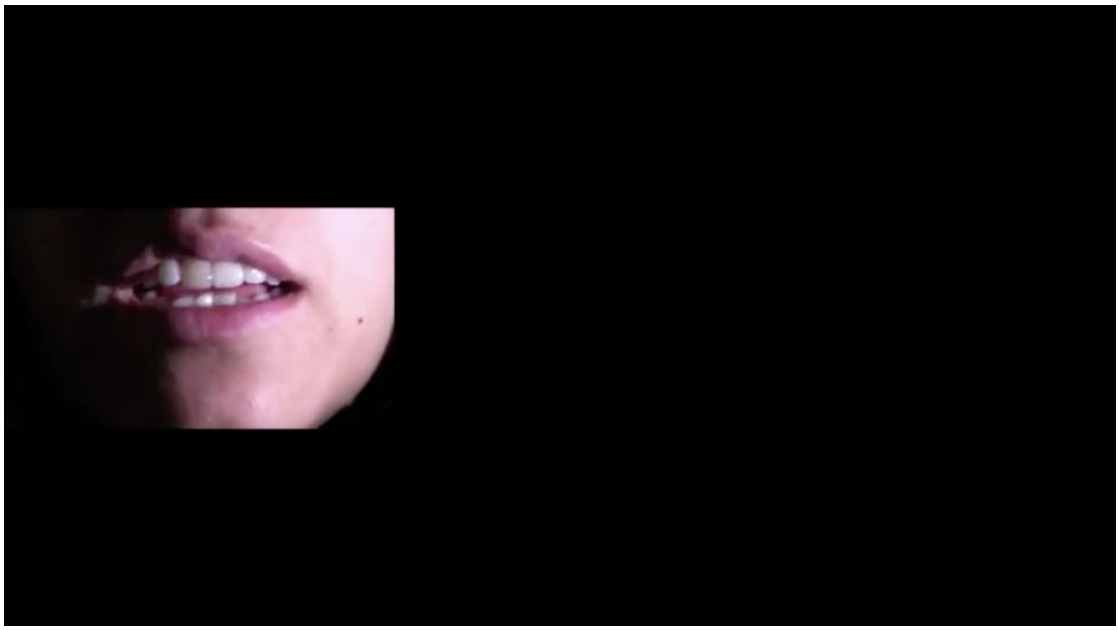


Sadie Benning is an American visual artist. *Living Inside*[16] (1989) is a video diary and one of her well known video pieces. This video gives a sense of isolation and her retreat from the world. Her way to convey her life seems similar to mine. She shows close-ups of her face or parts of her

[16] Benning, Sadie. Living Inside, 1989. Video.

face and body when talking about personal experiences.

A close-up is a type of shot used in photography and video. I utilize this type of shot to emphasize my emotional states. A close-up also exaggerates facial expressions which convey emotion. I want the viewer to feel what I feel and if possible to even identify with my experiences. The idea of the mouth is to be close to where my words come from literally but also figuratively. The camera is so close to my face when recording to also show my almost discomfort when it comes to be so open about my personal life.



I also did not want to show my entire face and I have never done it. I believe this is because of some insecurities of mine when talking about the self and who I really am.

The video *Who Made Me, Who Made You*, *idk* is a living proof of gender being purely performative, and the freedom of the self with infinite possibilities a possible approach, but also the way to get there is a very rocky one. A patriarchal society won't ever let the self rise because of gender roles and categorizations of human beings. In a patriarchy the obvious losers, the most affected ones, are women; however, men are also affected by it psychologically by not being able to be vulnerable, and having a disbelieve idea of superiority and power over "the other" sex. Diminishing women and using nature as a back-up has to stop. Since I was young there were very marked gender roles in my family and surroundings, men made the rules and were treated as superiors. I didn't understand why I had to learn to do certain things, while my younger brother didn't have to, everything just seemed very unfair and unbalanced, but getting out of that environment made me see clearly and getting to know me better.

We all live in a society based on image, where people put on multiple masks everyday. Societies where we all have to perform a role, which takes away the possibility to explore the inner-self. In my case, I had to lose myself to start finding me and it is a long process that I am still into. I performed the role of a male and did not feel superior, I also performed the role of a woman and it did not make me feel more myself than to not follow any role. There are ups and downs because of how long we've been carrying on with these roles, but we can do it by getting educated and working on our emotions.

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Figure 1. Cliteracy. Salford, Greater Manchester, England. Sophia Wallace. TEDxSalford 2015.

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