The essay "How Sexual Harassment Slaughtered, Then Saved Me" in Colonize This! really struck a chord with me. Living in Los Angeles for a year and a half, I had my own set of rules to follow regarding interactions with men on the streets similar to those Kiini Ibura Salaam outlines at the beginning of her essay. I quickly learned that even making eye contact with most men would guarantee a sexual invasion of my space. After the first week of living in my new house a mile off campus, I discovered that walking to and from school was not an option because it posed too much of a physical threat so I clung to my bike like my life depended on it. Every day I was confronted again with the same question—do I walk in rush hour traffic without a bike lane or do I slow my pace and take the sidewalks risking verbal assault? I ended up weaving on and off the sidewalks depending on who was walking there. My fear of men on the street even had an effect on my social life. The two block walk from my house to the nearest coffee shop after dark was so frightening that I often hooded myself in my most masculine, shapeless sweatshirt in an effort to pass as a male, hoping to avoid harassment. I rarely ventured out on weekends because the radius for campus cruiser (the university’s program for safely transporting students around the area after dark) fell a couple blocks short of my house so I had no way to safely get home. It didn’t help that female students in the area were getting sexually harassed and raped left and right by both local men and other students. I was disgusted and outraged that I had to put up with this every single day. Whenever I was confronted by catcalls, lewd remarks, or intrusive glances my insides would burn with rage. All I really wanted to do was scream obscenities at these guys and flick them off. But my fear kept me in place—in my neighborhood, you just don’t know who’s packing. On several occasions I expressed this sentiment to my boyfriend—I told him how I thought that catcalls and even glances to “check me out” were sexual harassment and completely unacceptable. My boyfriend, while supporting me, disagreed that checking people out is sexual harassment. I mean, generally, I don’t mind being sexually noticed by people—I even invite it a lot of the time—but what I couldn’t articulate to him then was that the "veiled aggression" of these glances and catcalls was what put my safety in jeopardy and is the very thing keeping this oppressive cultural norm in place—their hostility intimidates women into silence making us too scared to talk back. Eventually, this sexually hostile environment drove me out of Los Angeles. There are other reasons I left USC, but Salaam’s essay really helped to validate my anger and inability to continue within the reality I faced just outside my front door. Furthermore, I truly admire her strength and courage to talk back to these men in an effort to start a dialogue aimed at mutual respect. Maybe next time I find myself the object of a catcall I’ll try to do the same.

In college, and as I devote energy to different forms of social activism as well as academics, I try to push myself continually to enact the ideas of feminism in my life. It is a constant challenge for me; it is so easy to read some shit in scholarly articles or even third wave personal narratives, but taking those stories and critically looking at my relationships with people and institutions is the hard work that needs to go on in between. When I think that pressing issues for feminism today, I think about the need to organize people to both work to tear down oppressive institutions and to question their own involvement in those institutions. That is a really broad statement...But it’s like, clearly there are some specific institutions that, right now, are so important for feminists to organize around. A lot of people have mentioned them already—issues such as prison reform, especially given the feminization of imprisonment, especially for non-violent crimes or crimes in response to abuse from husbands or fathers; economics/welfare, with the feminization of poverty worldwide as well as the rollbacks in social services in the US and other industrialized states; reproductive rights, including race and class based issues of access to birth control and constructions of deviant black motherhood. There are so many other issues, and I can’t, from my position, really say what are the most important specific issues for feminism and women without really actively involving myself in the communities that are most affected by these oppressive institutions. I think the second part that maybe feminism needs to deal with is getting people active and organized. Something that I put squarely on my shoulders as a privileged white male is how to be more active in pushing people, organizing people, from my own communities of privilege. And that starts with myself, and organizing myself to be more critical of systems of oppression that operate within myself and that I receive privilege from and sometimes support. I look at campus activism at Macalester, and sometimes get really frustrated and disillusioned when I see people way to comfortable in their privilege without really questioning a lot of things. But then, I have to remind myself how many ways that I am complicit and other people might be revolted by my complacency, and that I need to continually push myself to think about what I can do most actively to build a movement that works to end all systems of oppression and domination. And I think a lot about how to effectively communicate with people who don’t have the same background of academics, don’t talk in the same jargon...and especially as I get ready to graduate, I need to really start pushing myself to effectively communicate and to both ask myself questions but to be able to ask important questions of other people about feminism, privilege, and oppression. peace, jason

So the first issue I’m thinking about for this final post is something that I’ve been aware of throughout the course. When I was in 4th and 5th grade a program came to my school called the Girls Project. The premise of the Girls Project is that girls often at the age of 9 and 10 are still confident, good students, and then around middle school there is inevitably a breakdown: girls participate less in class, they begin to lose confidence in their bodies and persons - so the Girls project tried to prevent this breakdown by teaching what is essentially a simplistic course in feminism to girls before the ages when they are most affected to try to prevent this breakdown. In the program we did such things as talk with a gynecologist about our bodies, we made cheers, skits, put on performances, visited the Ms. Foundation’s offices, had lessons on stereotypes and body image. However inevitably most of the girls who I went through this program experienced and went through many of the things the Girls project worked to prevent regardless of the merit of the program and it’s work. What I’m wondering about - especially after seeing that book in class about Girl culture and the way we as girls and then women absorb the stereotypes and expectations we are subjected to by the media and society - is how do you teach feminism to girls? How do you describe concepts as convoluted as identity politics to a pre-college age group - and what age should be targeted to help girls avoid many of the pitfalls there are out there for women growing up in terms of hating themselves, one another, hurting themselves, hurting their lives with bad decisions as a result of not having the knowledge necessary to see through alot of the bullshit thrown at women from all sides. Another issue I’ve been thinking about is the many different ways sexism and oppression manifests in different races and cultures of women. It is interesting how we are all subjected to one image of what it is to be a girl but it gets filtered through our identities. Thus, often when you talk to girls from different economic backgrounds, different ethnicities, from different parts of the world their insecurities are very different. To give general and perhaps stereotypical examples: from the Jewish girl who wants a new nose to the black girl who hates her hair to the gentile girl who wont eat etc. It all amounts to the same but it’s striking to me the way this self hatred is so contingent upon these variables of environment and identity, and it makes me wonder whose identity are we told to assume if no women anywhere seems to be free of this self doubt.