

**NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY**

***First Person Singular (Plural)***

**A Script Submitted to the**

**University Honors Program**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the**

**Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree**

**With University Honors**

**Women's Studies Program**

**Mishel Filisha**

**DeKalb, Illinois**

**May 2001**

**University Honors Program**

**Capstone Approval Page**

Capstone Title: (print or type):

First Person Singular (Plural)

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Women's Studies Program

Date of Approval (print or type):

May 9, 2021

HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT  
THESIS SUBMISSION FORM

AUTHOR: Mishel Filisha

THESIS TITLE: First Person Singular (Plural)

ADVISOR: Dr. Amy Levin

ADVISOR'S DEPT: Women's Studies

DISCIPLINE: Women's Studies

YEAR: 2001

PAGE LENGTH:

BIBLIOGRAPHY: No

ILLUSTRATED: No

PUBLISHED (YES OR NO): No

LIST PUBLICATION: —

COPIES AVAILABLE (HARD COPY, MICROFILM, DISKETTE): Hard Copy, Video

ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS):

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Mishel Filisha

*First Person Singular (Plural)* is a script and performance piece that explores female/feminine identity. The script, set for five female performers, is comprised of eight first person monologues, one group interactive sketch and an additional monologue that runs intermittently throughout the piece. The semi-autobiographical monologues discuss issues of particular concern to women such as rape, body image and the delegitimation of the feminine in Western religious tradition. Other monologues discuss topics of broad social concern such as acknowledging narrative bias, the silencing of democratic voice, and the importance of exploring one's personal history and intellectual histories. Each monologue stands alone to express a particular experience in the life of a woman. Taken together, the monologues come to represent the many facets of a singular woman's identity. The piece was performed live on Thursday, April 16, 2001 to an audience of approximately 140 people at The House in DeKalb, Illinois. Both the script and a video tape copy of the live performance are available on file in the Northern Illinois University Honors Program Capstone archives and in the Northern Illinois University Women's Studies Program Library.

# First Person Singular (Plural)

## First Person (Performers)

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Bethany Beach

Mishel Filisha

Michelle Gerber

C.J. Grimes

Heather Rhodes

## Plural (Credits)

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Capstone Adviser: Amy Levin

Stage Diva: Kim Atterberry

Set: Mishel Filisha

John Kemmerer

Joseph Turner

Program Design: Mishel Filisha

Photography: T.J. Lewis

Video: Jason Pittman

Energy: Sylvester Holmes

Inspiration: Dolores Bruno



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## **First Person Singular (Plural)**

Written and Directed by Mishel Filisha

Featuring: Bethany Beach, Mishel Filisha, Michelle Gerber, C.J. Grimes and Heather Rhodes

Script as performed on April 26, 2001 at The House, DeKalb, Illinois.

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Open with four women sitting on stage in chairs. Pink chair is on stage in the corner, empty.

*Heather/C.J./Michelle/Bethany*

### **my introduction (once upon a time)**

**Mishel and All**

**Mishel (from off-stage)**

Once upon a time when I was the littlest schoolgirl, my teacher told me I was nothing but a dreamer, he told me I was a loser, a deviant, an overzealous punk. When he caught me staring too long out of the classroom window, he told me my eyes focused in the wrong direction and he told me that the vision beyond the window would lead to nowhere.

That teacher said that life would pass me by if I didn't have what he wanted—currency, legitimacy, cultural capitol. I did not possess, or at least I did not elect to possess, that (beat) drive for the American dream. He said I was (beat) unpatriotic. His advice to me was to be quiet and do what I'm told.

When I got a little older, that same teacher likened me to Eve, the fallen woman. He called me a harlot because I wouldn't keep my (*1/2 beat*) mouth shut. He said it was all my fault, but he neglected to tell me what *it is*. (*beat*) That suit-and-tie wearin, follow-the-leader believin sellout sucker convinced me the looking glass of shame had my name on it, written red red lipstick—a sort of (beat) cosmetic reflection of my cosmic flaw.

He told me I would wander this unsafe planet—lost, alone, uncomfortable. But instead I've elected to ride the collective comfort zone without forsaking the mighty feminine goddess-mother-lover. And despite that teacher's allegations concerning my womanly mystique, I drive the streets in my grrrl-mobile. And despite his lies disguised as truth he did not corrupt my supersonic basilar membrane, he could not contain my velvet brain, and I do not care to listen.

Because baby, I hear no evil.

And I'm through with being jezebelled. I've elected to embrace the fine specimen of a woman I've become. I've learned to claim vixen as my maiden name. I eat vice for breakfast.

