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Molly Brodsky

Washington University in St. Louis

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“OTHER KNOWERS,” OTHER GROWERS: GENDER-CONSCIOUS FARMING AND THE “ALTERNATIVE” AGRICULTURE MOVEMENT

Molly Brodsky

Mentor: Heather O’Leary

With the rise of women farmers and agripreneurs in the United States, the agricultural landscape is shifting; urban farms, organic farming, and the food co-op movement are all rapidly growing—and all led by women. While existing literature examines the concurrent trends of the increase in alternative agricultural and women farmers, this research explores what I call “gender-conscious farms,” agricultural communities that intentionally center their farming practices on gender.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted in Northern California and Dehradun, India, this project examines the ways gender-conscious farms challenge current rhetoric and trends present in the alternative farming movement. Utilizing a crosscultural lens, this research identifies how gender-conscious farming challenges both current sustainable agricultural initiatives as well as contemporary feminist discourse by putting the two in conversation with one another.

Three common themes specific to gender-conscious farming manifest across both research sites: an ecofeminist ethic of care, a holistically diverse ecosystem, and an emphasis on bodily knowledge. By redefining a feminist “ethic of care,” gender-conscious farms recognize recipients of care, accounting for multiple players in an ecosystem. In turn, that ethic of care allows for building a “holistic ecosystem,” an ecosystem driven by paralleled social and environmental values, integrating diversity and sustainability across people, plants, and communities. Furthermore, in celebrating both feminism and farming, gender-conscious farms promote multiple ways of knowing, emphasizing the importance of learning with one’s hands outside the traditional Western classroom. This project also presents a tension that arises in performing cross-cultural ecofeminist research about food systems: what are the implications of labeling a movement, community, or even knowledge system “alternative?” By both challenging current “alternative” food discourse and providing innovative and nuanced ecofeminist-informed farming initiatives, gender-conscious farming presents a truly radical shift in the realm of sustainability.