

Ten Years of Becoming the Subject of Your Own Story...

That's right, I've been performing the same educational theatre performance on college campuses for the past ten years. I'm a pretty prolific writer and usually I let the older offerings fall away as I develop new material, but this show has remained on the menu. Here's why...

These are the five strategies I offer at the end of [*Becoming the Subject of Your Own Story \(Rather than the Object of Another's Gaze\)*](#).

1. **Visualize your perfect world** – in positive terms – and then act and think as though that's the world in which we already live.
2. **Practice your personal sovereignty by taking responsibility for all of your time and activities.** CHOOSE what you will do and how, rather than feeling forced – your time is your own.
3. **Practice your personal sovereignty by minding your business** – if you want to do something, learn how others do it – find mentors and advisors. Rather than drifting through and hoping things will go well, learn the rules of the games you choose to play.
4. **Pay attention to power relationships** – they're everywhere! Notice your position in big power relationships (race, class, gender, etc.) and in smaller power relationships (family, school, work, etc.). Decide how you will relate to power – it may be different under different circumstances. Will you amass power, partner with power, or work to change power relationships? Every choice is up to you.
5. **Help others; be a positive influence.** Notice how those around you think and behave. You can't change others, but you can help them see their lives more clearly through your

example. Our stories are connected – practice with love and gentleness toward all – especially yourself.

Tall order, no?

We arrive at the discussion about these five strategies - and the concept of personal sovereignty - via a series of humorous and touching stories about public life and gendered living. By the time the audience receives this list, they've been asked to consider the two lives they lead. One life involves being the subject of their own stories - focused on the identities they most love and the pursuits about which they feel passionate. The other life involves being the object of other people's understanding. Some identities are assumed by others or have negative meaning and impact. None of us escapes being the object of the social gaze. We can be vibrant subjects though. Or, it's possible to resign our subject positions to mindless conformity. And that's what led me to write this show.

Back in the early 2000s, I often found myself talking to young people who seemed to have plenty of privilege and still feel terrified about all they perceived they didn't have. They seemed to feel swept along in perceptions of themselves that they didn't necessarily want, and to which they felt bound nonetheless.

As I tell the stories in this show, I ask the audience questions about why certain pieces resonated with them. So many women seem to believe that they are the only ones experiencing truly awful forms of sexism, public harassment and assault. I prompt people to raise their hands and look around at one another issue by issue.

Ten years in, the hands still come up. Often more assuredly than they did in the beginning. We are in an important moment of internet-driven social awareness about gender, race, sexual diversity and more. A lot of young people are reading sites like [Everyday Feminism](#), watching comedy and linking to activism from folks like [Amy Poehler](#) and Tina Fey. When I ask the question in ***Becoming the Subject***... about different ways men and women use public space, many hands go up. It wasn't always so. Audience

members of all genders can articulate differences in safety on the streets. "Manspreading" is now part of the public lexicon and young people are able to point to positive solutions in their own communities, more often than not. They may be small and tentative efforts, but they're there.

This is the main reason I've continued to perform ***Becoming the Subject...*** The show offers depth, examples and clear strategies for spreading understanding - and the cultural zeitgeist is giving these messages traction! The show both answers and models: how? I've always been thrilled by the post-show responses - and they're shifting. I used to get emails from women saying they no longer felt so alone and from men saying they never understood that they were part of the problem just by upholding the status quo. Now I hear from folks of all genders who want to move more deeply into solidarity and cultural transformation.

I'll continue performing this show for another ten years, if it's useful. I'll leave you with some student quotes (provided by professors) from campus performances during the past two months of ***Becoming the Subject...*** The conversation is ramping up; change is afoot. I'm grateful and inspired...

"Kimberly Dark's talk provided a source of comfort for me because it created a community of women who all what Dark meant when she spoke about deciding how to handle tricky situations like the one described above. I felt connected to women who understand exactly the type of fears those situations elicit."

"I admire her for allowing the audience to join in on her experience and laugh and cry along with her... Dark's message of finding peace with your inner self and seeing your body as home was relatable and inspiring and her tone and presentation invited the audience into a state of self reflection."

"Something that I learned from Kimberly Dark's performance is to stand up for my personal sovereignty. It is important to care about what others say... it is equally important to not be defined by the judgment of others and to practice to become the subject of one's own story."

"It was encouraging to see so many young women gathered together supporting each other in attempts to dismiss societal standards."