I'm tired of spending nights writing my life into a bad feminist fiction novel—writing in pencil, so easily erased. I'm tired of waiting. Waiting for what? Waiting for who? I must have been

waiting for the graphite to turn to ink. I must have been waiting for a vision, a prophet, some sort of secret intellectual super strength that's been contained all the while within. I must have been waiting for some Thing I saw once in a television ad about appropriate menstrual hygiene. And so I said to myself, I said:

**Heather**

*(Thinking outloud to self)* I know, I think I'll do a performance. I'll go ahead and say everything I have to say. *(Increasing excitement)* That would be a perfect way to finish my college career. Ya, hell ya. I'll write a script, I'll invite everybody, I'll. . . oh christ, what am I getting myself into. . .

**C.J.**

*(More pensive than humorous this time)* What am I getting myself into. . . *(convincing yourself)* No. No. I have to do this. I owe it to myself. I can't hold it in any longer. No. I can't hold it in any longer.

**Michelle**

I can't, I can't hold it in any longer. But, shit, what are people gonna say? I mean, they'll think I'm a freak. People will laugh at me. This is a bad idea, a really bad idea. *(Beat)* But what if I don't do it? What happens then? What if it all just sits inside here and my insides rot? No. No. I have to do this. I have to have faith. I have to believe.

**Bethany**

I have to believe. I can't just sit here and not say anything. I've got to say something. I've got things to say. *(More confident)* I've got things to say. *(As much about self-discovery as it is a statement of fact)* I've got a lot to say.

*Enter Mishel:sr*

**Mishel**

I've got a lot to say. And here I am sayin it. Because tonight I'm here to confess, to express, to impress with the power I possess between my legs, unafraid to hide the strength inside, I've got ultimate feminine pride. Now, I'm not saying I'm particularly wise or that I qualified to advise, but I am here to prophecize. Because baby. . .

I am . . .

*(two beats)*

**All**

. . . a woman.

*(all sit on one beat, cross legs on one beat, in unison)*

*C.J., Michelle, and Bethany exit.*

*Heather crosses to sit in the pink chair. On the way, she and Mishel do a two-move handshake.*



*Mishel takes center.*

## **my anger (one angry grrrl)**

**Mishel**

*(Surveying the audience. Confident nodding of head.)*

O.K.

Well. . . what do you wanna talk about? *(hands in pockets)* I mean, I could stand here tonight and I could just tell you everything about me. I mean, you're all here now, so you'd sort of just have to listen. But, you know, really, I'd rather not.

To tell you the truth, I don't really know what I'm doing here. *(lean in as if secret)* Umm. . . This whole thing *(looking around)* just started *(beat)* happening.

But I had to do it this way—in a performance. I had to do it in a performance because I'm afraid to just say these things to you. I'm afraid to talk to you one on one. *(mocking myself)* I'd rather sit in your class in the front row, preferably the far left or the far right, and ask only very relevant questions using very concise language and very appropriate terminology.

*(cross arms)* I'd rather keep all my thoughts and feelings bottled up inside, you know, let 'em stew. Its much more healthy that way [sarcastic]

I mean, I know what your thinking: *(cross arms)* “Who's that little girl? She's got some kind of gal standing up there on stage talking about herself. She thinks she so righteous that she can get up there and tell us how it is—handing out flyers disrespecting the president. She's all up there cussin' about life and every other thing. What must her mama think? *(pause)* That poor woman must be turning in her grave.

*Mishel takes a seat in one of the chairs with her back to the audience.*

*Heather begins by reading from her notebook.*

**Heather**

Dear Mama,

God, I wish you were here. You left me at a bad time, mama. I need you now more than ever, now that I'm coming into womanhood and all. I wish you could be here see me speak my mind. I wish you could see me here, taking a stand like this, writing my life like this, going to school. I came here to college because you were always so embarrassed about not having an education. You carried so much shame, mama, and you had nothing to be ashamed of. You were strong. But you were so tired.

I'm tired too, mama, too tired for the age that I am, that's for sure. But not too tired to fight. I came out swinging, you know that. I got that from you. I am every feisty part of you. And the anger—I got that from you too. But I won't let it get the best of me. I'm here because of you, mama. And because of me. They told us to keep quiet, but I won't. I won't keep quiet. I'll shout.

*Heather sits back down in chair or exists, depending on lighting situation.*

*Mishel stands to face front.*

### **Mishel**

I guess I'm up here mostly because I'm pissed off. And people ask me about my anger all the time. *(Mocking)* "Mishel, why are you so angry?" I tell them that I think its because I know too much to sustain any peace of mind. I observe too many contradictions between what I was told and what I see and experience. "I'm angry because I'm frustrated," I tell them. I'm angry because I've been taught to revere a power structure that keeps me pretty well near the bottom and the people who keep me there think I'm too dumb to see it.

