

ENL 103
Paper Topic #3

In this essay, you will formulate a position and articulate it in relation to other positions, using some of the methods presented in *They Say, I Say*. Please note that while the paper topics suggest many readings you might want to utilize, you certainly don't need to incorporate all or even most of them.

Papers should be formatted and incorporate citations using proper MLA style. Refer to your Brief Penguin Handbook.

Papers should be 1000-2000 words. If you are willing to exchange essays with each other outside of class, they will be due on Friday, November 11th. If not, they are due Wed., Nov. 9th. You will be discussing each other's essays on Wednesday the 16th.

PAPER TOPICS

1.

A recent New York Times article, "The Freedom to Choose Your Pronoun," (see the class blog for the link) discusses the use of preferred gender pronouns and recent developments regarding gender-neutral language including a preschool in Sweden that uses gender-neutral pronouns and has students refer to each other as "friends," rather than identify each other as "boys" or "girls."

What do you think of this preschool's policy? Should such policies be established in the United States? In constructing your argument, be sure to first establish what the issue is, as well as what one or more of the most compelling opinions are, before developing your own.

While the comments after the article don't represent the most knowledgeable opinions, they may help you get a sense of the different arguments, and you may find it useful to look them over and incorporating one or two as a way of demonstrating certain positions. You might also refer to other readings that you've done this semester in any of your classes (psychology's findings on childhood development and identity formation, identity and naming issues for certain authors or characters) to help you develop your own argument.

Remember, you have learned things this semester; put them to use in developing your thinking.

2.

In the first chapter of *Superfreakonomics*, the authors discuss the wage gap between women and men (44-47). The studies that they cite suggest that "while gender discrimination may be a minor contributor to the male-female wage differential, it is desire—or lack thereof—that accounts for most of the wage gap" (45). In other words, men just want it more. Later, they imply that men and women have different "weaknesses." Do you agree with these conclusions?

If so, you should write an essay showing why you agree. You can take the essay in many directions, and I recommend using pages 61-65 in *They Say, I Say* as a way to develop your argument.

If you don't agree, identify the flaws, or gaps, in the authors' reasoning. Obviously, for this paper, you probably can't conduct your own study, but you can read the evidence differently, or you can refer to other texts (or other parts of *Superfreakonomics*) that complicate or refute these ideas about men and women.

3.

A gendering violence is the founding condition of human subjectivity; having a gender is the tribal tattoo that makes one's personhood cognizable. I stood for a moment between the pains of two violations, the mark of gender and the unlivability of its absence. Could I say which one was worse? Or could I only say which one I felt could best be survived?

--Susan Stryker

Stryker's quote captures a dilemma that those with non-standard gender identity confront. Do you align yourself with a particular gender label, despite it violating your sense of identity, or do you try to exist in a world without a label, as an "absence"? As we have discussed in class, what is the value of labels, and what are the dangers? Both Stryker and Kate Barnstein explore this question, considering the function of labels. What do they say about labels? Do you agree? You might look at the article that I posted on the blog about genderless pronouns and/or consider your own experiences as a way to form and express your opinion.

4.

Accord Alliance, which grew out of the Intersex Society of North America, takes a stance that children with "disorders of sex development" should be assigned a gender. If, later in development, individuals feel they have been assigned the "wrong" gender, reassignment becomes a possibility.

How does this stance relate to some of the readings that you have been doing, either in ENL 103 (Barnstein) or ENL 160 (Stryker, Butler, Eugenides, etc.)? How does it relate to other readings about psychological development that you have done?

Given the other readings that you've done, what do you think of the position of Accord Alliance? You can discuss the positives and negatives of the position, but you should finally try to settle on a position yourself.