Or sometimes when people ask me why I'm angry I tell them that I'm not really angry at all and that I feel and say what I do because I'm in a constant state of PMS. *(with sarcasm)*

I'm angry about a lot of things.

I'm angry because I'm 10,000 dollars in debt as a result of my right to public education. I'm angry because I can't walk home alone from the library at night by myself without being afraid of rape. I'm angry because it the year 2001 and women are still making only 75 cents for every dollar that their male counter parts in the same jobs are making. And a lot of people are lucky to even be getting paid at all.

But, you know, I've grown pretty comfortable with my anger. I do my best to make it work for me. I'm comfortable with being angry because the women and men in my generation have inherited what amounts to a legacy of anger from people who came before us—people who fought and continue to fight for social justice all around the world.

My most direct connection to that legacy of anger is through my bothers and sisters who in the 1960s and 70s fought for civil rights and women's equity. They were criticized for being angry. And yeah, they were. Of course they were angry. They had every right to be angry. They were a group of people who were unhappy with the legal and the social status quo. And they inherited their anger from the legacy that came before them.

But they were criticized for their anger, especially the women. So women in my generation took heed. We got positive. And actually we eventually wound up channeling our anger and doing something kind of cute it. We created Girl Power. [dramatic]

Girl power is the embrace of everything grrrl. It's cute, isn't it? Grrrl. Girl Power is about being glad you're female. It doesn't focus on the negative or the Other. It doesn't place blame. Girl power is about finding things in common with other girls. It emphasizes the positive attributes of

being female. Girl Power tells a girl to focus on those opportunities we inherited from our grandmothers and mothers and to do so happily, joyfully. . .unobtrusively.

And it worked, they were right. We needed to channel our anger positively. Girl power was created out of the call to not be so negative. Now we're positive and you still don't like it because positive does not necessitate benign like you thought it would. Little by little, we're conquering those internal messages our 2<sup>nd</sup> wave sisters pointed out to us. And you were right, we needed to get positive in order to do that.

And now you're thinking, "Now what?"

So (*drawn*) we did what they told us to do and now they don't know what to do with us.  
(*sarcastic*) Whoops!

So they move to plan B, And what they do is appropriate our symbols so that you can make money. They put our symbols onto tiny tanktops and vinyl backpacks so that the symbols themselves become so diffuse in their meaning that the next generation will have to create new symbols, a new identity, when they're ready to continue working for change. And that means more time spent defining and redefining the movement. And then they use that time to make more money and use that money to stuff even more money into the pockets of legislators and buy more votes in congress leading, of course, to something like, I don't know. . . something like making me pay out of pocket for birth control because my insurance, (*beat*) if I have it, (*beat*) sure isn't paying for it. And I sure as hell better buy that birth control because you're about to take away my right to get an abortion. (*sarcastic*)

And, you know, these issues—issues about my body like birth control, abortion and rape—they make me really angry because my body is mine. I'm angry because of all these things.

*C.J. enters during these lines.*

I'm angry because I've been. . .

. . . deceived.

*Mishel exits.*

**my body (mine)**

**C.J.**

*[The mood here is slightly distant, slightly self-absorbed, but still communicative.]*

I'm angry because I don't want to stand here and talk to you about rape. I know its going to make you uncomfortable. And god knows that its not a fucking picnic for me. But I have to. I have to because so many people can't. And I can. I'm lucky.  
Well, I guess lucky isn't really the right word.

And it's a risk. It's a huge risk. I know that when you all leave tonight somewhere someone is going to make fun of me for being over dramatic, or for being so serious. Someone is going to blame me for making them uncomfortable by talking about rape.

*C.J. sits in one of the four chairs.*

**Heather**

I don't want to speak today.

I want to be  
silent.

I have already served your holocaust.  
I have held myself accountable to you  
while you used the voice of my soft skin  
in your search for truth.

I don't want to be with anyone today.

I want to be  
alone.

There is no way for me to be connected.  
You sacrificed my wholeness,  
an unremarkable theft  
Left me dry, unwilling, marked.  
You dismembered my spirit  
to fill your own void.

I don't want to be today  
but I cannot shed even more blood over the loss.

*Heather sits in pink chair.*

**C.J.**

But I can't care what you say if what you say belittles me.

I have to talk about rape. Because I owe it to myself to get the ugliness out of me. Because I owe it to others who have survived rape, but who are still unable to thrive. I owe it you, so that you can have the information you need to protect yourselves and your daughters.

I have to keep talking about rape because lots of people are still not listening. Rape is happening. More than you think.

*(take a breath, consider, take a few steps) (drifted, but now coming back)*

Rape is personal. It fucks you up.

Yeah, rape is personal. *(Nervous)* I mean, after all, it was my fault, right? I mean, I was an early developer. They teased me. My body grew before I grew into my body and I should have kept that under control. I mean, they were my hormones after all and if I have too many hormones or something that's bound to be trouble. I mean, maybe I shouldn't have smiled so much when I

was younger, or maybe I shouldn't have been so pretty. Or maybe it's something more fundamental. Maybe I'm just... bad.

**Heather**

There's no way to explain the ugliness. I've tried talking about it like everyone says. Everyone says talk about it so you can heal. But I'm not healing. I'm not healing. I'm not whole. I walk around—heavy. Heavy with shame and the burden of violence.

**C.J.**

*(drifted, but now coming back)*

Rape is political.

It's a tool of war. Right now, *(emphasize)* right now in Bosnia the number of violent sexual acts committed against girls and women have increased in the areas where so-called "peace keeping troops" are located. *(Beat)* Peace for whom?

And here, *(emphasize)* right here in the United States, there's this statistic, an FBI statistic—one in four women will be sexual assaulted as she enters into adulthood. One in four. Do you understand that statistic? It means someone sitting near you tonight has been or will be raped. It means it could be your sister, your daughter. It means it could be you, *(beat)* or me. Me.

*C.J. sits.*

**Heather**

Me. Twelve years old, sitting on the bathroom floor vomiting. Vomiting. Vomiting so much because I just lost my Catholic-sacred virginity to a man in his twenties who told me he would stop. He told me he would stop and he didn't stop. And when I told him to stop, pleaded with him to stop, he put a knife to my neck and said... nothing. He just *(beat)* took it. My body. Mine. And I can't tell anyone. I don't even have the language for it. I'm a child.

Later. I'll think about it later. I know it means something, but I can't think about it right now. I'll do something about it later, when I'm older.

**C.J.**

*(drifted but now coming back)*

I'm participate here on campus in activities that support women. Like last semester when we had a Take Back the Night march here at NIU. Take Back the Night is national initiative meant to bring awareness to sexual assault. We walked down the street after sundown carrying signs that said that we weren't going to be afraid to be out at night, we walked together so that we could have comfort and strength in numbers. Most of us were survivors of rape or attempted rape, some publicly acknowledging our experiences for the first time.

*(slight pause)*

And the response, the response was...well, some of the women who were marching got hit with eggs that were thrown from a moving car. And while we were marching, people, men, shouted

out their windows at us. They yelled, “Show us your tits” and “We’re gonna follow you home tonight.”

I mean, do you have any idea how that felt? I was raped. Do they really think I’m doing this because its fun, or to hear my own voice—like its an extracurricular activity or something? I carry this weight around with me every day. In part I’m doing this, I’m talking about rape, for myself. So that I can at least try to heal. But the other part, and it’s a major part, I’m out there raising awareness so that we can prevent it from happening to their sisters, their girlfriends, their mothers. (*Questioning*) And that’s the response?

Why aren’t you listening? Don’t you understand that it paralyzes me? I can’t move. I can’t speak. Sometimes. . . I can’t even feel or when I do feel its all. . .confused.

*During these lines: C.J. crosses over to Heather, takes two strips of cloth from her pocket, ties one around Heather’s mouth and Heather’s wrists together with the other.*

I’m talking about rape because I don’t know what else to do about it. To be completely honest with you, I just don’t know what else to do.

*Bethany enters.*

I am...

... hurting.

*C.J. exits*

**my silence (                    )**

**Bethany**

I’m hurting because they don’t listen when I speak. And sometimes, they won’t even let me speak. Sometimes. . . more frequently than you might want to acknowledge. . . my voice never gets heard.

So many voices get left out—left out of mainstream textbooks, left out of popular media, left out of political discourse. And all those people, every one of them, has something to say. People need to speak, to express.

And we find ways to express ourselves even if others are trying to prevent us from doing so. They can limit my expression by keeping my sisters out of textbooks, but I’ve learned to read beyond the pages and I learn about the lost voices that are muted by violence, single-mindedness and corporate greed. I seek those voices out.

People are silenced in a lot of different ways. And its not just other people. We are all silenced. You are silenced. You’re being robbed of the tool that amplifies your democratic voice—your vote.

George W. Bush is currently president of the United States despite the fact that it was his competitor who won the popular vote. The popular vote. *(Getting a little sarcastic)* You know, popular—from the Latin root “polis” meaning people. You know... *(hand gesture indicating the self)* People. *(Gesture indicating the audience)* People. We wanted one guy in office and the other guy got in. That’s your voice right there. That’s how well you’re being heard. *(Put hand over hard as if saying the pledge of allegiance)*. . . And to the Republic, in which I have no say. *(Beat)* *(With some attitude)* Shitty.

*Mishel enters. Takes her place next to Bethany standing as if she’s in a proper spelling bee.*

**Still Bethany:**

You know, its funny because we learn about the Democratic system of governance in school

**Mishel**

Democracy. Government by the people for the people. Democracy.

**Bethany**

*(Make a buzzer noise)* Wrong. At least not where we’re living—and we’ve got it pretty good by comparison. Isn’t that all the more reason why we should be critical of our system?

It seems to me that we are not that far off from what we were doing thousands of years ago—you know, when one monarch ruled the entire population and people were taught to idolize the crown. Well, we still idolize the crown—only our crown isn’t gold, its green. Our crown is made of hundred dollar bills. Our idol is money. Our idol comes in the guise of having stock in the corporation that fronted a billion dollars to pay for the inaugural ball. That would be the same money that George W. used to buy his way into office. Let’s be honest with ourselves here. We live in an economic dictatorship.

Discounting my vote is stealing my voices. And my voice means something. They can ignore me all they want. Or they can try to pacify me with advertisements and free samples and sound bites. They can take me out of school books and then put me back in at their discretion. But they can never really take my expression away because I’ll find somewhere, some way to find my voice—*(a little distant)* provided they haven’t drowned it out so completely that even I can’t hear it.

How does it feel to be silenced? Try it. Try it for one day. Say nothing all day. And at the end of the day when you lay down in your bed to rest, imagine having to get up the next day and do it all over again, again and again and again.

Once you’ve been silenced, its difficult to gain your voice back. Voices need to be exercised. But in some cases, people have been silenced for so long that it seems like they’ve never even had a voice.

Being silenced is restricting. Its unjust. Its. . . happening all the time. Take a look. Really listen. Who has a gag over your mouth? Who has your hands tied? Who makes your decisions? What do you have to say?

These are questions I ask myself. I ask myself: Who makes up my mind? Who holds me prisoner? What if I'm being silenced and I just don't recognize it? What if I never learn how to express myself? What if I never really know who I am because I am . . . *(silence, but gesture as if you have something to say, something about who you are, but you can't say it, you're stifled.)*

*Heather: During this monologue, your mouth is covered and your hands are tied. You're uncomfortable. You should struggle a little every once in a while. We can find the right places for it so that it is effective and not distracting.*

*Bethany exits. As she exits she and Heather have a "moment."*

*Heather: struggles, maybe grunts or tries to yell.*

*Mishel enters and unties Heather.*

*Heather exits.*

## **my brain (the intellectual legacy)**

### **Mishel**

Education has allowed me to free myself. I'm learning how to think critically and how to analyze theoretical concepts and apply them to my own life.

I'm learning how to question and how to adapt my questions in order to seek out the information that I need. Like instead of opening up a book that reports about 20<sup>th</sup> century history and asking: What happened during the Bay of Pigs Invasion? But I also need to ask: Who wrote the book? Who's telling the story? Why are they telling it this way?

Because in order to figure out what's really going on, we're gonna have to get educated, formally or informally it doesn't matter. We need to find out about and listen to the people who came before us. We've inherited an intellectual legacy and we should be taking advantage of it. Educating ourselves gives us the power to define our own lives.

Knowledge is power, right? We've all heard that. Well, take off the ending of each of those words and we've got Knowledge. Know. K-N-O-W. Power. Pow. P-O-W.

Just like there's the legacy of anger that came before. There is also an intellectual legacy. One we can access through books, and music, and people. Part of educating ourselves is about respecting the intellectual legacy that came before us.

And because I'm smart enough to know better than to ignore the intellectual legacy that precedes me. . .

*Michelle and Heather enter.*



I am. . .

. . .dangerous

*Mishel exits*

## **my soul (ain't I a goddess?)**

**Michelle**

You know, part of the reason I'm so dangerous is because I was raised catholic. (*beat*) We went to church every Sunday—sort of. I mean I went but I wasn't really (*beat*) present. Well, I mean I was at first. Really I was. But I guess I grew out of it—intellectually.

They don't really like it when you ask questions. They don't let you question anything. And its not just that they don't let you question anything in the deeper sense—I mean, they don't even let you ask any questions.

I went to catechism class every week—Sundays before church. And I remember once in class I asked why Jesus was a man. Its not that I wanted to know why he was a man and not a deity or how he could be both a deity and a man. But I wanted to know why wasn't Jesus god's daughter instead of god's son. Look, I'm supposed to be a child of god right? And I'm supposed to made in god's image, right? Well, I'm a girl. I'm a daughter. Why wasn't Jesus a daughter?

It was a valid question. I didn't mean it to be snide or smartass. I just genuinely wanted to know. I mean, they'd talk and talk about the Father of Man and the King of Kings. And I wanted to know where the Queen was.

And then the only response that they give me is to tell me that the Queen was a virgin. Now I wasn't a particularly "scientific" kid. But I knew enough to know that a woman who passes a baby through her legs ain't no virgin.

I figured if god could put a zygote into Mary's belly, why would he even bother with Mary then? Why didn't he just, POOF (*hand gesture of some sort*), create a baby out of nowhere then. I mean both stories are equal unbelievable.

So I rose my hand in catechism class one morning and I questioned the virgin birth. I said. "I think its just a story."

And the teacher looked at me as if to say, "Is that your final answer?"

I looked back at her straight in the eyes. I wasn't challenging her. I simply had my own opinion. I mean you hear it all the time growing up. That's what's so great about America, right? everyone is entitled to her own opinion. Well that was my opinion so I said it: "I think the virgin birth is just a story."

And... they sent me home (*pause*) to think about it.

**Heather**

It is not alright to think.

**Michelle**

But I mean I had already thought about it. I had been thinking about it. I even asked god about it. And as far as I could tell, god though it was OK. I mean. I felt close to god when I was a kid and

I had gotten no indication that thinking that immaculate conception was just a story was problematic.

But I stated my opinion and I got sent home.

No, of course I didn't actually go home. I went to the drug store on the corner and I bought some candy—a bag of Skittles. You know those little round fruit-flavored candies.

I bought my Skittles and I sat down outside of the drugstore on the ground with my back against the brick wall and I took my bag of Skittles and I opened it up and turned the bag upside down and I poured the Skittles out on the sidewalk. And I began to arrange the candies into pretty colored patterns on the ground in front of me. Pretty safe patterns. It scared me to have been thrown out of class. The candies were comforting.

*(Beat)* While I was sitting there, trying to find safety in the colors, a woman, an older woman, came out of the drug store and looked at me very disapprovingly. She looked at me very disapprovingly and said, "What are doing?" and I looked up at her from down on the sidewalk and I said "I'm thinking" and she said "You should go home."

### **Heather**

Under no circumstances is it appropriate to think.

### **Michelle**

So I went home, god-less, skittle-less, and thought-less. And I went back to catechism class the next Sunday, but I never really went again.

And as soon as I was Confirmed—which, by the way, didn't mean anything to me, because it couldn't mean anything to me because I wasn't allowed to think about it or have an opinion about it—as soon as I was Confirmed I never went to church again.

And then about eight or nine years later, I was walking through a used book store in Madison WI and this book just found me. It was just sort of there on the shelf in front of me misplaced in the middle of a shelf of history books about WWI. The book was called "The Feminine Divine." It was a book about the suppression of the feminine, of women, in western religious tradition. I bought the book. I read the book. I considered what the book had to say. The author wrote about the intersection of politics and religion. The author, who was male, wrote about how western religions devalued the female as tainted, as less-than. He wrote about how its possible, indeed probably that it wasn't always this way. It was the first time I really understood what people meant by the term "agenda."

### **Heather**

*(Stressing irony)* So, remind me again how it is that I became deviant by claiming that which creates life exists in the form of a woman.

### **Michelle**

I thought about that book. For a long time.

And then about a year later I met two women through a friend. They were older than me and knowledgeable about the history of many religions. They acknowledged the feminine as powerful. They were in touch with the feminine divine. And they were not just in touch with it—they were active with the feminine divine. They were the Goddess. Through talking with them, interacting with them, learning from them, I came to understand that I didn't have to worship

something foreign to me. I came to understand that I could, in fact, know the Divine as feminine, as a reflection of myself. I could see myself reflected in the Divine.

And its working for me. I have a relationship with a Higher Power again.

And, you know, I really don't think God minds At least She hasn't given me any indication that She does.

Its not such a bad image, is it? Our Mother who art in heaven, hallowed be Her name?

The Divine Mother who gives life and nurtures growth, letting us suckle at her breast for strength. Isn't that just as comforting, just as protecting just as real?

It's a difficult subject to negotiate. And I'm only human—neither all woman nor all goddess.

And so for now my vision of the Feminine Divine will have to do.

Of course, what I really want is a co-creator, one who transcends what we label "gender." but that's awfully difficult to imagine. We don't have a working vision of a transgendered god. We don't have the language for it.

But I've started going to church again—a Christian church. And I like it.

I sit in back and mostly just listen and observe. And when we read from the Bible, I substitute Jesus' name with the word Love and I use the word She instead of He, because I just don't believe that god ever intended to alienate me.

And so I move through the Feminine Divine cautiously, but confidently. And everything I do I do in the name of the Love.

*Mishel enters.*

I do it in the name of the mother. . .

**Heather:** the daughter,

**Mishel:** and the holy diva.

**Michelle:**

Because I am . . .

**All three:**

. . . a Goddess.

*Michelle and Heather exit.*

### **my theory (first person collective)**

**Mishel**

Because I'm a goddess I have the power to create. I like to create ideas from other ideas to build and shift.

I have this “relationship” with ideas. It sounds funny, but it really is an interactive relationship. The depth of the connection varies from time to time and from idea to idea. And the relationship changes and shifts according to the new ideas I have.

Its sort of like love I guess. Just like I’m an active participant in my relationship with a person that I love, I’m an active participant in my relationship with ideas So, I guess, in a way, ideas are like lovers.

And lately I’ve been making love to this idea called the First Person Collective. Its reflected in the title of this piece, First Person Singular (Plural).

First person singular – I

First person plural – we ;

When I’m in the first person singular, I have the power of self-definition. I have the autonomy I need to explore who I am.

When I’m in the first person plural, I have the strength and comfort of a collective identity. I have the safety to move and take up space. And when I’m in the plural, I can speak as loudly as I want.

Its in combining the singular “I” with the plural “we” that the First Person Collective emerges.

The first person collective gives me the power of one and the strength of many. I can recognize my individuality without isolating myself or others.

I follow the principle of the First Person Collective because it makes sense to me.

*All enter.*

I follow the principle of the First Person Collective. Because I am...

**All: us**

### **my expression (parade of resistance)**

I believe that if we work together according to the principle of the First Person Collective, we can resist being silenced and we can resist being restricted. Alone and together we can resist both by doing a lot of different things.

Like, as an example, instead of choosing a major from the list of cookie-cutter majors the university has to offer. I created my own degree program using gender as a theme. Instead of letting someone else choose my path for me. I created my own path.

**C.J.:** Adlib about protest activism.

**Michelle:** I am uncompromising in my refusal not to shave my legs.

**Bethany:** I go out and buy the latest issue of Cosmo the day it comes out. I love the clothes. I love the makeup. . . I hate the clothes. I hate the makeup. I throw it away.

**Heather:** I write. And I write and write and write and write. . .

**Mishel:** I use funds allocated by a public university to create flyers that make the president of the United States look like an ass.

**C.J.:** I were a “boys” haircut, because fuck their fascist beauty standards.

**Michelle:** Adlib about rejecting the medical profession.

**Bethany:** I refuse to shop at Walmart.

**Heather:** I go on midnight graffiti raids.

**Mishel:** I...make...

**All:** Noise

### **my commencement (the story of it)**

I like to make noise. They told me to be quiet. They told me to swallow the secrets, but I’ll spit them out.

I graduate in just a few weeks. And the enactment of this performance is what I learned in college. Each of these monologues stands alone and speaks about a particular facet of an individual woman’s experience. But taken together (*gesture*)the monologues reflect the many facets of one woman’s personality.

It’s complex.

But I can’t be afraid to acknowledge my complexity. I can’t be afraid because I already am all these things.

**Mishel:** I’m angry.

**C.J.:** I’m hurting.

**Bethany:** I’m speaking.

**Mishel:** I’m dangerous.

**Michelle:** I'm a goddess.

**Heather:** I'm changing.

**Mishel :** I'm us. I am all these things and I don't try to deny it. As a matter of fact, I celebrate it. I am all these things because I am. .

**All:** . . .a woman

**Report of USOAR Project:**  
*First Person Singular (Plural)*

**Submitted by:**  
**Mishel Filisha**

**Submitted to:**  
**Northern Illinois University**  
**Office of the Provost**  
**Women's Studies Program**  
**University Honors Program**  
**Bursar's Office**  
**May 2001**

### **Report of USOAR Project: First Person Singular (Plural)**

I used grant money allocated by the USOAR program to fund a live performance entitled *First Person Singular (Plural)*. The performance took place on Thursday, April 26 at 9:30pm at The House restaurant and coffee shop in DeKalb, IL. The evening's event included a well-designed program of the live performance and a packet of handout materials including a list of suggested reading, suggested music selections, and suggested Internet web pages, all of which were relevant to the subject matter of the live performance. Copies of these materials are included with this report. *First Person Singular (Plural)* was created as my Honors Program Capstone Project. My Capstone advisor was Amy Levin, Director of the Women's Studies Program.

#### **The Performance**

The performance was quite successful. There were roughly 140 people in attendance, with the maximum capacity for the venue numbering 150. The venue's entertainment director informed me that the event drew the largest audience The House has supported since the establishment's opening. Those in attendance included graduate students, undergraduates, faculty and staff representing Women's Studies, English, Sociology, History, Psychology, Performing Arts, Campus Programming and Activities, the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, the Presidential Committee on Sexual Orientation, Women's Alliance, University Resources for Women, the Graduate School, the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, the Music Program, the Northern Star Newspaper, and the larger DeKalb community. According to Amy Levin, Director of the Women's Studies Program, the event had the largest and most diverse (in terms of race, sex, and ethnicity) audience of those attending activities sponsored or cosponsored by Women's Studies this year. The donation money totaled one hundred forty one dollars. This money was used to help make up the difference between my USOAR funds and the amount of money actually spent on creating the show.

#### **The Response**

I have received a very positive response concerning all aspects of the event. The week following the showing, the Northern Star Newspaper published a picture of several of the performers on stage. Two



professors have recommend that I take the script and production further, suggesting professional possibilities. The most impressive response, however, has been from audience members. I have received thanks in person and via email from at least a dozen women who have expressed that they saw themselves reflected in the monologues and who have shared with me stories from their own lives that they saw reflected in the performance. Seven men have approached me to tell me that they were glad they attended and that the performance made them consider issues of gender in new ways. As personal/community relation and education were both integral to the objective of the performance, I feel justified in calling the effort a success.

### **Resources**

As often as possible, I utilized local business and resources. The House is a locally owned business, which supports independent entertainment and art. All actors and the stage manager as well as the video service provider are NIU students. The photographer, T.J. Lewis is a former student at NIU and a member of the DeKalb community. I utilized other locally owned business such as Copy Service, Encore Clothing Shop and Village Commons Bookstore.

### **Video Documentation**

Video documentation was taken by Jason Pittman, an NIU graduate student and independent film-maker.

At this time, I am waiting for duplicates of the original video tape to be made. A video copy of the performance will be turned in to the Office of the Provost as soon as one becomes available. A video copy of the performance will also be given to the Women's Studies Program and to the University Honors Program.

### **Financial Documentation**

Attached please find itemized listings of how I spent the USOAR funds as well as receipt for those purchases. If there are any questions about the format or the details of this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Financial Report: Budget Breakdown and Totals****Programs and Handouts**

Item/Service Provider	Payment Amount	Place of Purchase/Payment	receipt number
Color Xerox/Programs	346.52	Office Max, DeKalb	1
Photo-Quality Printer Paper	11.49	Office Max, DeKalb	11
Photo-Quality Printer Ink Cartridges	82.98	Office Max, DeKalb	11
Zip 250 Parallel Port Drive	129.99	Office Max, DeKalb	11
IBM Zip Disks	19.88	WalMart, DeKalb	13
Black/White Xerox/Handouts	34.17	Copy Service, DeKalb	15
Color Xerox/Handouts	51.92	Copy Service, DeKalb	14
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>676.95</b>		

**Set and Costuming**

Apparel for actors	12.84	Encore Clothing, DeKalb	9
Paint and brushes for mobile set pieces	23.71	Village Commons Bookstore, DeKalb	6
Artificial flowers for mobile set piece	32.13	Jo-Ann Fabrics, DeKalb	7
Paint and brushes for stationary set pieces	32.85	Lowe's, DeKalb	8
Lumber/Hardware for stationary set pieces	130.67	Lowe's, DeKalb	8
Paint for stationary set pieces	35.88	Lowe's, DeKalb	8
Mobile set (stools)	97.30	Lowe's, DeKalb	8
Lumber for mobile set piece	10.74	Lowe's, DeKalb	10
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>376.12</b>		

**Participant Payment**

Heather Rhodes – actor	100.00	Personal Check	16
Bethany Beach – actor	100.00	Personal Check	17
C.J. Grimes – actor	50.00	Personal Check	18
Michelle Gerber – actor	50.00	Personal Check	19
Kimberly Atterberry – stage manager	50.00	Personal Check	20
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>350.00</b>		

**Photography and Video**

Jason Pittman – videographer	80.00	Personal Check	21
T.J. Lewis – photographer	125.00	Personal Check	12
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>205.00</b>		

**Advertising**

Color Xerox of Advertising Flyers (1 <sup>st</sup> run)	99.47	Copy Service, DeKalb	2
Color Xerox of Advertising Flyers (2 <sup>nd</sup> run)	98.00	Copy Service, DeKalb	3
Northern Star Newspaper Ad	66.80	Northern Illinois University	5
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>264.27</b>		

**Miscellaneous Supplies**

Adhesive Tape	5.97	Village Commons Bookstore, DeKalb	4
Notebook	5.29	Village Commons Bookstore, DeKalb	4
Plain Printer Paper	3.99	Village Commons Bookstore, DeKalb	4
Pen	0.50	Village Commons Bookstore, DeKalb	4
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>15.75</b>		

**Totals**

Programs and Handouts	676.95
Set and Costuming	376.12
Participant Payment	350.00
Photography and Video	205.00
Advertising	264.27
Miscellaneous Supplies	15.75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1888.09</b>